Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins at the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. I’m continuing my oral history interview with USAF Lieutenant Colonel Retired Kaye Biggar. Today’s date is the 8th of March 2004. Again, I am in the interview room in the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech in Lubbock, and Colonel Biggar is in San Antonio. Good afternoon, sir.

Kaye Biggar: Good afternoon, how are you today?

LC: I’m very good, thank you, and you?

KB: Good. Good. Nice, beautiful day down here, how is it up there?

LC: It’s lovely, actually. It’s very, very nice. Very pleasant day, about eighty degrees, I think. Sir, I wonder if I could ask you, first of all, recalling what we had been speaking about before, your assignment in Germany. During the time you were there in the early 1970s, you were promoted again, is that right?

KB: Yes, to lieutenant colonel.

LC: Ok. Sir, can you tell me how you found out about that promotion?

KB: Well, yeah. I was the guy that was supposed to be he first guy to know about things like that.

LC: Mm-hmm, I wondered.

KB: But because I was on the list, they called the general direct and I was summoned to the general’s office one morning, not knowing the release date was out or anything and figured well, here it is, you’re probably fired.

LC: Mm-hmm.

KB: And got the good announcement, along with about a half a dozen other guys.

LC: Ok. And –

KB: Most of them were my contemporaries, some of whom I had known early on back in the Turner Air Force Base in Aviano days. We re-met at Rammstein.

LC: And so that probably made you feel good, not only your own promotion but that of basically friends of yours.
KB: Yes. Yeah, it was really neat. But, let me point out that I missed my promotion party.

LC: How did that happen?

KB: I was on a court-martial.

LC: Ok.

KB: I was the president of the court-martial board, and we wound up our deliberations, I think about 10:15 the night of the promotion party, and I made the last minute.

LC: You made the last call, as it were?

KB: Yeah. Yeah, last call, as it were.

LC: Ok.

KB: In fact, I think we extended the last call.

LC: Ok, well that seems appropriate. But business took precedence, I understand. Do you remember that case? The court-martial case?

KB: No, I don’t specifically. I sat on a court-martial board. They liked to use me because I was kind of impartial because I wasn’t part of the total base, where most of the court-martials came from. In fact, I never court-martialed any of my people. I did a few article fifteens and lots of long, hard talks, but we never got to the point where we had to court-martial anyone.

LC: So you were – you were kind of hauled in on one or two of these, where you didn’t have a chain of command responsibility or anything.

KB: Yeah, that’s right, they liked to use me because I was impartial and you know, wouldn’t have any knowledge of who the people were, that sort of thing.

LC: Did all of your personnel experiences as well play a part, you think, in being selected?

KB: Oh yeah, I think so, very definitely.

LC: Now –

KB: One of the things they say in a court-martial is that the court-martial members know the ways of the world.

LC: What does that actually mean, do you think?

KB: Well, we’re all pretty experienced people.
LC: So you’ve seen –
KB: And are aware enough to render a balanced judgment.
LC: Ok. Based on a lot of experience and having the – having an idea of when things can be stretched and when they can’t be.
KB: Right, right.
LC: Sir, when exactly did that promotion come through for you? Do you remember the date? Or the month?
KB: I don’t remember the exact date, I think it’s in my little bio, if that’s important, but I think it was in March of…March of ‘71.
LC: Ok.
KB: I think.
LC: I think that sounds –
KB: Those things slip.
LC: And you’ve had it for quite a while now, yes sir. But I believe you did tell us that it was in 1971, so. After leaving Germany, where were you sent next?
KB: I was sent to Lakenheath. Royal Air Force Base, Lakenheath, England. The Brits – the Brits still wanted to be in charge, nominally, but they had very little – well, I’ll tell you a story about that. They did have a lot to do with the actual operation and maintenance of the base, but let’s go from there to your next question.
LC: Well, I wanted to ask you first of all about the mission of the Air Force at British Air Bases during that period, if you can talk just generally about that.
KB: Yeah, generally, at that point in time, they previously had been Strategic Air Command bases for the most part at the earliest part of the Cold War with bombers. But in my time frame in the ‘70s, we converted most of those bases to Tactical Fighter Wing bases. And there’s still a couple reserve bases that were meant for deployment of B-52 bombers if the circumstances permitted. Now that has since changed and while they’re not there on a permanently assigned basis, I think there are bombers that are there on temporary duty most all of the times of problems, certainly right now.
LC: Were the planes under Air Force command or NATO command? And can you discuss that?
KB: Well, that’s – they were under Air Force command, but they were part of what I was in at Rammstein as far as mission tasking in war, and that was the 4th Allied Tactical Air Force, which was made up primarily of U.S., but of Canadian, German, and British aircraft.

LC: Can you talk a little bit about what kinds of aircraft were assigned to the Tactical Fighter Wing, then?

KB: Yeah, at the time I was there it was the F-100. Interesting to note, I was in the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing at Turner Air Force Base, which was the first unit to get F-100 aircraft in 1958, and I was at Lakenheath Air Force Base in the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing, which also had another name, the Statue of Liberty wing, which was bestowed upon it by the government of France when it was stationed in France before it moved to England.

LC: Ok.

KB: And it was the last F-100 organization to be on active duty in the Air Force.

LC: Were the F-100s pulled out while you were there?

KB: No. After I left.

LC: But even yet, while you were there, they were – that was the last?

KB: That was the last, yeah.

LC: Really?

KB: The last squadron. Or, the last wing. Three squadrons in a wing.

LC: That –

KB: So, that was kind of a coincidence.

LC: That’s very interesting, actually. Kind of the beginning and an end to one model of aircraft extremely important to U.S. defense policy in that period. The wing had how many F-100s? Do you remember?

KB: Three squadrons, twenty-one to a squadron. You’re good at math.

LC: Ok. And was the wing up to strength when you were there?

KB: Yes, it was.

LC: And what was the personnel compliment for the wing?

KB: Oh, about five thousand.

LC: Ok.
KB: But that’s not the total story.

LC: Tell me more.

KB: I’ll tell more.

LC: Ok, go ahead.

KB: We also had most of the support responsibilities for an adjacent Air Force base, RAF Mildenhall, which was the headquarters of the 3rd Air Force, which was in charge of all of the Air Force units in England. And we had all the base support activities, the commissaries, the school system and I’ll tell you more about the school system when we get to that, that was one of my biggest headaches. They had their own Officers’ Club and that sort of stuff, but the dependence total between the two bases, probably ten thousand plus, all descended on us to provide commissary and exchange services.

LC: Wow.

KB: As well as the school system, not only for all – most of England, but also we ran a dependent high school with residents in house from most of the small bases in the whole European theater who were not large enough to have their own high school. I think the enrollment in that high school was like a thousand people.

LC: Ok, and you’re…ok, let’s just take the high school for a moment. You were – what was – how was the line of responsibility organized such that it came to you?

KB: It came to me as a deputy base commander from a civilian principal. Superintendent.

LC: Ok. And he reported to you effectively?

KB: Yeah, effectively because my boss kind of said, ‘You take the schools primarily and don’t bother me with it unless it’s a problem you can’t solve.’

LC: Ok.

KB: And he was more into the security forces stuff, the nuclear weapons guarding. Well, he gave me transportation too, and he gave me all the services junk with the commissaries and the clubs and stuff, but he was more involved on a daily basis with the really combat support aspects of the flying mission.

LC: Now what was his name, Kaye?

KB: Louis – well, there were two of them.
LC: Ok.
KB: Edward R. Johnson, who was a famous guy who flew a MiG fighter out of China. I don’t know how he even got into there, but somehow he got into there and flew a MiG fighter back so we could tear it apart and see what it was all about.
LC: Yeah, I think I read a little bit about him.
KB: Rabbit Johnson. Hell of a guy.
LC: Ok.
KB: And the second one was Louis Babbitt.
LC: Ok.
KB: Louis Babbitt had been a navigator in the…SAC navigator, and I forget the aircraft. And then was the director of administration for headquarters United States Air Forces in Europe for a General Jones and he caught his fancy, and when Rabbit retired, Louis came aboard.
LC: Ok.
KB: And Louis and I were known as the ‘dynamic duo.’
LC: Well how did you get that moniker?
KB: I don’t know, a PR guy made it up.
LC: Ok.
KB: Yeah, because we used to travel around in a staff car among other things early in the morning, before the general would show up, picking up diapers in the parking lot of the BX. One of our highly distinguished jobs.
LC: Yes, that sounds lovely.
KB: It was a great responsibility, but you know. Sometimes things have to be done.
LC: Things have to be done, that’s right. Just to get things squared away for the arrival of the general.
KB: Right.
LC: Now was the general that you’re referring to the base commander, or –
KB: No, he was the 3rd Air Force commander at the adjacent base of RAF Mildenhall.
LC: Ok.
KB: And he had once fashioned himself as having straightened out the commissary at a base he was at, name of which I can’t think of right now, but it’s where Vanna White’s from. Myrtle Beach.

LC: Oh. Mm-mm.

KB: And so he thought he was a commissary expert. And he was on my tail daily.

LC: What was his name?

KB: I got to think. Evan Rosencrantz. He’s here in San Antonio and is my buddy to this day.

LC: Is that right?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. Is he retired down there, then?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok. Now Kaye, you mentioned the high school and the school system for the twin bases of Lakenheath and Mildenhall.

KB: Well, there are actually three bases involved.

LC: Ok, what’s the other one?

KB: There was another one that I was a primary commander of, and it was called RAF Feltwell, about six miles or so from Lakenheath and Rammstein, and its primary mission, in addition to logistical kind of stuff and being a housing area for families, it was the site of the elementary school.

LC: Ok. Which –

KB: And that was a lot of fun.

LC: What was the population – the student population, you said about a thousand kids in the high school.

KB: In high school, yeah.

LC: What about overall?

KB: Oh, the elementary probably had a couple thousand.

LC: Wow. How many teachers? Any idea? Staff?

KB: Hundred. I don’t know the exact number off the top of my head, but a hundred.
LC: These are big operations.
KB: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
LC: A lot of personnel, a lot of –
KB: And a lot of problems, including bomb threats in the middle of the night in the dormitories.
LC: Ok. Remember any of those?
KB: Yup.
LC: Ok. Can you tell me a little bit about those threats, and - ?
KB: Scary, because we took them serious. And I would go in with a bomb squad, one step behind them, because they had the suits and I didn’t, and go from room to room until fortunately we didn’t find anything or it was an artificial kind of thing.
LC: Was there any assumption about who had placed those threats?
KB: Yeah, the students.
LC: The students themselves?
KB: Oh yeah. Yeah.
LC: Ok, I was thinking about perhaps some –
KB: Well, that was our assumption, I don’t know that we – you know, I don’t think we ever pinned it down to one particular student and did anything.
LC: Hmm.
KB: Yeah, I know it was the students.
LC: Now –
KB: Pranks.
LC: Pranks, ok. But you still shook them out seriously?
KB: Oh, yeah. We still took them seriously.
LC: Ok, Kaye, can you hold on for a minute?
KB: Sure.
LC: Now Kaye, you mentioned the bomb threats, and I was actually wondering whether there were any other external threats to base security at that time.
KB: No, we didn’t have that sort of thing. We had very close coordination – in fact, that was another one of my jobs – with the police constable for the area, and there were no major demonstrations while I was there.
LC: Ok, and I’m sure you’re aware that later on, there were demos at both Mildenhall and Lakenheath, by for example Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

KB: Yes, that did not happen on my watch, thankfully.

LC: Yeah. Now you said that there were lots of headaches with the school and the school system, can you tell us about any more of those? Was this primarily an American-type school system where they’re teaching an American school?

KB: Oh yeah, they were all American schoolteachers, yeah.

LC: Ok, and during this time period during the early 1970s, of course busing was an issue in American schools, that wouldn’t necessarily have applied to you?

KB: That wasn’t a problem there, no.

LC: But was race relations generally an issue?

KB: Yeah, race relations were as I mentioned the race relations efforts that I was involved in in Rammstein were at a lesser level, but they were still there, like they’re still with us today. And so yeah, I was acutely involved at a supervisory level because we had a staff that dealt with those kinds of things.

LC: Uh-huh. And were you – kind of describe how you would be informed. You’ve described following the bomb and demolition teams in.

KB: That of course was through the security police, not – well yeah, we got the high school principals out there and got them involved, but we usually got warning of that before they were notified.

LC: Ok. With race issues, how did they come to your attention? Did you get reports, or did you have meetings? Was there a committee? Do you remember any of that?

KB: Yeah, we had a staff of about four people that dealt with that 24/7.

LC: Really, ok.

KB: And only if they were unable to resolve an issue reasonably would they have to bring it to the command level.

LC: Ok. And did issues ever bubble up to you that you had to take a hand in and kind of straighten out?

KB: Not from the student standpoint very often. There were a couple or three isolated cases that I don’t recall the details of right now that I would get involved in. Oh,
yeah, one case and we did that often. Not often, but frequently, there was an authority
that we had to order the early return to the United States of anybody who became a
problem. Dependents primarily, and I recall a difficult thing that I had, here back again
to the commissary, with the commissary manager’s son, who was in constant trouble.
And one day I said, ‘He’s going back. You find Grandma. Wherever she is or whoever.’
And that was done not too often, but when it was necessary.

LC: Now was the kind of trouble, was that off-base trouble that he was into?
KB: Well, off base and on base. Pranks, just a nuisance kind of guy. He didn’t, you know, he didn’t hurt anybody, but…

LC: But you wanted to make sure that didn’t happen.
KB: Yeah, I think he stole some stuff.
LC: Uh-huh. In general, can you describe the relationship that American
personnel had with the English in the surrounding areas at that time?

KB: Tremendous, tremendous relationship.

LC: Ok.

KB: And we worked hard to make it that way.

LC: Ok. Like what kinds of things would you do?

KB: Oh, we would go out. I would visit periodically with different social groups, as I said, almost on a daily basis with a constable. I would go as a matter of fact before I even knew what Lions was, I went to a Lions Program in Thetford, England. It was a boxing match and a dinner, or something I think. But we had a high visibility in the communities.

LC: And was that part of your job per se, or did you create that, or a little bit of both?

KB: Oh, a little bit of both, I guess. I think it was a job responsibility. The initiatives that we took were probably at the request sometimes of the British, and our indicating that we would be pleased to be involved.

LC: With the different base and personnel management responsibilities that you had there, your primary contacts with British officials were who? You mentioned the local police, were there others?
KB: Yeah, there was our first and my daily contact, he was in my pocket and I was in his pocket on a daily basis was the nominal RAF Lakenheath Squadron Leader Gee, G-E-E.

LC: Mm-hmm. What was his rank, do you remember?
KB: He was a…he was like a major. Squadron leader. Squadron leader. Nice guy, nice guy.

LC: Where was he from, do you remember?
KB: No, I don’t.

LC: Ok.
KB: He lived on base.

LC: Ok. Was he married with children all living there?
KB: He was married, I think his children were grown.

LC: Ok. About how old was he then, do you remember?
KB: I would say he was probably forty-five to fifty.

LC: Ok.
KB: He was a relatively senior person in the Royal Air Force to get that kind of a plum assignment.

LC: Yes sir, I believe that’s true. He must have done very well in his career. Do you remember anything else about him? Did he leave while you were there and - ?
KB: No, I think he was still there when I left.

LC: And you were there until roughly when?
KB: July of 1975.

LC: Ok.
KB: Wow, that’s been a while back.

LC: Yes sir. Casting your mind back to that time, to say the spring of 1975, you know of course that’s when South Vietnam finally fell and just for the purposes of those who are interested in – who are listening to this interview because of its – your connections to Vietnam, I wonder if you paid any or much attention to that occurrence?
KB: I guess officially, we didn’t do anything. I might go back in retrospect, because I don’t think I mentioned it at Rammstein, but Rammstein, we were geared up
and I was very heavily involved in preparing for the POWs repatriation. But they didn’t come to Rammstein.

LC: That is very interesting, actually. Can you say a little bit more about the preparations?

KB: Oh yeah, we loaded that PX with uniforms, double everything that we ordinarily stocked and particularly uniforms because we didn’t carry a big supply of uniforms.

LC: Ok.

KB: And officers generally got their uniforms from the BX rather than from the clothing sales store. I think we beefed up the stuff in the clothing sales store, too, but because they were primarily officers, more of that effort was in the BX, and that poor guy went crazy because it took him ten years to sell that stuff.

LC: He was left holding a big inventory.

KB: Yeah. Yeah.

LC: What other kinds of things did you add besides clothing, what other –

KB: Oh, medical facilities were beefed up. We brought in dozens of doctors and psychiatrists. Or, we were prepared to. They were identified by name and on twenty-four hour alert, but it didn’t happen.

LC: Now how did it actually happen? Do you remember?

KB: I don’t remember where they went.

LC: You don’t remember?

KB: Nope. How about that, as big of a thing that was.

LC: That’s interesting. Yeah, I can’t recall –

KB: That’s selective senior moments, right?

LC: Well, I feel I’m having one as well because I don’t exactly know what their route was.

KB: Huh. Maybe you could do the research on it.

LC: That would be a good idea. I think I actually will look into that. But it’s interesting, the preparations that went forward.

KB: Oh yeah, massive. Massive. You know, that still is today, the number one concern of the entire department of defense is POWs. There’s not a day goes by that
there are not – I don’t know the numbers of people, but not a lot, there’s tremendous
effort put into that on a daily basis that nobody hears about because we take care of our
own.

LC: Ok, I was going to ask you to maybe expound on your own appreciation of
the importance of that. How do – do you feel that’s a good prioritization of resources and
can you talk about that a little bit?

KB: It’s a very good prioritization of resources in terms of what the goal and
what the achievement is. In terms of daily productivity, there’re probably not a lot of
results that come from the efforts that are put into it, let’s put it that way. But that
doesn’t lessen the importance of it.

LC: Do you think it’s important for the morale of current servicemen that those
efforts be made for the servicemen?

KB: You bet. You bet. Look at the rescues in Iraq.

LC: Yes, uh-huh. Yeah, it’s the major national story when POWs are liberated.

KB: Sometimes there’re some negative stories that come out of it too.

LC: True.

KB: But, that doesn’t make any difference. We get them out.

LC: Joint Task Force Full Accounting is the group that is currently assigned
within DOD to work on Southeast Asian theater. MIA people.

KB: Yes. Based in Hawaii, I believe.

LC: That’s right, yes. Yes sir. Yes, it’s painstaking work that they do. I wonder
if you can –

KB: And they’re on the ground in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

LC: Yes. Yes.

KB: You know, maybe not 24/7, but they maintain a strong presence whenever
there’s, you know, any indication that there may be somebody or some remains that are
discovered.

LC: Do you think it’s a good idea that the United States have diplomatic relations
with Vietnam in order to facilitate those kinds of searches?

KB: Sure, that’s our white hat approach.

LC: Ok.
KB: How would Japan be where they are today if we didn’t have that approach?
LC: Ok.
KB: But maybe that’s not such a good idea either. Because they’re cleaning our clock in automobiles.
LC: You mean economically.
KB: Yeah.
LC: The trade.
KB: Yeah. Although they’re having some problems right now.
LC: Right. It seems to be only temporary, though, I would guess.
KB: But if we do a Europe with a Marshall Plan, costs more than a war did. But, that’s the way we operate. And we should never change.
LC: You think it’s a good idea?
KB: Yeah, look at what we’re doing in Iraq.
LC: Mm-hmm.
KB: The war was a piece of cake. Not that a lot of good things weren’t done, but it was a three-week effort. But look at maintaining the peace where we are. Look at what happened today. They finally got them to sign that thing, and now they’re saying, no, it’s only interim. And the morning, while they were signing it, there were explosions. I haven’t heard the full details yet.
LC: Right. This was the agreement looking toward elections.
KB: Yeah. The constitution, the interim constitution.
LC: Yes, civilian government, yes sir. It’s interesting to get your perspective after everything that you’ve seen on you know, big questions of U.S. policy.
KB: Yeah, we would’ve gone back into Vietnam in a moment and helped rebuild that country if the communist government wanted us to. Now we are. Tremendous effort. There was just a ship in there a week or so ago. In my Saigon harbor, my river.
LC: Sitting right there?
KB: Sitting right there.
LC: Doing business.
KB: Yeah.
LC: Do you think that it was possible the U.S. might have taken a different course then, in 1973 or 1975 with regard to relations with Vietnam if the door had been open?

KB: Oh, I think so, yeah.

LC: Really, ok.

KB: Yeah, I certainly do.

LC: Ok. Do you think President Ford, who was in office at that time had any vision in that direction?

KB: I have no knowledge of that, but just knowing the American way, I’m sure that he may not have been thinking about that on a daily basis, but there certainly were a whole lot of people someplace that were having contingency plans to do that. I don’t know that for a fact, I just know that intuitively.

LC: Sir, you said that you didn’t pay a lot of attention, at least officially to what was going on in Vietnam in 1975, but were you keeping an eye out on the newspapers and kind of keeping track since you had been over there?

KB: I don’t think anymore than I kept track of news in general, no.

LC: Ok, so it didn’t ring any particular –

KB: Well, you know, I didn’t have any American papers to read. The British weren’t talking about it.

LC: No, probably not.

KB: *Stars and Stripes*, you know our official military magazine, probably you know, had some stuff in it that I noted from time to time, but…

LC: But you weren’t making a special –

KB: For me, the war ended in TET. That was the real war.

LC: Why do you say that? I mean, it’s interesting.

KB: Well, because I was there and involved.

LC: Uh-huh. And after –

KB: And that was the biggest offensive that the Viet Cong ever had.

LC: And that way was a turning point?

KB: It was, yeah. Unfortunately, we won the battle, but lost the war. Because the American public no longer wanted to support it.
LC: Yeah, while we’re –
KB: And the president didn’t run. Remember all that stuff?
LC: I sure do.
KB: That was a tremendous thing. That probably has never gotten the attention as the milestone in the history of civilization that it deserves. Wow, where’d I get those words from?
LC: I don’t know, but they sound good.
KB: Yeah. No, think about it.
LC: Yeah. The spring of 1968 and Johnson making his announcement, I think at the end of March.
KB: Right. Yeah. Altered the world. What one night – well, no, we fought for three weeks, but you know, one night’s event that had that impact on the world.
LC: Yeah, and that year, 1968 was…
KB: Well, a lot of other things happened in that year, too. Martin Luther King, if I remember, am I right?
LC: You’re exactly right.
KB: You’re a historian.
LC: You’re exactly right, in April 1968. Do you remember that, sir? Do you remember learning about his assassination?
KB: Well again, we didn’t have – well, it’s Stars and Stripes we had, but they weren’t a daily newspaper – yeah, they were a daily newspaper, but it was oriented toward military things. It was not a headline thing. Although I’m sure there was something in it. But, you know, I had my mind on other things. Like fighting the war.
LC: Yes, sir. Yeah, that’s right. While we’re talking about some of those big questions, I wonder if you can offer a general observation on General Westmoreland and the operation that he was running. Search and destroy tactics and all that.
KB: Well, I think he probably ran an excellent operation, but it wasn’t the right operation for the problem at hand. You know about Hackworth, David Hackworth?
LC: No.
KB: Colonel Hackworth, the most decorated guy in Korea and Vietnam history, he writes a syndicated article for a newspaper, it’s all across the country. And very
critical of generals. But, his Boots on the Ground concept of warfare were outdated in
Vietnam, but we didn’t know it. Boots on the Ground were outdated in Iraq, too, until
the peacetime came, and then Boots on the Ground, maybe we ain’t got enough over
there to handle what’s going on right now. But the war was fought and won primarily
from the air, in wiping out all of the enemy forces and allowing the very brave combat
Army infantry people and the Marines to make that three hundred mile trip in what, three
days or whatever?
LC: Yeah, something like that. Something like that.
KB: Yeah. And they deserve tremendous credit for what they did. But the door
was opened by the United States Air Force. And again, I’m parochial.
LC: But I think you make a very good argument. And the Boots on the Ground
refers to the more labor-intensive activity perhaps of pacification and nation building and
all of that.
KB: Yeah. Maybe. But certainly not Boots on the Ground for body counts that
were reported on the front steps of JUSPAO at five o’clock every night at the Five
o’clock Follies. That wasn’t the right way to run a war.
LC: Ok. And you alluded to your sense of the Air Force role in Vietnam. Do
you think the Air Force should have been employed even more greatly than it was?
KB: No, I think they were very well employed unless we wanted to blow up the
whole country, and that’s not our way of doing business.
LC: Yes, sir.
KB: And in the north, they were probably not employed as effectively as they
should have been because of political considerations.
LC: Can you outline those?
KB: Yeah, Johnson was approving every sortie that was flown.
LC: And that –
KB: You leave it to your military commanders. Give them the job and let them
go do it. We wouldn’t have had the losses and the POWs that we had if the Air Force
had been in control of the air war in the north.
LC: Would there have – would you think there had been different targets selected or better security for the targets that were selected, the guys that were flying on those targets?

KB: Probably both. Probably both.

LC: Yeah.

KB: And we wouldn’t have skirted around and had insignificant targets. We would have knocked out Hanoi in three days. Now, that’s cruel and deliberate, but that would’ve got their attention.

LC: And it was certainly well within the capabilities of the Air Force.

KB: Oh, yeah. No problem.

LC: Yeah.

KB: B-52s would’ve had that taken care of in two days.

LC: And –

KB: B-52s were stationed at Guam, if you remember.

LC: Was the only place in the Pacific that they were flying from?

KB: The major place.

LC: Ok. Do you know where else they were coming from?

KB: I don’t know if we had any on Okinawa or not. I don’t know that.

LC: Ok.

KB: Most of the Air Force effort in North Korea was out of Thailand. There was more Air Force in Thailand than there was in Vietnam. The Vietnam commitment was primarily ground- air-to-ground support of the Army.

LC: Right. So it’s –

KB: There weren’t any missions that I know of, again that I know of, that were flown from South Vietnam into North Vietnam, and I could be wrong. But that was not the major effort of the Air Force that was stationed in Vietnam itself. It was in country. Air-to-ground support.

LC: For combat troops engaged.

KB: Right. And the B-52s did the carpet bombing, which didn’t make a lot of sense because it just blew tremendous craters in areas that were uninhabited for the most part, that I flew over, as a matter of fact.
LC: When you were going around on your various trips? You could see the damage?

KB: Yeah. Yeah, flew right over the uninhabited coastal areas on our way to I CORPS. The Marines’ heaven.

LC: Yes sir. Did that look like dumped ordnance rather than strikes?

KB: Oh no. No, it was not dumped. It was deliberate, but it didn’t mean anything. Except for the tremendous, twenty-four hour a day roar that could be heard as far away as Saigon. Psychologically, maybe it was important.

LC: And most of the flights then of B-52s into the Vietnam theater, you’re thinking probably came from Guam?

KB: That’s my understanding. You may find that not historically correct.

LC: Ok. But that’s, anyway, that’s how it seems to you now. It seems like that was how they were arranged.

KB: Yeah.

LC: Kaye, I want to ask you about – another couple of questions about Lakenheath and your time there.

KB: Ok. Yeah. Then let’s kind of wrap that up and move on.

LC: Sure. Ok. Did you have much chance to –

KB: Are you really going to use all this stuff?

LC: Oh, sure.

KB: You’ll edit it, I’m sure.

LC: No, you can edit it, later.

KB: Oh, ok.

LC: But I wondered if you spent much time getting off the base and –

KB: No.

LC: Ok, no?

KB: The boss did. Except a couple times like, he took me to the boxing match, but I carried the brick while he was doing community relations stuff.

LC: Oh, ok. You were making sure everything was good at the base. Ok.
KB: Yeah. I’d lost I think thirty days leave time while I was there. I wanted to
go to Scotland because that’s theoretically where I’m from, but my wife and the base
commander’s wife took a trip to Scotland and they saw Loch Biggar. How about that?
LC: They did, huh? And were they impressed?
KB: Yeah.
LC: But you never got to go?
KB: No.
LC: Because you were just double timing it, without a break.
KB: I think I got one leave that I went to a jazz festival in Nice, France. That
was great.
LC: But didn’t last very long?
KB: I think a week.
LC: Ok. Well that’s not too bad.
KB: Yeah, it was pretty good.
LC: You mentioned –
KB: Then we went back to Germany once for a couple of days, hopped on a C-
130, and I think that was the extent of my leave, with you know, maybe a couple days off
once in a while.
LC: In July of 1975 then, you received a new assignment.
KB: Yes.
LC: What can you tell me about the assignments that you held between ’75 and
’82?
KB: Well, probably more than I initially thought I could.
LC: Ok. Well go ahead.
KB: It was for the super secret Air Force element for the National Security
Agency. Gives you a clue of the level of national responsibility and the level of the
confidentiality secrecy of the programs. Now I had a Top Secret clearance and had a
compartmentalized clearance for a couple of programs. But I knew nothing, as most of
the people in the headquarters, of the total things that were going on, because so many of
the projects were compartmentalized, and by that I mean, only a select few people really
knew what was happening in that particular arena.
LC: Yes, only a few people see the bigger picture.

KB: But I got to see the big picture pretty much from being kind of Mr. Personnel in the seven years I spent there, a quarter of my career, and I didn’t even know what it was when I went.

LC: Did you know that it existed?

KB: Yeah, I did. But I didn’t really know much about it although I was invited to the security service base at RAF Chicksands after I was selected for the assignment and went over, spent a couple days there and didn’t learn much, but you know. Had a good feel for – that was helpful for me in my job when I got to the headquarters by knowing what kinds of things the people were doing in terms of a personnel aspect of the twenty-four hour a day mission. How their lives were turned upside-down. Seven o’clock in the morning was the time they had happy hour at the Officers’ Club.

LC: Because everything was sort of topsy-turvy for them.

KB: Yeah. Yeah. Eight hour shifts, so there were three happy hours at the Officers’ Club during the course of a – no, not three, I guess only two.

LC: Now, tell me where you lived, and where –

KB: Oh, I lived on base. Well, not on base. Right across the street from on base in an American housing development that was kind of like duplexes. They were built by the British and leased by the United States Air Force. Now there- we had all kind of housing over there. There were then also housing units that were built by the British and leased individually to the officer or airman and his family. And then there were lots of people that just, as we called it, lived on the economy, wherever they could find a little place to rent.

LC: Now, this was beginning in 1975?

KB: Well, I guess it began much earlier than that. I don’t know what year they were built in. Probably late ‘60s.

LC: Ok. But – the base, which base was this housing next to?

KB: The housing I lived in was right next to Lakenheath. There were – the military – or, the British owned ones I think were closer to Mildenhall and as I mentioned before, the on base housing was located at RAF Feltwell, about six miles from Lakenheath and Ramm- Lakenheath and Mildenhall. And that was American operated.
but run and maintained, and we’ll get into this in a minute, by the English – the British government Department of Environment. Let me tell you, that was the biggest headache, next to the schools, probably.

LC: Why is that?

KB: They were the civil engineers, and to get them to respond to do something that you thought was needed was, you know, like sticking your head in the sand. They, you know, they did overall a good job, but they did it in their own manner at their own pace, unfortunately.

LC: Not necessarily in a hurry to finish that up.

KB: No. No.

LC: Ok. Now I just want to clarify, when you were with the Air Force element of the NSA, you were in England?

KB: No. No, I was here in San Antonio.

LC: Ok.

KB: And the headquarters of the then, and this is important, you write this down.

LC: Ok.

KB: No, you’re recording it. United States Air Force Security Service. Which was begun in Vint Hill Farms, Virginia, at the close of the war. World War II. And what they did at that time was primarily surveillance by monitoring Morse code interceptions from the enemy. Because Morse code was a thing that was communicated in those days.

LC: Ok.

KB: And have you ever heard of the Enigma machine?

LC: Yes sir.

KB: Ok. They did that.

LC: Ok, so they were contributing to the Enigma effort?

KB: Yup.

LC: Ok.

KB: And have continued that role through a couple of name changes. The Electronics Security Command, which probably makes more sense to the layperson, and now the air intelligence agency, which probably makes even more sense. And it is
charged with running the entire Air Force intelligence effort throughout the world from here at Lackland Air Force Base.

LC: And so you were based at Lackland?

KB: Well, that’s another story.

LC: Ok.

KB: It was then Kelly Air Force Base, which was selected unfortunately by the Brack Team to be closed. Security Service was on Security Hill, which was above Kelly Air Force Base and above the runway and immediately adjacent to the Lackland. We probably should have belonged, technically to Lackland, as they do today. But, those are details we – need not get into that, I guess.

LC: So just to summarize then, Kelly was closed?

KB: Yeah, it is now called Kelly USA and is a tremendously successful conversion of a military base to a commercial logistics and repair of military aircraft by civilians, the likes of McDonnell, Douglas, Boeing, etc, etc, etc.

LC: So they have facilities on that what was formerly a base area.

KB: Yes. Yes.

LC: Ok. And you then moved from England to the San Antonio area in ’75?

KB: ’75. Headquarters United States Air Force Security Service then. My first job was chief of airmen assignments, responsible for fourteen thousand people at a hundred and forty locations around the world. Some locations might only have two or three people, other major installations might have had three to four hundred.

LC: And that’s all airmen assigned –

KB: Airmen and officers. But I was just in charge at that time of the airmen.

LC: Assigned to this –

KB: Worldwide command.

LC: Ok. How long were you in that position?

KB: About two years.

LC: Ok. Then?

KB: Then I moved up to the next slot as the director of assignments, both officer and airmen, and served in that for about six months until some crazy guy came in and said we’re going to reorganize, and they did away with two jobs. Mine and a civilian guy
who was in charge of the plans division. And we had a little joke when they had a party
with a barge on the San Antonio River, you know about the San Antonio River?

LC: Yeah, a little bit, uh-huh.

KB: Yeah, we had a little rowboat that if the two of us were in, it was behind the
big boat with all the people that had real jobs.

LC: So where did they put you?

KB: Ok, I was then given the only blue suit officer assignment in the United
States Air Force as a major command civilian personnel officer. How about that for a
mouthful of words?

LC: What did that mean?

KB: That means that I went over and fired the civilian personnel guy and cleaned
up his mess.

LC: And this was all still happening –

KB: That was probably the best part of my job there.

LC: You got to clean up the mess, or get rid of the guy that was there?

KB: Well, that was unfortunate, he was a really nice guy, but I had to go into an
almost court case environment, documenting his inadequacies while he was a close
personal friend of mine.

LC: Oh, gee. That sounds very difficult.

KB: Tough. Yeah.

LC: But you were glad when that part was over, anyway.

KB: Yeah. But in the meantime, we had to do a lot of things, not only to
straighten up the kind of – I think my boss wrote it up as an archaic organization that I
brought into the twentieth century, or whatever. Whatever was said.

LC: Now can you describe what kinds of things you had to impose on this
archaic organization in order to –

KB: Yeah, it was nine hundred civilians.

LC: Ok.

KB: And this entity was physically located not in the headquarters building, and
that led them to think that they were a world of their own, and they ran the personnel
system. And at utter disregard for the commanders and supervisors in the organizations
that they were servicing.

LC: That was evident how? What kinds of things?

KB: Well, independent decisions that didn’t take management into consideration, and the first thing I did was revitalize a civilian employee advisory council and would meet once a month with I don’t know, twenty people who were representative of each of the functional areas in the headquarters, and they would beat me into the ground with things that were wrong. And I would take them very positively and say, ‘I’ll fix that.’ And some of them I couldn’t fix because of federal law, but we fixed most of them, or at least adjusted them to where the people were happy and the supervisors had a say in who was hired and fired. Instead of it being an arbitrary decision, it was made by a dozen people in the civilian personnel office who were allowed to have let that situation deteriorate.

LC: Would you say that at that point in your career that you were having fun?

KB: Oh yeah, that was the most – I guess except for being the deputy base commander and the thrill of picking up diapers. You know, and the more important responsibility. Level of responsibility was far greater. Job satisfaction was excellent. But this was probably the most unique challenge I took on because I knew a little bit about civilian personnel, but I knew nothing of the individual mechanics of it. But I learned in six months.

LC: And how long were you actually in that post?

KB: About a year and a half.

LC: Ok. So after six months you had the lay of the land and were ready to –

KB: Right, yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: And I knew what I was talking about. First six months, man there was a lot of ‘I hope this letter I write doesn’t blow up in my face,’ sort of stuff.

LC: Right, you were kind of out on a wire in a way, not sure what responses would come up?

KB: Yeah. But I had full command support.

LC: Who were you reporting to at that point?
KB: Well, I was reporting at that point in time to a couple of different full colonels, but in effect I had the ear of Major General Doyle Larson, the commander. I could walk in his office anytime I wanted to. I was careful that I, you know, that I laid the groundwork with my immediate supervisor, but he backed everything that I said needed to be done.

LC: What was Larson’s background, do you know?

KB: Larson’s background was completely in intelligence. He started out as a two-striper in the security service and made his way up in with tours like in SAC and like Pacific Air Forces. No, Pacific Command. He was a director of intelligence as a one-star general, he was in SAC as the intelligence guy, and then came home to security service and said ‘I’m going to change it, and it’s going to be called electronics security command, and we’re going to expand the mission tenfold.’

LC: So he was head of the global command?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok, so he was the big cheese?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok.

KB: And he remains my close friend today. In fact, he and I are involved in the National Air Force Association, which if we ever get through with this –

LC: I have it on my list.

KB: Ok.

LC: Did you have one or two more postings yet there in San Antonio?

KB: Yeah, in San Antonio. When I hired a new civilian, civilian personnel officer, Sam Bressy, I left. Because, no, I didn’t want to hang around and get in his hair.

LC: Right.

KB: So, I created a new job from two dysfunctional areas, one in the assignments business that I knew and the other in the personal plans – personnel plans area that I fought with daily, and took away the training functions that each of them had a piece of and put it together in a directorate of education and training, which required headquarters Air Force approval. And that was a project in itself. Once I sold that, then they said ok, you’re stuck with it, make it work.
LC: Did you have assistance in getting that approved?
KB: Oh, yeah. I had full command support.
LC: Ok. Including, for example, General Larson?
KB: Yeah.
LC: Can you just outline the work of the directorate?
KB: Yeah, we did everything, from what we called the Trained Personnel Requirements, that’s identifying to the Air Education and Training Command the kinds and numbers of people that we had to have in the pipeline in order to meet mission requirements.
LC: Ok.
KB: Which was the most complex, confusing situation in the world with the mission change. So, we’re fighting a war in where, then? I don’t know, we had a heavy commitment in Taiwan watching China. And so we trained linguists, Chinese linguists, to intercept communications. Then one day the decision was made on high, ‘We’re going to pull out of there.’ So what did we do with all the Chinese guys that are in the pipeline, training, when we don’t need them anymore. You know, let alone getting the people out of Taiwan and into other jobs. So, those kinds of things.
LC: So you were developing some kind of systematic control for mission change problems and supplied personnel?
KB: Yeah. That always – we had to react to after the fact, because who knew where the next war was going to be?
LC: Right.
KB: What were we doing a year ago? Afghanistan. We were training Afghan linguists like crazy. What are we doing today? Trying to figure out how to handle the Iraq problem and I don’t know that we’ve trained an Iraqi since the war began. We had some. Small, maybe fifty. But we need, you know, lots more now. It’s that kind of thing. Interesting.
LC: Yeah, very interesting, actually. Does that directorate still exist, or has it been reformed now into some other –
KB: You know, I don’t know the answer to that, because that was twenty-some odd years ago.
LC: But that work still needs to be done, whether it’s called the same thing?

KB: Oh yeah, whether it’s in that particular title and format or not, the job still needs to be done.

LC: Now, Kaye, is that where you finished out? Did you end there?

KB: No, then after that, we wanted to put a security service kind of guy into that job, and so we picked a major, I guess, and put him in there, and I moved up to become the executive officer for the entire human resources function.

LC: Would that be in the deputy chief of staff personnel office?

KB: Boy, how did you know that?

LC: I’m just guessing. It sounded right.

KB: Yeah, that’s right.

LC: Ok. And were you still assigned in San Antonio?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok, did you go to Washington much?

KB: No, thankfully.

LC: Ok.

KB: I did when I was in the – yeah, let me tell you a little bit more about the scope of that job, the previous job of the education and training. We supervised the education for all services except the Marines. Army, Navy, Air Force, not Coast Guard either.

LC: Ok.

KB: At six campuses around the country. And you know, while I didn’t run those schools, I had the overall responsibility to make sure they were doing the right thing, and would travel periodically to those places, such nice ones like the Presidio at Monterey, California.

LC: Yeah, that’s beautiful.

KB: Which was our basic language training facility, run by the Army. And it’s no longer there; I don’t know where it is now.

LC: Mm-hmm.

KB: And to the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, where a lot of training was done. To Barksdale – not Barksdale, to Shreveport. What’s Shreveport’s name? Whatever the
base is there. Another nice trip. And to NSA itself. The National Security Agency at Ft.
George Meade, Maryland.

LC: Ok. So you skipped around to these different places?

KB: Skipped around quite a bit, yeah.

LC: Did you enjoy that traveling?

KB: No.

LC: Why not?

KB: I don’t like to travel.

LC: Ok.

KB: I like the comforts of home, not a suitcase.

LC: Had you decided at that point that you’re probably going to stay in San
Antonio?

KB: Yeah, I think so. San Antonio is military retiree heaven. Haven and heaven.

LC: Yes. Ok.

KB: Yeah, with the – of course, we don’t use it anymore, but with the military
hospital facilities here and the BX’s, the climate, the attitude of the citizens of San
Antonio to the retired military community led me to decide to do that, plus I wasn’t
excited about going back to my hometown in Spokane except to visit in the summertime.

LC: Because of the weather?

KB: Not there when the snow’s there.

LC: Right, I was going to ask is that because of the weather?

KB: Yeah.

LC: I gathered that was true. Sir, can you tell me about your separation from the
Air Force in retirement? Were you – can you describe how you felt?

KB: Yeah, let me tell you more than you want to know about that.

LC: That’d be great. That’d be great, go ahead.

KB: I found out, not illegally but because I had access to message traffic, that
there was a provision that was coming about in two days that would allow you to put in
your request for retirement at some time in the future and therefore not be subject to
reassignment.

LC: Ok.
And when I heard that, I got my papers and hand carried them around and set up my retirement for I guess six months before my mandatory retirement at twenty-eight years of service. 

Then I subsequently elected, because of some business opportunities, to retire even six months earlier than that. Retiring on officially the 31st of December 1981. The beginning of 2002. 

KB: ’82. What’d I say? 

LC: I don’t know. But you meant ’82. 

KB: Yeah, ’82. 

LC: And tell me about the business ventures that were appealing to you. 

KB: Well, I did one of the two things that I said I’d never do. I said I’d never sell insurance, and I’d never sell real estate. So what did I do for twenty years? Successfully sold real estate. 

LC: And those were good years for Texas generally, I think. Is that right in those years? 

KB: Good and bad. 

LC: Ok. 

KB: Good and bad. Like the real estate business is, it’s a roller coaster. 

LC: Can you talk about the 1980s in Texas and San Antonio? 

KB: Yeah. Texas is always out of sync with what the national situation is. 

LC: Yes, sir. 

KB: If the national economy is doing good, Texas is probably in a slump, and vice versa. And housing, being the most important aspect of the civilian economic community in terms of dollars and in terms of human needs, rolls with that out-of-sync environment. High interest rates. At one point in time, interest rates were eighteen percent. And we were selling houses like hotcakes. 

LC: Right. Which, our current interest rate is what, would you say today?
KB: Oh, about six percent now, I think. Which is very favorable to housing, and housing is good I think across most of the country and for one time we’re in sync with it in Texas. And in San Antonio.

LC: Now is this something that you really, really enjoyed? Did you get into it?

KB: Yeah, because it was people business. I mean, you’re helping people make the most important investment decision in their life. And you literally live with them, hopefully for only three days, but I’ve lived with them off and on for as much as six months, and then they’ve gone and bought a house from somebody else.

LC: Right. And that’s darn disappointing, isn’t it?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Sir, have your –

KB: But the most satisfaction I had was not with the high-dollar sales; it was with the low-dollar sales, helping young families, helping young Hispanic families who were finally gaining a place in society to be able to buy their first fifty thousand dollar house. Biggest thrill in the world was making something like that work. And it was the most demanding, took the most time.

LC: I would guess you’ve done that many, many times.

KB: Yeah. Many times.

LC: Has your long military experience helped you find clients in San Antonio area?

KB: Not to the extent that you would have thought that it would.

LC: Ok.

KB: Particularly when we start to talk about the Air Force Association.

LC: Ok. Well –

KB: We’re not ready to do that yet.

LC: No, I wanted to ask you about one or two other business ventures that I think you may have been –

KB: Well, let’s finish real estate.

LC: Ok, go ahead.
KB: You might note someplace that I was real estate salesperson of the year for 1984, maybe. An honor of my three thousand – four thousand, then peers to have been selected for that recognition.

LC: Now was that in the state of Texas? Or where –


LC: Ok, San Antonio area.

KB: The San Antonio Board of Realtors. Then four thousand strong.

LC: Wow.

KB: I don’t know what the strength is now.

LC: Yeah.

KB: But that was not just for my real estate sales. That was for my involvement in the real estate community and in the Board of Realtors in particular and in the entire community of San Antonio to include the Chamber of Commerce and a number of other charitable organizations. That overall package gave me that distinction.

LC: Well, and you got that very quickly after moving out of military service.

KB: Yeah.

LC: That’s interesting.

KB: I don’t really - Really, I’d been in real estate part-time since 1978.

LC: Ok.

KB: But only full-time since ’82, and that was in ’84, so yeah, I guess that was kind of a whirlwind thing. Busy days. And nights.

LC: Did you at some point serve on committees, or –

KB: Oh yes. Yeah.

LC: Can you talk about –

KB: Served on probably most of the major committees of the Board. Two of the most important ones were the governmental affairs committee and public relations that I think I did three or four or five years of public relations work.

LC: Now are you still actively –

KB: No.

LC: Selling?
KB: No. That’s the other honor that I was given. Because of my work over the years, I was declared a Retired Realtor. A distinction that I share with twelve other people.

LC: Wow.

KB: Over a hundred years of existence of the Board.

LC: Now is the purpose behind that to both acknowledge what you’ve done and in terms of serving that industry?

KB: Yes. And what else?

LC: And also to kind of keep you tied to them in some ways?

KB: No. No, it doesn’t tie them.

LC: It’s an honorific, I’m sure.

KB: I could have a free membership if I continued to hold my real estate broker’s license and was a member of the national association etc, etc, etc. Which would be the equivalent of about sixty bucks a year.

LC: Ok.

KB: So, I elected to hang my real estate broker’s license in Austin, as they say, because when I was no longer doing it, why pay five hundred dollars a year and then the additional money that it cost to belong to the Board of Realtors in the multiple listing service, etc, etc, etc when I was no longer in actual practice.

LC: Now when did you actually stop practicing?


LC: Now what was behind that decision? Was it just a personal decision, or did you want a change?

KB: No, it wasn’t 19. It wasn’t 19. It was 2002.

LC: 2002?

KB: Not that long ago.

LC: Because you did it for over twenty years, as you said.

KB: Yes.

LC: I was just going to ask about your decision to hang up your license. Was that a personal decision, or were you pursuing other things, or just time to quit?
KB: Well, all three. I was so involved with the Air Force Association, which eventually we’re going to get to, that it was almost a full time job. I’d kind of burned out on real estate. I mean, you can sleep with people three days a week for only so long. You know, that.

LC: It’d just get to you.

KB: Everything but sleep with them. Yeah. Because you can’t let them get away. Don’t let them get out of your car is the best thing, but never let them get out of their motel. Ok? Those are secrets of the trade.

LC: Ok, well I’ll pocket those as a, against future possibilities.

KB: When you go to buy a house, remember, that’s what they’re trying to do.

LC: Ok, I will. Did you have some other consultancy businesses?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Along with that?

KB: Yeah. I did. And I guess I ought to say that throughout my military career, except when it wasn’t possible, I had some business pursuit of some sort, ranging from consumer electronics over many, many years to financial – mortgage financing, automobile after sales, a number of things. Very extensive background in marketing and sales.

LC: Ok. That sounds to me like the same Kaye Biggar as when you were a kid and you had all your little businesses and things that you were doing as well as going to school and everything else. That sounds –

KB: Yeah, an extension of that, certainly. To the extent that my military job would allow.

LC: Right, exactly.

KB: And I guess the most extensive of that was as an affiliate of a corporation we had called Electronics International, which sold audio kinds of stuff in those days to the U.S. military worldwide, and then we had six affiliate hi-fi consultant stores, and mine was located in Albuquerque and I would go there after work and run it til nine o’clock at night.

LC: So you were always busy with some set of projects that were in addition to or went beyond you military service.
KB: And secondary to my military responsibility.

LC: Right, exactly. Did any of those that you mentioned, or others, come up to you – come to you in the 1980s and continue to be of interest to you?

KB: I guess consumer electronics and computers, now those are kind of melded together, for an avocation. But no, I am not involved in those businesses.

LC: Ok. Are you still running a consulting firm?

KB: Yes, the Biggar Advantage is my consulting firm. Management consulting. Sales and management consulting.

LC: Ok. Would any of the – I don’t know if you’ve mentioned any of your clients, but I wonder if you could tell a little more about the kinds of clients that you have. Are they primarily commercial clients? Retail? Real estate? Can you mention any of that, or not?

KB: To be frank with you, I have not actively pursued that for the last six months or so, so I don’t have a current client list.

LC: Ok. Well, you’ve got a lot of things –

KB: But as a past client list, automotive after market stuff, financial firms, the one thing that I was into was brake repair, with the absolute brake service, so those kinds of things that are past.

LC: Ok. But you’ve got a lot of other things that continue to go on.

KB: My volunteer stuff won’t stop.

LC: Ok. And some of that is philanthropic and some of it is related to your status in retirement.

KB: Yeah, let’s talk about Air Force Association first.

LC: Sure.

KB: Well, let’s talk about philanthropic first because that takes less time.

LC: Ok, go ahead.

KB: One of the major things that I am still involved in is the eyeglasses trick. The Lions. Sight. Sight research. I served with the San Antonio branch of Prevent Blindness Texas for a number of years. Three years as president. I was the chairman of the board of Prevent Blindness Texas for a year. Prevent Blindness Texas is located in – has offices in most of the major cities in Texas.
LC: Now why were you attracted to devoting time to that?
KB: I don’t know.
LC: Ok.
KB: Because I just three weeks ago got my eye fixed. So, it wasn’t that. It was Lions, and extension of Lions.
LC: Ok.
KB: Lions is almost like a religion. It’s a life set of principles you subscribe to. And the opportunity was presented that prevent blindness needed some help, and so I gave them ten years for that.
LC: Ok. Sounds like they were very fortunate in attracting you.
KB: Yeah, we did some good things.
LC: Yeah. And I know you just recently had a big load of eyeglasses that you were helping to –
KB: Yeah. We think that now the count’s eight to ten thousand.
LC: That’s incredible. That’s amazing. That’s a lot of people who are going to be helped.
KB: Yes.
LC: Now those are distributed in the United States?
KB: No.
LC: Ok, where are they distributed?
KB: They’re distributed in foreign countries.
LC: Ok. And how is that organized? Is there a central group or committee?
KB: Yeah, there’s a commercial – a commercial concern that reads the eyeglasses, repairs them, refurbishes them, or whatever, and has a network that distributes them, individual Lions perhaps don’t get involved in that, but Lions International makes sure that where they’re being sent is where they’re needed.
LC: That’s great. That’s I think a very good program. Sir, what other charities or philanthropic organizations are you working with?
KB: Well, I was a public relations guy for the Red Cross. And in Texas, that is a magnanimous task.
LC: Why do you say that?
KB: Well, because of all the floods and problems we’ve got.

LC: Ok, so a lot of natural disasters?

KB: We’ve always got somebody on the road in a truck going somewhere to help with some disaster.

LC: Now you did PR assistance on that?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Ok. Of what kinds of things, can you recall any?

KB: Well, the whole program. There was a paid staff, and I provided them guidance and direction and stuff. I didn’t go out and write anything. Well, I guess I was on television a couple times.

LC: So you were acting more or less as a consultant?

KB: Yeah.

LC: Off your own bat, as it were. Now in addition, I think perhaps you mentioned earlier that you were interested in helping youngsters and youth get closer to science and technology education.

KB: That’s right, and that’s the Air Force Association, and we can segue to that.

LC: Ok. Go ahead and tell me about the San Antonio branch and your relationship to it.

KB: Yeah. The Alamo chapter of the Air Force Association, about five thousand members, is the largest chapter in the world. The Air Force Association is about, and we’re having problems now with the declines in strength and aging of our members and that sort of stuff, is down now from more that a quarter of a million twenty years ago to probably a hundred and fifty thousand now.

LC: That’s still pretty good sized.

KB: But a very potent, very potent operation. We bill ourselves as the force behind the Force. We support the Air Force family in every way we can, from strong, very strong legislative presence in the government down to and including the things that I’m going to talk about when we talk about the chapter level.

LC: Ok. Now you’ve talked about the membership and the lobbying effort. What are the other sort of missions of the organization as a whole?
KB: Well, the one that we’re accused of is being the defense industrial
relationship complex that Eisenhower warned about.

LC: Uh-huh. Do you think that that’s true?

KB: The allegation is true, the reality is not.

LC: Oh, ok.

KB: But, we do interface with every major civilian industry that’s involved in
aviation. And the major event is a national meeting where they all show their wares in
Washington, D.C. and the reason we do that is because the Pentagon is there and it’s
convenient for the generals, colonels, and whoever else that are making decisions to be
able to come an see in one place in three days what the latest technology is. Now, if you
want to construe that to being trying to persuade the Air Force leadership to buy a
particular product, I think you’re wrong.

LC: Ok. Where does that kind of criticism come from, though, that you’re
alluding to?

KB: Oh, the left-wingers I guess, whoever.

LC: Ok. In the press? Or, do they write letters?

KB: Yeah, the press often wants to take on that subject, yeah.

LC: Ok. Ok, yeah. That’s interesting. I hadn’t heard that before.

KB: That’s only a small part of what we do.

LC: Ok.

KB: But it’s a very important part.

LC: Yes. Now that happens annually, that –

KB: Yeah, the legislative effort is not at all related to that function. The
legislative effort is related to people.

LC: Ok, can you talk about that?

KB: Pay, and allowances, and health care. Support of families when they’re torn
apart as they are today with the overseas deployment of something that has never
happened to the extent that it has today, and that’s the Guard and the Reserve, who are
shouldering more than a third of the burden of the effort in Iraq.

LC: Yes, sir. And that has consequences for their families that weren’t
anticipated. And are unprecedented.
KB: Absolutely. In fact I just sent an email to all of our – not our five thousand people. We’re in touch with the leadership element of the five thousand, which is probably fifty to seventy-five, on a daily basis, and I just sent out a message for them to share with their neighbors and with the people in their units or whatever, of where there is a location that those dependants can go for guidance and assistance if they need it.

LC: Ok.

KB: And we’re looking to try and see if there’s a place for us to establish in the Air Force Association such a group. But this was a preliminary thing to say, we haven’t got ours together yet, but here’s where you can go.

LC: In the sense that you’re thinking the Air Force Association provides some clearinghouse information for services?

KB: That’s right, that’s one of our major projects at the moment.

LC: Ok. And your email to the leadership, that would be to the Alamo branch?

KB: Yes, Alamo. Well, and the state of Texas. No, I got it out to guys all over the state; we’ve got about fifteen chapters in the major cities of the state of Texas, so each of those leadership persons got that message, but it might spur them to see if there’s anything like that, but obviously those people aren’t going to drive down here to spend two hours in counseling on a Wednesday evening.

LC: Sure. Sure. What you’re trying to do is –

KB: It’s a local effort, mainly.

LC: And get organizations around the different local efforts and make them known, that kind of thing.

KB: Right, right.

LC: Tell me a little bit about the Alamo chapter. You’ve described its size.

KB: Yeah. Its size is one of our biggest problems. How do you relate to five thousand people? With such a diverse nature as retirees, enlisted people, officers, civilians, Air Force civilians, plain civilians who have expressed an interest in our organization, for example I’m sitting here right now with a program that my man just emailed me for our upcoming Blue Suit Awards Banquet, where we honor sixty plus people for the good work they do in the Air Force and the community. And we’ll do that on the 25th of March. And I’m looking at the program right now and the page that has
our community partners. And we have over fifty businesses who are community
partners, and our financial supporters of this particular event and others that we have. So
we reach out into the community. Civilian community.

LC: What kinds of things does the chapter do as a group? What kinds of things
do you –

KB: We do this Blue Suit military banquet, we do one for civilian employees in
October, we hold what has become one of the major social events on the San Antonio
calendar, the Air Force birthday ball in September.

LC: Now, tell me a little bit about the birthday ball.

KB: Birthday ball is a major fundraiser for our scholarship and education
programs. Attended last year by five hundred and fourteen people in a hanger at
Randolph Air Force Base with the former Air Force chief of staff – not chief of staff, the
Air Force secretary as their guest speaker.

LC: Who was that, do you remember?

KB: Yeah, I’m trying to think.

LC: That’s ok, when it comes to you, let me know. Now –

KB: Hans B. Mark. Who was also the chancellor of the University of- of Texas
A&M at one point in time.

LC: And as you said, secretary of the Air Force.

KB: Yeah.

LC: Now Kaye, the fundraising for scholarships. Can you explain a little bit
about your activities, the chapter’s activities in that area?

KB: Yeah, as a matter of fact we just received approval from the Texas Secretary
of State, oh, a week or ten days ago for the formation of a non-profit corporation called
the Alamo AFA Aerospace Education Foundation. Which is going to become the keeper
of the money and the raiser with much more extensive fundraising efforts than we’ve had
in the past, hopefully.

LC: That’s great.

KB: To increase the scholarships in the programs.

LC: Now who are the beneficiaries intended to be?
KB: Beneficiaries are first elementary school kids who are involved in a program that we pay for and that the National Aerospace Education pays for and that most of the funds come from the newspaper USA Today. You familiar with that?

LC: Yes, sir. Now how did that happen, how did they –

KB: It’s called the Visions of Exploration Program.

LC: Ok.

KB: Each school once a week for eighteen weeks during the school year receives thirty-five copies of USA Today newspaper plus a workbook and a whole bunch of other stuff. And then the net is full of additional resource information, etc, etc, etc. The purpose of it is to try and get them interested in math and science, two disciplines that are sorely lacking in our country, and which the rest of the world has overtaken us. Look at the outsourcing that’s going to India and places like that because they’ve got more technical oriented people than we have. So we’re trying to use the excitement of space and USA Today to encourage – well first, it encourages them to read.

LC: Sure, absolutely. That’s step one.

KB: You know, science and math come next.

LC: Step one, right? Exactly.

KB: And we found that in some of the less affluent schools that we go into, it’s the first time that the parents of the kids have ever seen a newspaper.

LC: Yeah, that’s –

KB: When the kids take it home.

LC: That’s kind of exciting, to have that kind of impact.

KB: It’s exciting, and it’s a tragic situation. But it’s true.

LC: Yes, sir.

KB: So, we think we’re doing good there.

LC: Well, I think it sounds like it.

KB: Then we have seventeen high schools throughout the South Texas, you know San Antonio region, that we provide scholarships to the winners of the National Bronze Medal. So that’s a scholarship effort. Then we have a significant scholarship effort with six scholarships at the senior ROTC detachment at the University of Texas at San Antonio.
LC: So this is a big, broad scale program.
KB: We also have a scholastic achievement contest that attracts about thirty-five to forty essays from high school students around the area and we’re going to honor that young lady on the 25th of March.
LC: Ok, at the Blue Suit Dinner?
KB: At the Blue Suit Dinner.
LC: Ok, why is it called a Blue Suit Dinner?
KB: Well, because it’s for Air Force Blue Suit people.
LC: Ok.
KB: Versus the one that’s for Air Force civilian employees in October.
LC: Got it. Ok.
KB: Got it?
LC: I just wanted to clarify, and that’s what I suspected.
KB: We’ve also got scholarships for our members and their dependents.
LC: Ok. Can you talk a little bit about that?
KB: Yeah. It’s three five hundred dollar scholarships each year.
LC: Super.
KB: You know, five hundred bucks will buy a couple of books.
LC: Or pay the tuition for a class, it depends on where you’re going.
KB: Yeah.
LC: Yeah, that – these all sound like really good initiatives. I wonder how many other chapters of AFA are similarly active? Are you guys out front?
KB: Very, very few. Yeah, we’re far in front. There may be a chapter in Florida, rich, rich chapter in Florida that maybe does as good as we do.
LC: Ok. But you guys are kind of setting the mark?
KB: Yes.
LC: Ok.
KB: And particularly with the creation of our new Aerospace Education Foundation. One of I think only three at the chapter level in the country. Three or four.
LC: Yeah, that speaks very well to your ability to mobilize dollars, then.
Yeah. And one of the major things we’re doing, and this is a mouthful. We’ve got a program that’s very unique here at the University of Texas at San Antonio called the Center for Infrastructure Assurance and Security.

LC: Ok. What does mean?
KB: To boil that down to two words, Homeland Defense.
LC: Uh-huh.
KB: What’s more important in our country today than that? And what they do is cyber technology. They work to prevent terrorists from disrupting our communications, conduct exercises at the state – the city, county, state, national level to make people aware of things that can be done to keep that from happening and probably more important, how do you put it together after they’ve blown it up?
LC: Ok, and this is actually, this center is located within UTSA?
KB: UTSA.
LC: And how is –
KB: And we’re proposing it to the National Aerospace Education Foundation as a flagship project nationally. To bring them attention and hopefully when people find out about it and see how important it is to contribute massive amounts of money for new programs.
LC: That’s interesting. It puts me in mind of the Civil Defense efforts back in the ‘50s to organize exercises, raise awareness and that kind of thing. Does it – does that parallel also occur to you? Or do you see –
KB: The parallel occurs to me, but we haven’t go people running around in hard hats and with whistles and bells.
LC: Right, this is a much more elevated exercise.
KB: It’s probably one of the highest levels of cyberspace.
LC: Ok. Can you describe in any greater detail what they’re doing, who the personnel – what the personnel compliment there is?
KB: Yeah, the personnel compliment is a staff of people specifically charged with this at the university plus participation by the College of Science and the College of Engineering, of which I happen to be an advisory council member.
LC: Of the College of Engineering?
KB: Yes.

LC: Ok. And how long –

KB: And in addition to that collegiate effort, San Antonio is, because of the Air Intelligence Agency, the largest commercial group of businesses that are involved in that.

LC: In that industry?

KB: In that industry.

LC: Ok. So that’s –

KB: Anywhere in the country.

LC: So there’s a concentration there?

KB: Concentration. And of course, the granddaddy of them all, the Air Intelligence Agency itself.

LC: Which is still HQ’d down there?

KB: Yes.

LC: Ok. Yeah, that’s actually very interesting. I’m glad that you decided to include that. How long have you been working with the College of Engineering there?

KB: One week today.

LC: Ok. So they’ve just added you on?

KB: I’ve just finished the initial draft of the executive summary of what we’re going to do that…oh, I’ll email you.

LC: Ok, that would be super. Who else is on that board? What kinds of backgrounds?

KB: There are only three of us.

LC: Ok.

KB: We decided to keep it to reasonable management level as authorized by the state of Texas, and I serve as a president, our about-to-be elected AFA executive president to be president serves as the treasurer, and a guy that lives here in San Antonio who has been involved in AFA throughout his life, I guess almost, actually served as a secretary of the National Air Force Association and is now a board member of the National Aerospace Education Foundation as our secretary.

LC: Wow. That’s some –

KB: High-powered group.
LC: Yes, it sounds like it. Well able to give direction to the college and its
efforts in the homeland security area. Kaye, I want to ask you a couple more questions,
unless you have something additional to say about AFA.

KB: No, let you ask some questions; might be things I don’t even think about.

LC: Well, I’m going to throw it open to you, but I also want to just come back
around if I can. I know you’ve had this incredibly diverse career with so many different
postings and different responsibilities, but if I can ask you to focus for just a couple
minutes on the Vietnam conflict and you’ve alluded in a number of different comments
you’ve made to parallels with the current conflict in Iraq, and I wonder if you can talk in
general, thinking about Vietnam and how it affected the country and thinking about Iraq
and how it might affect the country, about the general strategy of U.S. placement of
troops overseas in situations that might have open-ended commitments. Can you draw
any parallels between the two, or –

KB: Yeah, don’t go.

LC: Ok. Can you –

KB: A few Marines in Haiti is ok. But what McManaway, who we talked about
before, when he was ambassador, putting fifty thousand troops in there, putting billions
of dollars in there and ten years later, see the situation worse than it was when we started.

LC: Yes, yes. That’s kind of what I was wondering.

KB: That’s pretty specific I guess.

LC: Well I was wondering if you –

KB: Parallel to Iraq?

LC: Yeah.

KB: Get out of there as fast as we can.

LC: Ok. And what would be minimum criteria, would you say, right now, if you
just had to say two or three things that should be established and then leave?

KB: Yeah. Get the military presence out of there with advisors like we had
initially in Vietnam, don’t let it escalate again, and put in the thing that we did
successfully in Vietnam, but it was terminated as a result of the lack of enthusiasm after
TET, and that was the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development System.
LC: Ok, so back to CORDS.

KB: With the United States Agency for International Development to go in and restore the economy.

LC: Ok, and focus –

KB: With civilians.

LC: Uh-huh, and focus on some of that infrastructure development rather than –

KB: Yes.

LC: Yeah.

KB: In all the areas, communications, health, agriculture, you know, the whole gamut of what constitutes a viable economic system. That’s the approach we need to take. If we got to fight a war, fight it and get it over with, and then let the country run themselves, hopefully democratically. And provide them the dollars and the people and the technical support in order to bring about a viable democratic economic country.

LC: And I think you indicated earlier that United States has had success in doing that. Marshall Plan, Japan.

KB: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But we failed not because we weren’t doing a good job but because the emphasis of the country was disenchanted with Vietnam and the money was cut off and we continued to fight a war unsuccessfully without the proper approach of trying to lead the citizens toward governing themselves for what, seven years after TET? Whatever.

LC: Right. Sir, thinking back over your career, if there was one place that you could go to visit now with time and money being no issue, where would you go?

KB: Northern Italy.

LC: Can you tell me why?

KB: Because of the six months I spent at Aviano. It is like heaven on earth, with the Adriatic Sea fifty miles away, with Cortina and skiing thirty-five miles away, good wine, great food. What else do you want to know?

LC: That sounds great. Is there anything else you’d like to add that possibly I haven’t asked you about?

KB: No, I think we’ve pretty well covered far more than what was originally intended in this thing.
LC: Well, we wanted to have a full coverage of your career, sir, not just the year
that you spent in Vietnam. It helps to kind of get a better perspective on your time over
there if we know more about you and the many ways in which you served the country,
not just in Vietnam. So, thank you very much for participating, and this concludes our
oral history interview.