Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I’m continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Ken Craig. Today is July 23, 2004. I’m again in Lubbock, Texas in the Vietnam Archive Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech University and Mr. Craig; you are again in Virginia Beach, Virginia. It is approximately five after one o’clock, Central Standard Time, five after two Eastern Time. Ken, let’s start with where we left off and we basically had finished discussing your second cruise in 1972. I wanted to give you the opportunity to talk about anything else that’s come to mind about that and if nothing has, we can move forward with where you went after 19…or when you finished that cruise. Is there anything else that you want to discuss about that eleven-month cruise?

Ken Craig: Not really. As I stated before, it was an extremely thrilling cruise. I think we did a good job and I was kind of sorry to leave the squadron when I did. I left in November, which was right before the LINEBACKER 2 bombing, in I believe, December of ’72. And I would’ve loved to have been there for that, but I had orders out of the squadron to report to PG School [Naval Postgraduate School] at Monterey, California. So I went back to Whidbey Island from the Philippines, left the ship and flew back commercially to Seattle to be reunited with my family.

RV: What was that like flying out of Vietnam and leaving the squadron?
KC: Well, it was difficult because I was leaving a group of people that I had a lot of respect and admiration for and I didn’t feel the job was completed. But we didn’t know what the extent of the war was going to be, whether it was going to be more of the same long delays and then getting back into it. So there was a lot of uncertainty at the time that I left whether we were just going to continue this thing forever feeling.

RV: Right.

KC: It had been going on so long without any decisive results that we just didn’t know what the future held.

RV: Did you have a desire to leave? I know, I’m sure you wanted to see Sandy and your children.

KC: Well, yeah. Certainly it was nice to be reunited, but no, I didn’t really want to leave because I liked, like I said, I really enjoyed the flying aspect of it and my position in the squadron as Ops Officer, I thrived on it and enjoyed it. I thought we were making good progress.

RV: Right.

KC: So I wasn’t at all happy to leave, but I knew I just had to do it.

RV: Did you request it or was it time?

KC: No, it was just our normal rotation.

RV: Okay.

KC: And there wasn’t any free way to, you know, ask for a couple of months of extension or anything else because I had a starting date at PG School, [Postgraduate School] which I thought was important.

RV: Right, okay. Why don’t we talk about getting into that, actually before that…any problems when you came into Seattle?

KC: No, no, no.

RV: Okay. Were you in uniform?

KC: Uh, I don’t believe I was.

RV: Okay, okay.

KC: I guess I was in civilian clothes.

RV: Tell me about Monterey and PG School.
KC: Well, I went to Monterey just before Christmas and settled in as a student there. It was an enjoyable experience. I was a little apprehensive because I didn’t feel I was a great student at the Naval Academy, but I found the studies in that environment were...maybe I’d matured, but I had no trouble with the studies. In fact, I did fairly well and got a Masters in economics. Well, it was actually a management...it was a degree in management, but with an economic sub-specialty.

RV: Okay.

KC: And I really enjoyed it. I took a lot of accounting classes and over what I was required to do because I thought that was an interesting field.

RV: Right.

KC: I got a good...I thought a very enjoyable time. Sandy had a difficult time in Monterey, just through the adjustments, but we weathered it and it was one of those things. She just, you know, she had been...I guess the pressure had been released from the pressure cooker and it was tough on her.

RV: Adjusting to having you back home again, is that or...?

KC: No, I think it was more of a mental thing, to where she gets just, you know, almost had a hard time with...in a way, a little bit of a midlife crisis before midlife, you know what I mean.

RV: Right, right.

KC: But I was just patient and in no short order, she was right back to where she had been, but I think just the fact that I was home after all the time that she had spent worrying about me and everything else, I think it was just a relief.

RV: Right.

KC: She took some courses there. One of the first times we were at a cocktail party, it was sort of like new students meeting the faculty at a cocktail party and she got into talking to some professor that I think was head of one of the departments and she says she’s very interested in finding out what this school had to offer and they said, ‘Well, you can come and audit the course if you want to, even take it if you wish for credit.’ And Sandy was very surprised and so was I because I didn’t think they did that. And so she took a Mid East political course and really got to learn a lot about the Middle East or...about the right time actually, but before everybody was terribly interested about
it. But yeah, very good fundamental ground on the Middle East politics and what we are engaging in today.

RV: Right, right.

KC: We also befriended a South Vietnamese officer who was an exchange student there and he was later…he was one of the people that were lucky enough to get out. So that was a very enjoyable time. Of course, he was dirt poor when he came over here so we kind of took him under our wing, made sure he had plenty of food and had a family because he missed his family dearly.

RV: Now he escaped from the fall after ’75?

KC: Yes.

RV: Okay. And did you meet him happenstance?

KC: Well, he was a student at the war college or at the postgraduate school.

RV: Right, so you had a class with him or you just ran into him?

KC: Right, I had a class with him.

RV: Okay. Did he talk to you about his experiences in the war?

KC: Yes he did and he was a Naval officer obviously and he was fighting the same kind of battle I was, but it was certainly a lot more…the experience was really nice and the kids loved Mr. Nam and we had some other good experiences. We had other foreign officers, which we were associated with. I enjoyed doing that. We sponsored one Filipino who was…he was the most autocratic person I’ve ever met in my life. He came from a rich family and he was not at all one of my…what I would consider one of my friends. We tried to do everything for he and his family and they didn’t appreciate anything we’d done for him.

RV: Really? Why do you think?

KC: I don’t know. I think maybe he had something or maybe he’s one of those people that didn’t like the United States and was very arrogant.

RV: Why did you choose to sponsor him?

KC: Pardon me?

RV: Why did you choose to sponsor him?

KC: Well, I just put my name in and they assigned people if you wanted to sponsor somebody and it was a luck of the draw.
RV: So how long did this last, the PG School?
KC: Two years.
RV: Okay.
KC: Well actually, just a year and a half.
RV: Was it hard for you Ken to adjust back to life stateside much?
KC: Oh, not at all. I was just delighted to be home.
RV: Okay.
KC: Delighted to have my kids around me again and my dog.
RV: Right.
KC: And of course Sandy.
RV: Yeah. Did you talk about your Vietnam experiences with anyone?
KC: Not really.
RV: Was that by choice or just didn’t ask?
KC: No, it’s just one of those things that you just put in the back of your mind and you go on. It’s not one of those things that you talk so much about. I did get a lot of awards that came in during that time and of course, I was called to the admiral to get my awards. That made some commotion, but a lot of people were getting awards, I wasn’t the only one.
RV: Right.
KC: There was quite a few.
RV: What do you mean it made some commotion?
KC: Well, among my classmates and everything.
RV: What kind, I mean, were they…?
KC: Oh just support.
RV: They realized who you…did they know what you had done or at that point did they realize?
KC: No, not really because you don’t talk about it.
RV: Right. But at that point, they realized you had done something.
KC: Well, you know, it was nice to get the awards and other aviators especially who knew what the awards meant or were and curious and supportive.
RV: Do you want to talk about whose awards were?
KC: Well, for that cruise, I got one DFC and then about five Air Medals, individual Air Medals and quite a few Strike Flight Air Medals. I think maybe a combination of those, plus I think Presidential Unit Citation came in about the same time.

RV: Right. Okay. Were you thinking at this point in your career that you were going to make the Navy a career for sure or did you have any…?

KC: Well, as soon as I got into aviation, I was so happy with aviation, and I kind of made a pact with God that if He ever let me in, that I was going to, you know, if I got my wings, I would stay in for a career.

RV: Right.

KC: And I was happy with that choice.

RV: Okay.

KC: So, I never had any doubts, I think that was pretty much career right from the start.

RV: Right. So you graduated in ’74, is that correct? You went in December ’72?

KC: Yeah, it was ’73 ½ I guess. And then I went to Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk for almost six months, five months till I completed the course.

RV: Okay. Again, this is in…?

KC: So a total of two years of educational…education.

RV: Okay. So after you finished the educational part, where did you go? Did you have a choice based on the fact that now you had this educational experience, this background or did you want to go back to flying immediately?

KC: Well, of course I wanted to go back to flying and I was going back to shore duty, so the best opportunity in the world was I went back to being on an attack wing staff at Oceana, which I became the Assistant Readiness Officer, so that was sort of like being an Ops Officer, but of a whole wing.

RV: Right.

KC: And it’s primarily training, so it was right up my alley, based on the fact that I’d been an instructor in the RAG right across the street and then I’d had the experience that I’d had, but it was natural for me and I enjoyed that job.

RV: What was the airframe you were instructing in, was it A-6?

KC: A-6s.
RV: A-6?
KC: Yes.
RV: Okay. And how long were you there in Oceana?
KC: For about a year and a half I believe it was.
RV: Okay.
KC: And it was right at the end of my staff college experience, I got selected for
command. So we’d call it a ‘stash’ job. It’s a job that they put you in and they know that
you only have a certain amount of time before they’re going to pull you out and put you
into a squadron for your XO, you know, when the billet comes up. So that’s where I was
getting placed and it was a great job and I loved it and I got to fly.
RV: Where was this?
KC: At Oceana.
RV: At Oceana, okay. And how long were you in that position?
KC: About eighteen months.
RV: Okay. And this is when you commanded the squadron or you were going
into the staff?
KC: Yeah, I was going from there to XO.
RV: Okay.
KC: And then CO of the squadron. That’s the way aviation units do it. They
send somebody as their same person who will go as XO and then just what they call fleet
up to CO.
RV: Right.
KC: And that’s about…the total length of time is about three years in an active
squadron again. So that’s all sea duty.
RV: Okay. Where did this happen? You know, you came back so and so.
KC: And they weren’t going to move anybody. It was crunch time, again it was
funny and they weren’t going to transfer anybody to the west coast. And Sandy and I
said, ‘Here we go again.’ So I went to the west coast for my command tour.
RV: Okay. Where did you go?
KC: I went to Whidbey Island to VA-95 eventually. I went a little bit through the RAG [VA]-196 out there before you reported as XO. And since I was pretty current in the A-6, it was a really short course for me.

RV: Right, right.

KC: And then I was reported as XO in VA-95.

RV: What year was this Ken?

KC: Uh, let’s see, ’76 I guess.

RV: Oh, ’76, when you became CO?

KC: No, CO is a year and a half later.

RV: Okay, ’78.

KC: Yeah.

RV: Okay. Can you describe what a CO of a squadron does? What did you do?

KC: Well, number one, you’re responsible for everything that goes on in that squadron and that’s literally. And you have to set up a training program in your squadron to train your people, whether it be maintenance or whether it be operational. And you’re responsible for the care and welfare at that time, about three hundred and fifty people. So it was an interesting and fun job. I really enjoyed the challenge. We went on cruise pretty rapidly after I joined the squadron and I was on the cruise as XO of the course.

RV: Right.

KC: And that was the [USS] Coral Sea, which was the sister ship of both the Roosevelt that I’d been on first in A-4s and then Midway, which is class sister ship.

RV: Right.

KC: And now I was on the Coral Sea, which I thought was interesting, three cruises on all of three Midway class carriers.

RV: Yes.

KC: And we went to the WESPAC [Western Pacific] and had a good WESPAC cruise, very safe one. You know, the standard. And I forgot to mention on talking about safety that we had…I told you that we hadn’t lost anybody to combat when I was there on that squadron, but we had lost two people to aircraft accidents in VA-115.

RV: Really?
KC: Yeah. One of them went and landed, broke his gear because I think he had too much...he landed with too much ordnance on the wing and he broke his landing gear and as he was sliding down [the deck], the bombardier navigator ejected and unfortunately he impacted the crane, so he was killed. The other...well, we went, what am I talking about, oh yes; we had Ray Donnelly [wrong in the context. He was a combat fatality, not an accident] who was shot through the head.

RV: Right.

KC: And that was combat loss. Let me see, what was the other one.

RV: That’s when he was actually out there just flying and he took a round.

KC: Yeah, a lucky shot.

RV: Yeah.

KC: That was interesting. Can I go back to that?

RV: Of course you can, absolutely.

KC: That was an interesting night.

RV: This is VA-115, right?

KC: Yeah, this is 115 in 1972, and Mike McCormick was the pilot and Ray Donnelly was the BN and we got a call saying they were coming back to the ship [after taking a hit]. I was down in the ready room, so when he came back and landed, I was up on the flight deck because he was the last to come aboard, we cleared the deck for him. And he came aboard and I knew everybody was going to be concerned about Ray because he was slumped over in the cockpit apparently, and at least that’s the report. We didn’t know at that time he was dead, but it was a horrible experience for Mike because blood was all over the cockpit and of course, the hole in the windscreen, it had made the cockpit unbearably noisy with all the wind flow. And so Mike got it back courageously, got it back aboard ship, but I knew he was going to be needing some support, so everybody rushed over to the side that Ray was on. I rushed over to the side, and got up and helped Mike get out of the airplane and took him to my room before the debriefs and everything started, sat him down and let him collect himself and gave him a shot of something; and just helped him re-acclimate, I guess you would say, before he was put through the million questions.

RV: Right.
KC: So he was very, very upset and as well can be imagined, was a terrible, emotional situation for him to lose his good friend like that.

RV: Yes. Was he able to continue flying?

KC: Yes he did, and then later he was flying with Al and they were shot down and that came later on in December.

RV: Right. Is that difficult for you Ken today to think about that night and things like that? I mean, you’ve talked a lot about your ability to put the fear in the background and just do your job and the aggressive added and do the right thing, etc, and when something like this happens, I can’t imagine what it would be like then, but what is it like for you now to think about that?

KC: Well, I didn’t give it a great deal of… I mean, I may sound unfeeling, but I don’t dwell on things a lot.

RV: Right.

KC: I’m not a dweller. And so I just considered it part of one of the experiences of a lifetime and I don’t dwell on much of the implications or concerned about it. Now, of course, I’m very concerned about the families. We asked [Tonya to visit us in Monterey and] that we’d pay for a ticket to bring Tonya up to Monterey because when that happened, I was a squadron… when Ray, I mean, when Mike was shot down and Al Clark was shot down in Lai Khe. We know that Tonya was probably having a hard time, so Sandy and I bought her a ticket up to Monterey and asked her to come up and see us and she did. And we, you know, we didn’t talk about anything about the war, we just went out and went to dinners and had some good times and everything else and I was trying, more than anything, just to make sure that she knew she had friends if she needed them.

RV: Right. You saw her again this past January?

KC: That’s right.

RV: In Arlington.

KC: Right.

RV: Had you all kept in touch?

KC: No, surprisingly not. She didn’t keep in touch with us at all. We offered to, but we didn’t question that she didn’t want to or whatever.
RV: Right.

KC: I mean, she might’ve had her own reasons, we don’t know.

RV: Right.

KC: But we tried to make it as pleasant for her as we could and that’s the way it was.

RV: So as XO [at VA-95] aboard the Coral Sea, speaking of safety and accidents, I assume you had a contingency plan for or an SOP for in a situation where you lose an aircraft.

KC: Oh yeah, every squadron has one.

RV: Yes. What would you do in that situation? Can you walk us through that?

KC: Well basically, it’s like a book and you have notification, official notification that you have to do, for the chain of command, that has to be notified that there’s been an aircraft accident; where, how, why, anything that you know about it at the time. And what that does is set in motion a series of events within the Navy, one of which is the safety center [Naval Safety Center] at Norfolk will get involved. And within the squadron, you set up two investigations. One means the safety investigation and the other is a JAG investigation. JAG investigation is for legal claims against the government and its a legal body that the proceedings can be open to the public whereas the safety investigation is for safety only. It can’t be used in a disciplinary manner and therefore any witnesses who come forth are protected and there is no claim that can be made against them in a disciplinary fashion.

RV: Right.

KC: And what you want to do is with that board is determine what caused the accident, how can we prevent future accidents from occurring; what are the weaknesses in whatever the chain of causation. And then they’ll make a report, which goes all the way up to the chain of command, all the way to the CNO, Chief of Naval Operations, who will finally sign off on it. But basically, and all the endorsers have an opportunity to put their endorsement on the report. So the CO may say, ‘This is the cause of the accident or at least this is what we believe was [caused] the accident and these are the factors.’ And other people can claim that well, there’s other issues involved as well. So
everybody gets their chance to comment on what might have caused the accident or what they believed were the factors that were involved in that situation.

RV: Right, okay.

KC: And then on the squadron level, of course you have to notify…the CO has to notify the next kin and my squadron when I was the CO, we had an accident and we lost two people. And of course, I was very familiar with not only being at the Safety Center and directing these kind of things, I was aware of it on a personal level of what it goes from the CO’s point. But you have to notify all the next kin and of course, if you’re on cruise, that’s done by somebody else, but if you’re in a local area and it happens, you have to go out and personally talk to the families involved. You send a…the Navy department sends letters to next to kin that are away from the area, for instance parents and things like that. And so all of this, there is a lot of administration that is involved anytime you lose an aircraft, except in a combat situation.

RV: Yes. While we’re in the 1970s, let me ask you some questions about the war. It ends obviously for the United States in ’73 and then the war goes on for another eighteen months and Saigon falls April of 1975. How much did you keep up with the war when you came…?

KC: Oh of course I was avidly interested in reading about it and one of the things I didn’t mention the other day, you said, ‘How did you follow the war when you were going on in the Mediterranean cruises’ and like that.

RV: Yes.

KC: Well, the Navy of course had a lot of intelligence analysts reports and they were available to people who had come to know these things and I read those analysts analyses when I was on the cruise. So I kept up not necessarily to the newspapers, but through the official reports.

RV: Right. Tell me what you felt in April ’75 when you saw…I assume you saw what was going on with the…

KC: Well I was delighted that Nixon started getting serious about ending the war. I was delighted about that. Especially if we weren’t going to go into it to win, we might as well get the heck out of a quagmire and get our guys back. And so I was delighted to see first of all, the mining effort, which the squadron participated in. We dropped mines
and that was a good feeling because we knew then that they were serious. And then of course I wasn’t there for Linebacker II, but from the armchair, I certainly cheered it and just wished I’d been in on it because I knew it was going to be really hot and really good targets. So yeah, I was delighted to see them tighten the wrench or tighten the screws.

RV: Right. And when the United States is out and then South Vietnam falls, what went through your mind?

KC: Well, I was disappointed, of course, because there, in my humble opinion, there was no need for that failure. It was just a failure of our will and our political resolve. It wasn’t a failure of military arms and so of course I was disappointed. And more than that, I was disappointed in the people like Na [the Vietnamese Naval Officer], who I had gotten to know, who were really good people and I knew there was millions more of good people who were going to be subjected to a totalitarian society and regime and they still are, they’re still suffering.

RV: Did you think that the Vietnamization policy would work, this effort by the Nixon Administration to kind of turn the war over to the Vietnamese using American equipment and things like that? Was this something viable? And you’re kind of removed because you’re out there on the carrier.

KC: Yeah, I’m kind of removed from that, but from a standpoint of knowing how weak the society was in; the fact that the Communists before we even got pretty much involved in it, they were decimating the people who should carry on the society and they’d been doing that since the French wars and the teachers and anybody who had foreign training, university training and things like that. So they systematically done a pretty good job of cleaning the country out of anybody who was strong enough to speak up. So there weren’t a lot of people that were left that you could say would be a really effective organizing force for any kind of a political activity. And the Communists were relentless. I mean, they just continued to undermine everything and I wasn’t confident that South Vietnam had enough leadership to be able to counteract this Communist force that had been in place for many, many years. And we could say all we wanted about body counts, but the fact was, they were winning the minds of the people by assassinating anybody that didn’t agree with them.

RV: Right.
KC: It was effective. And so if you didn’t have absolute control over any given piece of real estate, the Communists were there and were in charge.

RV: What about that body count policy, what did you think of that?

KC: Well I thought it was stupid. But that was the way for somebody to justify that we were doing something over there.

RV: Right.

KC: But anybody who was fought in the jungle or seen a jungle would understand that body counts are not necessarily too important, that’s not the determinant. But that was typical McNamara. He was a bean counter and he devised all these measures of effectiveness. He did it, I believe, it was at Ford Motor…

RV: Yes.

KC: Yeah.

RV: Ford Motor Company

KC: He did the same kind of thing there and then he was with the Air Force and working for the Air Force I believe early in his career and got into that stuff and he was a big systems analysis guy. Well, I had enough courses about systems analysis in post graduate school, that I understand exactly all these things and it’s not bogus, it’s very useful for manufacturing and things like that, but when you try to put into arcane things like effectiveness on military action, hey, it breaks down pretty badly. So he didn’t have any other good measures. It wasn’t the number of bombs dropped or bullets fired or…you know, you had to have something that says, ‘Okay, for every engagement I’ve had bodies.’ Well, that’s not going to hack it.

RV: Right.

KC: And so then of course, the news people are part of the problem because they love something like that that they can say, ‘Oh yes, we got counts today.’

RV: Right.

KC: So we can report counts just like if you count airplane shot down, that’s one thing, but body, you know, that’s not terribly helpful.

RV: What did you think of the media coverage of the war?
KC: Very slanted, it slanted towards...as the war got on; it got worse. It was the first aired and especially the, you know, you might even remember the movie, the Special Forces one with John Wayne.

RV: Yes.

KC: And that was all rah, rah, rah, and everybody liked that and that was very supportive, but that was very early on and the more you got into it, the more negative it became and of course, I think they allied with the peace group and so obviously they were making a statement.

RV: Right.

KC: And I didn't think that the reporting was at all good nor do I think it's good today. Everything is negative, everything that they focus on is losses and bombs exploding and everything else; nothing about the life of the poor guy in the street.

RV: Right. What were your thoughts on the anti-war movement?

KC: Well, I obviously didn't have much regard for them either.

RV: Right.

KC: I cannot stand Jane Fonda and her ilk to this day and obviously John Kerry is not high on my list either.

RV: Right.

KC: Because I think they were traitors.

RV: Because of their outspokenness against the war, during the war?

KC: Well, not necessarily Kerry. Anybody who did it here in the United States, that's not being a traitor, but when you go to a foreign land that we're fighting and champion their cause like, I think it was Daniel Ellsberg went over there and Jane Fonda and some other people, I can't remember all the names, but to me, those were just plain traitorous acts that somehow this country is so democratic and nice, will allow that happen, even if it hurts us.

RV: Right.

KC: I know I could never forgive any of them.

RV: What about the guys in the squadron in 115? Did you all talk about the anti-war movement when you were over there on station?
KC: I think we did and I think most of us didn’t support it at all. Now there was various views of the war in ’72.
RV: Yes.
KC: Much different than in ’66, for example.
RV: Yes. Tell me about those differences.
KC: You had many more of the…junior officers were coming into the squadron had views that maybe we weren’t doing the right thing there.
RV: Right.
KC: But I think from one hundred percent that nobody ever let those views get in the way of their work. They never, you know, even if they were not totally supportive of the war, they never, never let that get in the way of their being professionals.
RV: Right, okay.
KC: Which I think might’ve been different in other groups of combat, but certainly not in my experience did I ever see anything that I considered any sabotage or lack of will to fight or any of that stuff due to the anti-war movement.
RV: Right, okay. Ken, let’s continue with…we’ll come back to some Vietnam material in a moment. Let’s continue with your career. When you finished your cruise on the Coral Sea, where did you go?
KC: Well then we came back to Whidbey Island and went through another training program and this one was…we were switched from one air wing to another, and the next air wing was going to go to the east coast and be on the east coast carrier the [USS] America. And so we had a long workup just because of the timing and cruise period and all that stuff, where they had the scheduling. So we were at Whidbey for a fairly long time and we went through a lot of training exercises. Because I tried to insist on this from the air wing, to make sure that we were…I didn’t want people sitting around doing nothing.
RV: Right.
KC: And usually when you’re back at Whidbey or in any squadron and you’re not deployed, you get the last call on resources. So if you’re not doing anything, you end up with fewer airplanes and less parts and you end up not flying as much and people…it hurts morale and it’s not good for effectiveness of the squadron. So I signed up for every
imaginable deployment. We went to [NAS] Fallon, [Nev], we went I think three times to Fallon and one time to Red Flag down in Nellis Air Force Base, which was really good; that was a great exercise! And kept the guys busy and on the step and as I told them when I took over the squadron that I wanted to be ready for the next conflict because I didn’t feel we were totally prepared in the last one and I didn’t want to have it happen on my watch because we weren’t prepared.

RV: Right.

KC: So we trained hard and I think we were one of the...of course, I’m prejudiced, but I think we had one of the most effective squadrons that could’ve been because we were engaged all the time in doing our business.

RV: Is this before you went to the east coast?

KC: Yeah, before we went to the east coast and went on America.

RV: When did you go over on the America?

KC: Oh jeez, I can’t remember the dates.

RV: Was it like ’80, ’81, or...?

KC: No, I think it was in ’77 through ’79 I think is when I was in VA-95, The Green Lizards.

RV: Okay.

KC: So I was over on cruise, we went to the Mediterranean and my tour was up in the Mediterranean, and so we had our change of command in Naples, [Italy] and I came back and my next tour of duty was to another carrier, surprise, surprise.

RV: (Laughing)

KC: I was gong to be an Air Operations Officer on a carrier and then Operations Officer. And this was the [USS] Independence and it was home ported out of [in] Norfolk. So Sandy and the family and I came back to Norfolk from Whidbey and I went to sea again and it was again several cruises, went to the Mediterranean. In fact, I think, let’s see if I, yeah, it was just before we went for the Mediterranean and I joined the ship, and came back, went to the shipyard, which was never a good experience.

RV: What do you mean?

KC: It was a major overhaul.

RV: Why do you say it wasn’t a good experience?
KC: Well, number one, you’re not at sea and the ship should be at sea.
RV: Right.
KC: That sounds kind of funny, but it really is true.
RV: No, that makes sense.
KC: I mean, when you’re going to shipyard, they tear everything apart. A lot of
your people are left leave, so then when you transform going back to sea, you get a whole
bunch of brand new people that have never been on a ship and you have to go through the
laborious training program to get everybody ready to go.
RV: Right.
KC: And then you deploy and it takes, you know, there’s a lot of heartache about
getting ready to deploy, whether the shipyard will finish its work on time, things like that.
And then you go through this graduated workup program that takes you from learning
just how to steam the ship out safely out of the harbor and back to more complex
operations.
RV: How long was that?
KC: That includes bringing on the air wing to have your flight deck crews learn
how to operate airplanes and start that out slow by not [having] very many airplanes, and
then you add more airplanes and that kind of thing.
RV: How long does this typically take?
KC: The training aspect, about six months.
RV: Is that trying or is that something, you know, you know it’s necessary?
KC: Oh yes, absolutely necessary. But it’s trying in the aspect of you saw a ship
that went and sailed in the yard proudly and it was already to go and maybe it had some
engineering deficiency, but you could work around those and then you see this thing
being torn apart as they run new electrical lines or electronic lines and they can put in
new equipment and take out old equipment, whatever. And in our case, we were putting
in, making new berthing areas. So we tore out complete berthing areas, like, I think I had
twelve…that was one of my jobs in the shipyard, I was in charge of habitability and that
meant taking these twelve compartments and ripping them out, totally out. And we laid
new flooring, put in completely new metal beds and the dividers and everything else and
brought these things up to really nice things. But I had a problem, we knew what the
schedule was and we made the schedule readily apparent to NAVSEASYSCOM, which habitability guy and I kept telling him that, ‘Hey, you got to furnish me the equipment,’ because we’d torn all these things out as we were supposed to and we were getting ready close to sail date and this stuff was…the metal berthing wasn’t appearing.

RV: Right.

KC: So I went to the CO to keep him informed. I was keeping my bosses informed all the way along in getting more toward crunch time and finally the CO said, ‘Well, go ahead and write a message for me and I’ll send it.’ So I wrote up a real nasty telegram to SEASYSCOM telling them all the phone calls I made with this guy and tell him that he had plenty of advanced notice to get the stuff delivered to the pier on time and now we were getting to the point where we were going to have to sail with a thousand people without beds or something like that, you know. That’s not a good deal.

RV: Right.

KC: So that message of course reverberated up in D.C., it was sent to the head, so the Three Star got involved and this guy called me the next day and he said, ‘Why did you send that message, blah, blah, blah…’

RV: (Laughing)

KC: And I kept telling him, I said, ‘Listen, I’ve sent you messages, I have telephoned you,’ and I kept meticulous records of all my dealings with this man and I said, ‘Hey, you just didn’t do the job.’ And he said, ‘Well, because this stuff is being delivered, blah, blah, blah…’ and of course, it got delivered, but the point is at the end of the thing, it was my men who suffered because they had to work overtime late in the evening every night to get these things done and it should’ve been delivered in a normally prudent time, then these guys could have had liberty. So we take it out of our men when people in bureaucracies don’t do their job.

RV: And you had to kick this guy in the rear.

KC: And this happens all the time unfortunately.

RV: You had to kick this guy in the rear to get him to actually get it done.

KC: Yeah, absolutely. He would not have acted had we not sent that message.

RV: Now was this common in the Navy for you or is this the exception?
KC: No, this is common anytime you’re dealing with the bureaucracy because
the people in the bureaucracies, unfortunately many of them are not Navy. They don’t
have any idea about schedules, they don’t know what the impact of…you can sit there
and tell them what the impact of not having berthing available when you go to sea and
it’s just like, it make no impact. They have no foggy idea why, you know, I can’t delay a
couple of weeks. I mean, this is a construction job. You know, it’s like, okay, if you’re
having a repair done on your house, well, construction guys sort of have their own
timetable. Well, unfortunately, when you’re dealing with ships and schedules, we have
fixed timetables and no slack. And then we end up taking it out on our men, which made
me furious.

RV: Yeah. How long did you stay on the [USS] Independence?
KC: I was there for two and a half years.
RV: Okay. Do you want to comment on that cruise and your tour with the
Independence? Any incidents happen?
KC: Well, we went to Indian Ocean; that was interesting. So we went through
the Suez Canal.
RV: Right. What was that like?
KC: That was interesting, very flat. I mean, I’m reading a book right now called
The Path Between the Seas, of the creation of the Panama Canal.
RV: Right.
KC: And Lesseps, whose genius of engineering in Egypt, compared to what he
did and what happens to him in Panama. But since I’ve been through it, I was now able
to see what he was talking about; it was pretty easy to dig a ditch in the very flat sandy
terrain compared to going through mountainous jungle territory with heavy rainfall.
RV: Right.
KC: But anyhow, it was flat and you could see for miles to the Egyptian
defenses, right along where the Sixty-Seven day war was [Israel/Egypt], you can see all
of that and it was still there, some of it, like burned up tanks and trucks, it was really kind
of neat. And the Indian Ocean thing was very interesting because our biggest thing in
those days was we had Russian aircraft that would come out and surveill the fleets. And
we had a practice if they should not come within two hundred miles of the carrier without
being under escort.

RV: Okay, and could they call into you and ask for escort?

KC: Oh no, they wouldn’t talk to us.

RV: Okay, I didn’t think so.

KC: They just came out and it was our job to make sure they were under escort
so that you could say essentially, it was like saying, ‘Okay, we see you, and if you come
out here with hostile intent, you know, we’re going to get you.’ It was a recon game.

RV: Right.

KC: And of course, they weren’t coming out with hostile intent, but they were
probing our defenses all the time and seeing how well we did. Well, one of my jobs was
to make sure that the…as Ops Officer was to make sure that these incursions were met
successfully.

RV: Right.

KC: And I had a CO of the ship and I won’t tell you his name, but this guy didn’t
like to be woken up at night. And he was a very autocratic officer and he was very
profane when he was woken up or anything else. And I would wake him up early in the
morning. I mean, this is like three o’clock in the morning or something like that, after
I’ve been woken up and gotten an intelligence brief and all that stuff and talked with my
experts and figured out when they would be out and where we had to make the intercept
and all this kind of stuff and I’d call him up after all that was figured out, so I had a good
plan of action. And then he would get mad at me for waking him up and cuss at me and
everything else. So I was sitting in Combat [Combat Information Center] on one chair
and the other chair was the Ops Officer of the Admiral’s Staff was sitting in and, of
course, he could overhear the whole conversation. And I would then wait about five
minutes and call him again and he’d yell at me again and cuss at me and tell me I was,
you know, bothering him. So this went on, finally I said, ‘Captain, you’ve got to get out
to the bridge and order the launch,’ because only the captain could do that.

RV: Right.

KC: So he begrudgingly got up and went out and launched. By that time, we
were late in making a normal intercept. And we had to launch the tankers because the
fighters, the F-4s were the only ones that made the intercepts and normally they didn’t
need any gas if you did it normally, but if they had to go out really fast, then you had to
have fuel, airborne fuel for them.
RV: Right.
KC: Well, the Admiral of course, found out about the whole incident and just
was steaming. In fact, he was in combat when I had to finally just order the captain to get
out of bed and go make the launch. And of course, as soon as this evolution was all over,
he asked the captain to come down to his staff office and apparently he just creamed him
and he should’ve. The guy was incompetent. But that was a very interesting period in
my life, not the most fun one, I might add. It was probably my most least enjoyable time
in the Navy and yet I had planned to do so much and had my own thoughts of how a good
Ops Officer could really help in running of a ship and running the exercise and
everything else and I felt my talent was totally wasted because I was always trying to
figure out how to get this guy to react. It was not fun.
RV: Was this the first time you had cruised in the Indian Ocean?
KC: Yes it was.
RV: Okay.
KC: We made port calls to Mauritius and Sydney, I mean in Perth, Australia. So
that was nice.
RV: Wow, okay. So what happened when you got off the Independence?
KC: Then I went to CINCLANTFLT as a Command Watch Officer for a short
period of time. And that’s in their Command Center.
RV: Where was this?
KC: This is in Norfolk.
RV: Okay.
KC: The Atlantic Command, in those days, Atlantic Command and
CINCLANTFLT, so it was a joint command, but we had part of the finger of the nuclear
trigger if you will, so we had to learn those kind of drills and that was one of the watch
officer’s main responsibilities, so you had to go through those tasks.
RV: Right.
KC: Then, you know, had to watch basically anything that came up of great importance, anywhere in the Atlantic Area and Command, you had to keep everybody informed as a watch officer.

RV: Right.

KC: It was an interesting tour. But I made captain at that point. I didn’t think I would after the problems with my CO. I thought I was dead, dead in the water, but I did get selected for captain and then I was assigned as a Carrier Scheduling Officer for the Atlantic Fleet in the Ops area.

RV: What year were you promoted, do you remember?

KC: ’80, I think it was ’80.

RV: 1980?

KC: Yes.

RV: Okay.

KC: And so then, again, I was in operations, which was my bailey wick. I liked it and I did that and enjoyed doing that. And then one day, this is about a year later or so, I got a call from an Admiral friend of mine who was over in SACLANT, Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, NATO Command, which is right next door to the Atlantic Command in that same complex in Norfolk there and he said, ‘We need a guy, a captain who has nuclear experience, blah, blah, blah, to go over to relieve a fellow who is retiring in Belgium because the relief that they had planned for him fell through.’ And I won’t go into all the details, but basically they needed somebody right now and I was available. And I said, ‘Well let me,’ like a jailed says, ‘Let me make one call to Sandy and see how she thinks about it.’ So I called her and I said, ‘I have a chance to go to Belgium in this job, and to be deputy SACLANT REP EUR in Europe, but I have to leave very soon, like within a week and get over there and what do you think?’ She said, ‘Let’s do it!’ So that’s how we ended up in Belgium for four years.

RV: Wow, so four years over there?

KC: Right. And I was the Deputy to a three star foreign officer who was the SACLANT Representative in Europe at the NATO Headquarters and that was a really nice tour. Professionally, not so great because it was kind of boring, professionally because my job was social and primarily taking notes at meetings and things like that. So
there wasn’t anything operational about it. It was more political. But the chances for travel and for learning about different cultures and living in Belgium was a really neat… it overshadowed anything, it was fabulous, we had great trips.

RV: I can imagine that. This is the midst of, you know, the Cold War is just really boiling at this point. What was it like to be involved there in the early 80s in Europe?

KC: Well, it was a very interesting time. We were there in Belgium when the Red Faction was famous, infamous in Germany and also in Belgium. We had the Army Support Activity Building was blown up, which was the one we used for our daily cashing checks and doing all kinds of things that were U.S. type stuff done, you know, that also was our housing office and all these other kind of support activity. That was blown up while we were there. So, it was a very interesting time.

RV: Yeah.

KC: There was a lot of concern about you’d be targeted.

RV: By whom?

KC: But I didn’t really feel too alarmed about it all because I don’t think at those times they were targeting people so much as symbols.

RV: Targeting whom Ken or by whom, by terrorists or…?

KC: By the red terrorists.

RV: Yes sir, okay, okay.

KC: That was that group in Germany and they had elements in Belgium.

RV: Right.

KC: In fact, all over Europe I guess. But there was a lot of activity going on and there was also during the time as you recall that the NATO Allies were having a big discussion whether they were going to counter the weight of the medium-range missiles that were being set up in East Germany.

RV: Right.

KC: For NATO and various other places. And NATO, you know, the United States was after NATO to make a response because it was one of these things, do you want to… if a medium nuclear missile was fired at someplace in Europe, then our only
response if we didn’t have some kind of a counter weight, our only response was a
massive nuclear strike on the Soviet Union.
RV: Right.
KC: And people want…you know, we didn’t want to be put in a position where
we had no option to counter a medium strike. And we went through much deliberations
on that and I happened to be…one of my jobs over there was I was on the Nuclear
Planning Group, which was a very interesting group of what I considered junior
diplomats. These would be of mid-level career officers who were probably the cream of
their diplomatic corps. They were sent to NATO to be in this Nuclear Planning Group.
And they would discuss all these various options and have….oh, I mean, we’d have
meeting after meeting getting the feed and they in turn would feed back to the foreign
ministries what everybody was thinking about these issues and then hopefully come to
some kind of deliberative process at NATO, these ministerial meetings and so that they
finally ended up deploying the medium-range missile. But all that was something that I
was a part of and was very interesting. Like I say, I was mostly just a note taker because
I didn’t, you know, I was not formulating any of these kind of policies, these policies
were probably more formulated in D.C. and then articulated well enough and then you
went around, tried to get support, very much like in any political process. You go around
and round up your supporters and try to drum up other support and saying, you know,
demonstrating the need and giving intelligence briefings, why these things were
necessary and all that. And you had of course a very skeptical audience. There was not a
monolithic institution by any means. Everybody had their own opinion. But we played
that game for many years, still playing it.
RV: Yes we did. How serious was the Soviet threat in reality or was it bluffing?
KC: Well, you know, it was interesting. We were over there and the first time
that I had thought of anything other than the Soviets being very strong because of
the…we knew their gear was not sophisticated, okay.
RV: Right.
KC: We had seen that for years. Well, ever since World War II, we knew that
their gear was…the manufacturing quality was not all the best, but they could put it out in
tremendous numbers and they could, since they had a totalitarian regime, they could put
in any amount of resources in it as they wished and they didn’t have a populace that had any power to say, ‘No, you ought to spend it on hospitals.’

RV: Right.

KC: Well, the first time I realized the Soviet Union was in trouble, surprisingly enough, as we have a Sovietologist at NATO.

RV: Right.

KC: And they usually picked a visiting professor and he would have a two-year stint over there or something like that and this guy was a professor of public health, believe it or not. But he had done a lot of work in the Soviet Union in their public health field. He was the only person at that time who had been allowed access, basically unfettered access to the Moscow Public Library System and research system because they, the Soviets, were very concerned about their decreasing life span.

RV: Right.

KC: And so they wanted to…he was an expert on that area and so they wanted him to come over and do some research and they liked his research and they kept inviting him back. So he’d go over there every summer for maybe like ten years or something and he was finding out exactly what was happening in the Soviet Union. And so he gave a speech, of course, it was all closed, it was a classified speech, but allowed any member of the delegation that wanted to come and listen to him, and it was incredible and it was all about public health, but it told the given inkling of how serious a problem they were in. And he was the one that said that the Soviet Union is a third world country with a first world military might. And he said things are very, very bad over in the Soviet Union. The healthcare is declining and he gave many, many examples that were not necessarily pertaining to what we’re talking about, but basically he just said that they are absolutely in horrible condition economically and health wise [Audio problems, conversation unintelligible]…far better.

RV: Right.

KC: That weren’t considered number one manufacturing giant.

RV: Right.

KC: So I said, yeah, they gave me an inkling they were in deep trouble, but I don’t think anybody there, while I was there, I was there from ’83 to ’87, I don’t think
anybody had any inkling that the Soviet Union was going to implode like it did. There
wasn’t anybody around that table that would’ve bet even a dollar that the Soviet Union
would have collapsed that fast.

RV: Why is that do you think?
KC: I just don’t think anybody knew it. They just didn’t have the knowledge that
things were that bad in the Soviet Union.

RV: But four years later, it was gone.
KC: Yeah, it was incredible.

RV: That’s amazing. I would’ve thought that you all right there on the frontlines
would’ve sensed this coming.

KC: Yeah, well, you know, I’m still surprised that it went that fast.
RV: Right.
KC: Absolutely just amazed because, you know, we had access to all kinds of
good intelligence, but most of it was military intelligence.

RV: Right.
KC: And we weren’t talking about people’s lives and the poor roads and all that
stuff, as long as our railroads could take their missiles to wherever they wanted them to
go and they were building their shipyards, were putting out submarines right and left
everyday and they were doing this and they were doing that all over the world. We still
had to respect their military might, even thought it was shoddy compared to ours. And
we knew that, you know, that they had many major accidents in the nuclear program. We
knew that they had problems. Everywhere they went, they had problems with
mechanical things, but they were out there and they were out there in numbers.

RV: Right.
KC: But we had to be respectful of them.
RV: Absolutely.
KC: And of course, you know, through the years, we’ve had these collisions at
sea with or near collisions at sea with the Soviet ships that follow us all the time. So they
were there and they were making themselves and they were being kind of like little
bullies.

RV: Right.
KC: So you had to respect what they had and you didn’t really know, you
couldn’t know, from my aspect, really what the leadership would do. So I think that’s
major, more of a concern than anything was the fact that you had leadership that might do
something. They never did, but they might do something that would be pretty audacious
and horrible.

RV: And you simply couldn’t take the chance.

KC: No, absolutely not.

RV: Right, right. Looking back on it Ken, most people, most historians or a lot
of historians and a lot of folks in general believe that the United States won the Cold War
and from your perspective, A, did the United States win the Cold War and B, how do you
think we did that?

KC: Well, I think there’s no doubt that we won it two ways. One, we maintained
the will to counter their moves. Number two, we are and were then and are now the
economic powerhouse of the world and the Soviets appreciated that and they knew very
well they didn’t want to try to counter us directly. But they were doing their best to work
around the margins and take over maybe, if you will, the areas of the world that provided
a lot of raw materials like Africa and they would’ve loved to gotten into the Middle East
and Iran and places like that. And obviously Southeast Asia, the maritime routes and
various supplies that come out of Southeast Asia.

RV: Right.

KC: So they were working on the margins very assiduously and that’s what our
containment policy, I think, was all about was to try to not let them get in the game or
many games and this was of course, goes back why we’re there in Vietnam because we
didn’t want them to have a dominance in Vietnam, which would lead to Cambodia, Laos,
and then maybe possibly Burma and who knows, Thailand, you know, that kind of the
domino theory type effect. But they were working very hard all over the world in these
areas. They had a strong military, but I think our biggest thing other than a will and I
think it was ably represented by Reagan was our economic strength.

RV: Right.

KC: If push came to shove, we could out produce them and they were terrified of
it. And they were terrified of our out producing not only maybe not in exact numbers,
but in our capability, our sophistications of a product. But they still were bullies when they thought they could get away with it.

RV: What role did Vietnam play in that? Well, you mentioned that briefly, but in general?

KC: Well, I think there’s no question that they, the Soviet Union, supported the Vietnam effort very greatly and direct military supplies and politically so that, you know, if they were successful, they could be a client state...in fact, they wanted Cam Ranh Bay, which they got after Vietnam collapsed.

RV: Yes.

KC: So they were there and waiting to take advantage of having a client state if you will, another one on the periphery.

RV: Right.

KC: So, what I say, they were working on the margins, they were trying to reduce our influence obviously and we were trying to protect whatever influence we had and allow people to grow naturally.

RV: Right. Tell me Ken after Belgium, where did you go?

KC: Well, then I got orders to come back to the [Naval] Safety Center in Norfolk where I was Director of Aviation Safety and that was for four years until I retired in ’91. So, my job there was...it was the largest department in the Safety Center and it’s the oldest of our safety efforts in the Navy, was Aviation Safety. We’ve had Aviation Safety long before we had ship safety and driver safety and all those other safety programs that we have today.

RV: Right.

KC: And we had established years ago, understood the importance of computerizing all of our data. And we were using old computers and punch cards and all that stuff, we started assembling all the aviation’s accident data that we had, starting with World War II and going through, up through to modern day, and we have prevention programs. We also sent out the accident investigators that go to the scene of an accident and go through the wreckage, just like the FAA sends out their team.

RV: Right.
KC: If it’s a civilian accident, well, we send out a team every time an airplane goes down throughout the world and, if we can get to it. We also dive; send out salvage ships to recover wreckage if we can find them and we’ll recover as much wreckage as we can and then we’ll disassemble it and look at all the parts and try to figure out what happened if we can.

RV: Right.

KC: It’s a very interesting job. We also published a magazine called *Approach* and we were publishing one called *Mech*, which was based, focused on the enlisted troops who maintain our airplanes. In that we would talk about maintenance practices and how to do things right in maintenance with real world examples so people see, you know, we’re not just blowing smoke, but we actually have pictures of people doing it wrong and what the consequences can be and we’ve reduced our maintenance accident level down to almost nothing.

RV: Right.

KC: And our pilot error, of course, is still the big issue and we’re working on that. We’ve come down with even some style up, but we were coming down as I was there making a good effort on analyzing why people are having the problems they’re having and trying to prevent them the next time.

RV: It sounds like you spent a lot of time in your Naval career after your primary pilot years as overseeing safety, overseeing…and doing a lot of teaching and training and overseeing the safety aspect. Did you enjoy that?

KC: I did very much. I thought it was worthwhile. I guess that’s my motivation.

RV: Right.

KC: I thought it was absolutely worthwhile.

RV: Okay. Ken, why don’t we take a break for a moment?

KC: Okay. All right.

RV: Okay Ken, so you retired in ’91?

KC: Right.

RV: Did you find your Naval career satisfying, how do you feel about it today?

KC: Absolutely. I loved every minute; they had to throw me out.

RV: (Laughing) Was it simply a thirty-year deal and that was it?
KC: Thirty years, right.
RV: Okay. Do you miss it?
KC: Uh, let’s put it this way. I miss the people. The people were the most, the best people that you could be associated with in any career.
RV: Okay.
KC: The quality of people, both officer and enlisted in aviation were of the finest. The officers were all type A personalities, full of life. There were a few that were not smart, but by and large, they were really highly gifted, smart people, full of life, loved life and enjoyed, you know, I think the common goal even was if they didn’t make it career, there was a common goal and purpose in what they were doing and most of them thrived on it.
RV: Let’s talk about looking back at your Vietnam experience. How do you feel about your service in Vietnam today?
KC: Oh, I’m very proud of it. I think we did make a difference.
RV: Meaning that…?
KC: By in spite of all the handicaps we were faced with, I think with what we were able to do; we did about a good a job as you could do.
RV: Are you talking about your specific squadron or the United States in general?
KC: Well, I’m saying my…I think the military effort.
RV: Okay.
KC: Political effort, I do not agree, I didn’t think it was very good at all and that was a matter of will and we didn’t have a will for it, the involvement. There wasn’t a recognition of how difficult it would be. Very much of the same kind of complaints you here about Iraq today. There doesn’t seem to be an appreciation of how difficult it is to affect change, especially through military means.
RV: Right.
KC: But the military I think, there was certainly some goof ups that we did, but overall, I think the military did a hell of a job there under just the most trying circumstances. And for those guys who fought in those jungles and I think again, with one hand tied behind the backs, did a marvelous job and we tried to support.
RV: Do you think the United States learned lessons from this experience?

KC: Well, I was hoping so. I was hoping that...in fact, there was some really

good recommendations that came out of it that we should never go into war without a

firm commitment by the leadership and the Congress and with agreement with American

people. And that was I think articulated very well by the Secretary of State Powell.

RV: Right.

KC: And if we can learn that and understand that philosophy, I think we would

be very well off as a nation.

RV: Are you speaking of the Powell Doctrine, going with hard force with a

purpose and then get out?

KC: Well yes, and also to have commitment.

RV: Yes.

KC: In other words, to have committed people throughout the whole effort, not

just one segment of government or one group of people, but you have to have a

consensus that you're going to commit with a limited goal or with a defined goal I should

say.

RV: One of the things that I ask in these interviews Ken is something that we’ve

already talked about a bit, is how relevant Vietnam is today and is the Vietnam War still

with the United States today or has it been properly put to rest?

KC: Well, that’s a hard question because I think you probably get a lot of

different responses depending everybody’s view of the war, but I think the experiences

are very much with us. I think it lives today. I think we have the same elements of the

media, of the liberal establishment and I don’t say all that with disdain, but I do believe

that there’s a lot of people who will use a cause to be against what I think the nation was

founded on. And that’s, you know, we are the beacon of hope and freedom of the world,

which is articulated by many of our founding fathers, but also by people like Reagan and

others. And there’s a liberal cast that says, ‘No, we shouldn’t do that. We should be

more accommodating.’ But these kind of policies have never worked against tyrants and

that’s why I’m so against that kind of a philosophy, is they don’t work against people like

Saddam. They don’t work against with about anybody. I mean, look at our friends, so-
called friends, Chirac and those, you know. Chirac does everything for France, as he
should. I’m not saying that that’s wrong, but the people think that you’re going to
convince him to do something for America at maybe not France’s best interests. Are you
kidding me? They were happy you were selling all that stuff to Saddam, than they were
in supporting us in any kind of effort, but the liberals and the media people that are of
that ilk, will never get that. They just don’t understand it and that distresses me a little
bit, but hey, it’s a democracy and I fought for it and I’m glad I fought for it and I’d fight
for anybody’s right to say whatever they want.

RV: How would you say that the war has most affected your life, the Vietnam
War?

KC: Well, from a career military aspect, having combat in your jacket is certainly
not a bad thing to have. And so, from a very selfish point of view, I think it certainly
didn’t hurt me to have that experience. I think I could’ve…there are other people who
never saw a day of combat that did just as well as I did. So, it’s no precursor to success,
but it certainly didn’t hurt.

RV: Right.

KC: Other than that, it had very little effect.

RV: Do you suffer any disabilities from your time at Vietnam?

KC: No, none.

RV: Okay. Would you change anything about your Vietnam experience if you
could?

KC: Yeah. I would’ve liked to been able to hit targets that I knew were there.

(Laughing)

RV: Right.

KC: I would’ve done a lot more damage and made them quit faster.

RV: Right.

KC: Yeah. I just felt it was horribly run and the campaign was run poorly, the air
campaign was run poorly. A lot of it was because of political constraints, but it just was
not an efficient way to conduct a war and it was horrible to see. What I resented most
about it other than the fact that I think it hurt our country, is that it hurt people,
individuals. I really believe that it cost us men and material, but it certainly cost us men
that I saw die. I didn’t like it at all.
RV: Personally Ken, what was the most significant thing you learned about yourself during your three cruises over there?

KC: Well, I’d always hoped to be a warrior. I kind of grew up thinking, even as a child that I was. I think I acquitted myself pretty well. I felt I could handle the stress of the combat. I felt I was a real warrior and I was proud of that effort.

RV: Would you ever want to go back and visit?

KC: I don’t have a great desire to do that, no.

RV: Why not?

KC: Well, I just don’t much care for that part of the world and I don’t enjoy jungles that much. I don’t enjoy high humidity. If I had my choice of visiting, I’d rather go to Canada. (Laughing)

RV: (Laughing) That’s kind of ironic you saying that.

KC: Yeah, and I stated it that way for that impact.

RV: Yes. What is your perception of Vietnam today, the country?

KC: Well, I think it’s struggling. It still hasn’t been able to advance, as it should’ve. It suffers…I’m really into economics and I love to read The Wall Street Journal and various other publications that give an inkling to how the trade policies are going and all this kind of stuff. So, I’m always fascinated to read how they’ll open up their economy a little bit and then they, the bureaucrats who by and large now, are about as corrupt as you can imagine having the state run everything, will retract whatever advances had been made and withdraw because they become frightened that the people are going to get too much power. So it’s fascinating to watch how it has evolved, but it’s a lot poorer than it should be because it could be a very rich country, potentially could be fabulously wealthy and it’s just kind of sad that the people are still suffering after years of having sent all their ex-military people that fought for the west to indoctrination camps and all that other stuff. But I’ll tell you; we have people here in Virginia Beach that are Vietnamese and either came over from the boat or came over afterwards and I’ll tell you, they are so happy to be here, they try like heck to get their relatives out of the country.

So it’s still that sad of a situation and they don’t have freedom there, and they don’t have a free enterprise system, and they suffer from it and will continue for many years. And past, all this old leadership has died away or most of them are dead, you got the
bureaucrats who are the Communist type bureaucrat central planning and all that kind of stuff and now they’re corrupting. They are being very corrupted. It’s a pathetic situation, I feel for the Vietnamese people greatly because I know it could’ve been better.

RV: Let’s talk about the Vietnam Veteran today. Do you think the government’s taken care of Vietnam Veterans in the way they would take care of any veteran?

KC: Well, I think the Vietnamese Veterans…I think that most the publicity has been on the failures of the veterans, most of them having to do with psychological problems and probably started when they started puffing marijuana and taking cocaine and illicit drugs or they had alcohol problems and these resulted in the social problems that they are faced with. And I kind of tire of the homeless Vietnam Veteran kind of thing because the guy is sick. He’s no different than any of these other misfits in society or psychologically deficient or mentally deficient or psychiatrically deficient from a guy who’s wandering around, panhandling in the streets today. And I think the effort should not be on publicizing that aspect of it, of the healthcare issue, but is getting veterans mental help for all of those guys, all of the people. There’s both female and male walking around with these kinds of problems because we’ve done away with most state mental hospitals. So the people that could help them in let’s say in the 50s, those hospitals and those people are not even available for the people today. I know in Virginia, per se, we cleansed our hospitals of the mental hospital patients, put them in halfway houses and when they don’t work there, guess where they end up, they’re in the street and most of them end up on the street because there’s no law that says they have to remain in the halfway house, even if they’re very deficient as an ongoing citizen. So we got another whole issue that hasn’t been even dealt with by anybody because of the cost involved. And I don’t believe it’s just the Vietnam Veteran. I just think they are one segment of a bigger story. And again, I do not feel most of the Vietnam Veterans are that…they get tainted as all the homeless. I really believe that millions of Vietnam Veterans out there that are making productive lives, just like people in World War II, but they just got a lot of press because it was fed to the antiwar stuff too, which is helpful to the antiwar people and the skeptics who were against out policies. That was another nail to put in a coffin. You could just say, ‘Ah see, this is what war causes,’ with the effect of our war, which you have all these homeless vets. You have all these people who are
having flashbacks. You have all these people that are on cocaine because they were…BS man, BS. They were there because they got a psychological problem or a mental problem or an addiction of a sort that they could’ve picked up over there, I’ll grant you that because there was plenty of cocaine and marijuana in Southeast Asia, which they got a lot of. On ground, at least they had access to it whereas as the sailors probably didn’t.

RV: Did you see any of that stuff onboard ship?
KC: No, I never did. I mean, I know that there was some of it, but it’d be more or less in the area of probably marijuana.
RV: Right.
KC: No, that’s not to say that I didn’t see drug problems in the Navy, there were some. There were lots of them.
RV: Right.
KC: The time I was over there, we didn’t see much.
RV: Ken, let me ask you, what would you tell a young person today, if they asked you about Vietnam, you talked about the policy stuff and I can imagine you would talk about that to an extent of, you know, if you walked into a classroom, say a high school classroom, what would you tell them about Vietnam?
KC: Well, I’d tell them, you know, basically what I’ve told you about my philosophy of why we were over there, what we were trying to do. I thought that the goal was excellent. I just think we carried…we had no political will to carry out the policy, nor did we have the financial funding priority to make it happen without a serious effect on our economy, which of course it turned out to be disastrous economically to our country, to run the great society program and the war at the same time, and we damn near bankrupted our country doing that. But that aside, I would just go on to say that when political leaders make decisions, they are something as important as giving away American lives, there should be more input from congress or actually better sold by any administration so that you have essentially the polydoctrine.
RV: Right.
KC: And I would say that the people that fought over there, they did it courageously and they did it against great odds. They were spit on and reviled when they
got home and it wasn’t fair. But, they were doing the best they could, being sent there, not of their own will, but because the nation said, ‘You will.’

RV: Ken, have you been to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington?

KC: Yes I have.

RV: Can you talk about your experiences there?

KC: Well, I enjoyed going. It’s a beautiful architecture; a professional art form and I thought it was neat to have all the names there.

RV: Were you able to find Mike’s name?

KC: I found all my squadron mates and others who I knew.

RV: Ken, let me ask you a couple of questions about this experience of being interviewed about Vietnam. What are your thoughts on it and how has it affected you?

KC: Well, I’m just happy to be able to make a statement based on what I knew and what I experienced and I don’t think it’s affected me one way or the other, I’m just happy to do it.

RV: Right. Okay. Well, is there anything else that you would like to add to our discussion, anything else that you would like to comment on?

KC: Not that I can think of.

RV: Okay. All right. Well, this will end the interview with Ken Craig. Thank you very much sir for your time.

KC: All right.

RV: Okay.