

**Oral History Interview of
Ken Hite**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
February 21, 2014
Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Ken Hite. Hite discusses his missions in Korea and his encounters with enemy aircraft. Hite also talks about the aircraft he flew and the possible technical difficulties. Furthermore, Hite discusses his work at the Air Force Academy and his work with the government.

Length of Interview: 02:14:41

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Encounters with enemy aircraft	5	00:00:00
Involvement in combat	10	00:11:15
Potential technical issues with aircraft	14	00:23:44
June 22, 1953 mission	17	00:35:13
Experiences firing at enemy	25	00:54:41
Career between time in Korea and North Vietnam	30	01:07:17
Air Force Academy	32	01:12:18
JC maneuvers	36	01:25:51
Bomber aircraft	39	01:32:24
Strategic targets	39	01:35:40
Robert McNamara and Curtis LeMay	42	01:43:50
At the Pentagon	47	01:54:53
Okinawa sovereignty	49	02:02:46
Japanese culture	51	02:10:45

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David Marshall (DM):

The date is February 21, 2014, and this is David Marshall interviewing Ken Hite at his home in Lubbock, Texas. And we talked a couple of weeks ago, but I wanted to continue on that a bit. We were talking about combat missions over Korea, and you had mentioned that you had flew ninety missions. Now, can you tell me a little bit about how many of those missions involved encounters with enemy aircraft?

Ken Hite (KH):

Well, it is kind of a function of what the mission was. I just looked—scanned those mission—ninety missions in a book over there, and a lot of the time would be escorting fighter bombers—not escorting them but providing top cover—we'd be escorting reconnaissance aircraft. On one mission, for example, we—it was kind of a psychological thing—we deployed down to another airbase from K-14 to K-8 which is south of there where the F-84s operate, and—to make them think, I guess, that we were based there. We did that the night before. And the mission was an interesting one. We were to make a pass across the North Korean people's military academy, and I liked that. The only thing is you couldn't—we were forbidden from firing our guns, so we came down from about forty thousand feet. And we didn't get all that low because we don't like to get that close to guns, but we came across about five thousand feet and gave them a buzz job. (both laugh) We had missions like that. We had weather reconnaissance missions where either an—normally it was a flight of four when we did anything. We'd take off early in the morning before sunup, and I just looked at one of those missions. We were doing a weather reconnaissance where we'd cover, you know, all the key points up to the Yalu River, Wonsan [?] Harbor on the east side, and the Ch'ongch'on on the west side.

DM:

That sounds like—okay, Ch'ongch'on—that sounds like a mission to demoralize the enemy, though—buzzing through the military base.

KH:

Oh, back at the academy or the—yeah. You know, you never know what impact that had.

DM:

So different types of missions.

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

Were they all at or north of the thirty-eighth parallel, or were there any—?

KH:

Oh yeah, they were all in—at this particular time the Ch'o do—the river through there was the boundary. That was the fence we called it.

DM:

Did—was there ever—was enemy aircraft often sighted over South Korean airspace?

KH:

Never.

DM:

Okay.

KH:

At that time. We had to go north, generally. Well, if there was something going on in Pyongyang, they'd be there. That's not all that far north—kind of central Korea.

DM:

Okay, but mostly theirs was around the Yalu?

KH:

Well, it was in that vicinity, and they had two airbases up there in Manchuria. And remember these were Russian aircrafts—so we had Russian—they had Russian pilots who were doing a training and even flying combat with them. And you'd run into all sorts of skill levels up there.

DM:

Now, maybe you can remind me, now Russian pilots were flying some of these Russian MiGs, but, technically, they weren't supposed to be doing that—involved in that degree in this war—were they?

KH:

Well, it's their choice, and we could—we could tell when we had a very experienced pilot in a combat situation. And the Korean word for boss—or number one—is *honcho*. (laughs) So we'd run into a *honcho* occasionally who really knew what he was doing. He had good information on our aircraft capability and had better training than most of the people we ran into.

DM:

And how, specifically, could you tell? Could you tell by the way he maneuvered, or how—?

KH:

What they did—they were more aggressive, and a lot of the—we used to get—pick up on MiGs that maybe had been down to Pyongyang, and the F-84s were bombing down there, maybe. And we'd catch them on the way home, and hopefully they were low on fuel and needed to get home. And, if things worked out right, you could get a kill. And I put this out, not to—for self-aggrandizement—

DM:

No, I saw that.

KH:

—but this is—can you read that?

DM:

No, I was looking at it when we were talking a little while ago. I hadn't read that yet—Oh, okay.

KH:

So those were the—

DM:

It was the first time.

KH:

—those were the MiGs that were probably coming back from Pyongyang, and they were—had been down lower—at a lower altitude down probably where the fighter bombers were—the F-84s. And they were below, uncharacteristically, flying below our flight altitude, but it's like this old song we had:

*When we go up,
to fly at noon,
the MiG-15s,
leap off the moon.*

DM:

(both laugh) Is that right?

KH:

That's a little off key.

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DM:

No, that sounded good. By the way, I was telling Andy about your songs because you were giving me little samples of some of the songs—last time—that you sang with the Australians and other people, and he said, “I need to record some of those with him.”

KH:

Well, listen. They wouldn't—

DM:

Okay, so on this particular day—were looking at an article here. It says—I guess it's 22 of June in 1953—that you damaged a MiG-15 and then—is it talking about you here where you destroyed six MiGs?

KH:

No. They're talking about the wing—

DM:

The wing.

KH:

—whole fighter wing—in the 51st Fighter-Interceptor Wing.

DM:

Okay. I'm sorry. I was trying to read and listen at the same time. That's good. Now, these *honchos*—were they typically Russian pilots, or would you know?

KH:

Well, that was our belief, or they were the leaders, perhaps, of the North Korean that had more experience—more flying experience. And, of course, these were the first two aircraft in the world with swept wings: MiG-15 and the F-86.

DM:

Mm-hm. They're really slick looking aircraft.

KH:

The interesting thing was that the plan view of the MiG-15 from, say, three thousand feet is very hard distinguish between a MiG-15 and an F-86.

DM:

Mm-hm. Oh, so you might come in close and realize that, no, this is not—from the aircraft.

KH:

Oh, often. And, you know, you see a flash—a glint—from the sunlight shining on the wings, and you have to go down and investigate. You don't know. We're on squadron frequencies, so we can talk—have the radio—if we're in combat and need to tell someone to break left or right. And a break is just a tight turn because you've got an enemy on your tail. You want to get him out here, somewhere where you can come back around, maybe, and get behind him.

DM:

Right. Right. So you have to go investigate any time you see a glint.

KH:

If it's within range of you, you know.

DM:

Is there any way to avoid that glint—giving off that glint yourself?

KH:

Oh, Oh sure.

DM:

I mean, the position of the sun—

KH:

They could have been camouflaged, but they weren't, they were all silver. And the MiGs seemed to be—some had been spray-painted a little off silver, and some weren't.

DM:

They were dulled—kind of a dull color? They wouldn't give a glint?

KH:

Yeah. Kind of a greyish—light grey, something like that

DM:

Besides the Russian pilots, there were also Chinese pilots and North Korean pilots? Were all three—?

KH:

To my knowledge, there were no Chinese pilots. It—I was never briefed that there were.

DM:

Okay. How many combat instances were you involved in—directly involved in?

KH:

You know, I can't—not enough, I'll tell you that. And there were two factors involved: the weather and the—some problems that we had with our F-86. We had pressurization problems sometimes. Sometimes we'd have oxygen problems, or external fuel tank—when they were empty, we jettison them. And if they didn't jettison or one jettisoned, then you weren't fit to go into combat. And we had fuel regulator problems where the aircraft engine would surge and it can be just the beginning of a real problem, so you automatically go home. And we always flew in flights with four unless someone had to go home, and if someone had to go home, a good airplane went with him as an escort. So then we were a two ship flight.

DM:

And with two, that's not really enough to typically engage the enemy. Is that correct?

KH:

Well—

DM:

I know—you were telling me about a fellow who did and he engaged a lot of MiGs.

KH:

Yeah. I was telling you about George A. Davis who did that and got his last two MiGs. And a MiG got him, and he was killed in action. It's just a—you know, the technology hadn't—it was really rudimentary. It was—as far as keeping track of aircraft and radar vectors. You had no—the only thing automated that you had in the cockpit was a radar ranging gunsight, and that was a great help for us. Our airplanes were much better equipped.

DM:

And heavier, too, I think you said.

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

Probably, I guess, because of that.

KH:

And wing loading was higher.

DM:

Well, now you're looking back sixty years later, and it seems to me that, when you were flying these things in the early fifties, jets were pretty new. I guess they came out of the tail end of World War II. This was still kind of experimental aircraft—you were in—I guess everything that came out was experimental aircraft.

KH:

Well, the first operational Air Force jet was the F-80 Lightning, and we didn't have the engine technology to build—to design our own engine. So we took a British engine which operated in a completely different fashion in that the compressor system was self—was very short and large round, and the engine sat right behind the cockpit, whereas our engines were radial engines and they might have—I'm—this is a guess, you know—fifteen or twenty rows of turbine blades which—that was the compressor section of the aircraft. And then you had fire cans that sprayed the fuel into that—

DM:

And all of that happened right behind you.

KH:

All that happened right behind.

DM:

That sounds like it would be loud and hot and very dangerous.

KH:

No—well, no, it would. It might get in the cockpit with you if you—(laughs) if you didn't to everything just right. But, no, it wasn't noisy at all.

DM:

Oh, really? Golly.

KH:

But all that noise was behind us.

DM:

Right. You were leaving it behind.

KH:

We left it behind, in fact, before it could reach the cockpit unless it was right close.

DM:

You said these things did Mach 1 point something, didn't y—?

KH:

Yes. The F-86 would go up to Mach 1.1 or 2. You could go through the speed of sound, but you couldn't do it straight and level. You had to be in a dive. But that was—could be an advantage too, if you had to get out of there, because the MiG-15 seemed to get uncontrollable at about .9 to about .94 Mach. And how do we know this? Well, we were dropping leaflets up there in North Korea—in Manchuria. I can't say exactly where, but they were doing this out of C-47s. I had an uncle who was on one of those crews. And they were offering a hundred thousand dollars to any MiG pilot who would bring an airplane to K-14, and one day it happened. And he landed—came in, and our runway was one, four, three, two—that meant 140 degrees if you're headed south—southeast. And one, two was 180 degrees out of that. So he came in against traffic—the traffic flow. It wasn't much traffic, and we had what we called an alert shack. It was a little building down there. We kept people on fifteen minute alert there—a flight of four—all the time in case of a downed pilot or something of that nature that required immediate assistance. And that was a duty that you got frequently.

DM:

You could get out of there in fifteen minutes if you had to.

KH:

Or less.

DM:

—if you got—or less. Wow.

KH:

Power units were there, and it was a foot race to get in the cockpit and be the first one to get your engine started.

DM:

Planes were always kept checked, and fueled—

KH:

But then you had to get in flight order because you had one, two, three, four, and a leader—number one.

DM:

So he came in near this.

KH:

But I had a friend, and I—this is one name I haven't brought up—but he was a Hawaiian who had been with the Hawaiian National Guard, flying F-102s. But he got into—well, not 102s, but anyway—he got on a—he was able to join the Air Force, and get proficient in the F-86. He was out there in the radar shack—in the alert shack when this MiG-15 was sighted, and the tower gave him a phone call out there that it was coming in. And he pulled out right in front of the alert shack, and our Hawaiian friend—I don't know what languages he speaks—spoke—probably the majority Oriental population in Hawaii's always been Japanese, but there were a lot more than that. So he was accepted in a friendly fashion. He brought us a very nice MiG. It had—it was loaded with ammo, and the brakes were in good shape, and everything was wonderful. So they sent it down to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa which was south of there, oh, maybe 600 miles. He could leapfrog down. So, this is not something I covered with you last time?

DM:

No, it's not.

KH:

No? Okay. So we took the airplane down to Kadena which is a big air base there—larger airplanes flew out of there. Bombers flew out of there and transports and that kind of thing. But they sent a crew from Edwards Air Force Base in—also—and they came out—inspected the airplane, and what-have-you, and ran tests on the airplane, and determined all the capabilities that it had, and then actually flew it in combat maneuvers against an F-86 in the airspace down there at Okinawa. So we were the best informed, the best trained people with an aircraft that had some weaknesses which you never exposed to the enemy. You had to play your strengths against his weaknesses. That's the way you stayed alive. If you didn't have the advantage, the capability, quote, you didn't just blindly go get engaged. But we couldn't get engaged enough. It was sometimes boring. And Asia weather patterns are unique—they were in Korea just as they were in Southeast Asia down in the monsoon area. But other than the weather reki [?] we didn't have satellites looking down at that point. So you might go up and have a very aggressive—every flight. Everybody had a very aggressive attitude. We really wanted to engage MiGs. I mean, that was the mission.

DM:

Well, all that you had trained for it. You were prepared for it. Everything.

KH:

We were prepared, and we felt very, very confident.

DM:

By the way, this pilot that landed the MiG, was he Russian, or—?

KH:

No. He was North Korean. And—

DM:

And what happened to him? Did you ever hear?

KH:

Well, yes. You go to the National Air Force Museum at Dayton, Ohio. They have his whole story displayed—pictures and everything else.

DM:

Mm-hm. Okay. (laughs) He got his hundred thousand.

KH:

That was interesting to me to get to see that a while back. Back then a hundred thousand dollars would get you a long way. And I'm sure there's a book about that.

DM:

I'm sure there is. I'm sure there is.

KH:

I haven't read it.

DM:

Well, before we talk a little more about the combat aspect—you brought up something very interesting and that is the little technical problems that can go wrong, and it's like, not only were you looking for the enemy, and concerning yourself with weather patterns, but also—did you report frequently on the performance of the airplane? “Look, we've got this problem. It needs to be—someone needs to fix this.” Were you—because you were the people who knew, really had these things—

KH:

No, that's right. The first people to meet us after we got on the ground were maintenance people as they came out to pick us up from the flight line. There'd be a maintenance debriefer on board, and he'd listen to each pilot. But, see, the missions—I noticed—I had one mission that was longer than most, and it was only two hours—an hour and a half—an hour forty-five—at the throttle settings we used in combat in the F-86. Even though you had external fuel and dropped the tanks, you didn't have all that much fuel on board—that much time. You had to really have it together.

DM:

What if you encountered—we were talking about his before I turned the recorder on—what if you encountered a problem with the canopy, for example? What if you were at fairly high altitude and there was a crack, or—? I mean, that sounds so life-threatening, that suddenly the air pressure change—

KH:

Well, you have an oxygen regulator, and you fly with it on the automatic position. If you lose pressurization, you reach over and turn it to a hundred percent oxygen, and that's pressure breathing. So that gives you time to get to a reasonable altitude, and if you lost your option you didn't fly around with an unpressurized cockpit. Sometimes you'd lose pressurization in the cockpit, and you didn't go in—keep your—continue on looking for MiGs with no pressurization. I—and what about the canopy? I had an occasion, and—if I've mentioned any of these things, stop me and I'll go in another direction—but I have described this to our flying groups and that kind of thing. We have to talk about the missions we flew. I was flying with one of the leading Jet Aces one day—James Jabara. He was also our squadron commander at the time. And we were a flight of four, and he had found some—sighted some MiGs up high up around forty-five thousand feet and was behind them. And he was trying to close on them, but he was about two thousand feet. He could—if you're fortunate, you can hit a MiG from that distance, and that's the way I hit mine. So, he was focused up front. And I was a wing man, and I was focused on the rear—what's happening back there. And I looked back, and he was getting ready to fire—or maybe had fired some. And we had another flight of MiGs coming in behind us at six o'clock low. That's the blind spot in your airplane. But we'd kick is up like this, and we could see the blind spot—see what's happening back there. And I called out the MiGs, and the—my element leader started making a turn. I was over here on the outside, and—if you're still on the outside and he's making a turn, it's like running a foot race. You just get further behind. So I had to get on the inside, and came across watching, you know, several different ways. And I crossed a little bit higher than I wanted to behind the element lead—I was a number four man—and I got into his jet wash. And it flamed my aircraft out.

DM:

Mm-hm. You did mention that last time.

KH:

Oh, okay.

DM:

Go ahead, though.

KH:

But anyway, canopy frosted over, and I couldn't see anything. And here we were—had MiGs in front of me and MiGs behind me, and I couldn't see anything. And the aircraft—I knew what the tech order said, but—flying—I wanted to—power as soon as I could. I found out I couldn't get it. So your glide speed on the airplane—you might be going Mach 9—on that—probably going about .9 when that happened. And then you're a glider, and you're gliding along at maybe at a 180 or 200 knots instead of 500 or 600. So you're a sitting duck. And I never—you know, these things happen, and they—you come home. It's kind of like going down the road and you come close to another car. Well, you don't worry about those that you missed. It's those that might still hit you. You might learn a lesson about it, but that's the way it was and—but I was told that Major Jabara and his element came back around. And they disengaged from the MiGs in front, and did maneuvers that kept the flight of MiGs behind off of me until I got an air start. It's—the ocean. The Yellow Sea there, between Korea and China, at that time of the year was about thirty-eight degrees. We didn't wear just a flight suit like we do in summertime. We wore a full rubber boot and immersible suit with a tight collar up here so you could survive a little longer. At that thirty-eight degrees you couldn't survive more than a few minutes, really, in that water. Sometimes it was colder than that.

DM:

What about in your survival suit? How long could you survive in thirty-eight degrees with that on?

KH:

Oh, it's—I don't know that that's documented, even. It would depend on a lot of things. You have a floatation gear that you—had a carbon dioxide pressurization device, you pull a string and puncture that and it inflates your life vest, and you know, what's the weather out there? How's the wind? What—there's so many variables, but it sure gave you more time because you needed some time. They had air rescue aircraft called Dumbos. They were SA-16 flying boats, and their sole job was to pick up people that had bailed out in the ocean.

DM:

Yet it would take time. It would still take time to get out there. That would—

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

That would be a concern.

KH:

Well, that's the most concern I had except on occasion we had—we were using very plain call signs. Now the computer cranks out some really nice call signs from Sierra to Eagle to Falcon to all sorts of things. And for intelligence purposes, they can never associate a call sign with a particular flight of aircraft. It makes it more difficult. But we were Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog type flights. (laughs) And we were Baker flight one day, and I was in a number four position. And we were doing some maneuvers. We—the flight lead had some MiGs in sight, and there's an Able flight that was engaged with the MiGs. And the only thing—he made a mistake, and he was telling his wingman to brake it in and pull it in tighter. And we called a brake brake now. That's a roll over and max performance. Turn—maybe up—probably down or level—to get out of the way, and he made a mistake and called Baker, “Pull it in tighter. Brake.” And, well that wasn't—and that was—I heard that, and, gee, I immediately went into a brake and whatever. I thought that was my flight lead that was telling his—me to do that. So I did several descending, tight turns down there before the lead said, “Hey, that was Able flight. They made a mistake.” (laughs)

DM:

Right. So you got out. Okay. (laughs) Well, you know, so many things could go wrong. That's kind of a—it's a tough situation. And to remember code names and everything else—seems like it would be difficult. Would you—did you ever feel panicked during any of this, or did you just kind of take it in stride of, “Well, this is—I need to do this now.”

KH:

Well—

DM:

Step by step.

KH:

I think fighter pilots learn that fear and panic are your worst enemies, and you learn to control that, hopefully, during your flight training. So, no. I heard aircraft in all sorts of bad conditions, and the pilot speaks very calmly and precisely like he was sitting in the living room chair. He has it under control. And you have—that's your best defense is to have everything under control that you can handle, and then you can think and do the right thing.

DM:

Can you tell me about this write-up? Can you give me, in your own words, what happened this day? It was June 22, I guess, of 1953. Can you tell me how that took place?

KH:

Yes. That was mission number fifty-six for me, and I was still a second lieutenant. And my gold bar needed polishing, so I was a brown bar second lieutenant. (both laugh) That mean you'd—people would let them go, you know, so these looked like they'd been there for a while. When you got there they were nice and gold, and they had a nickname for you. You were called a new sport [?]. (both laugh) Anyway, my flight commander—the individual on the ground—we all took a flight was maybe seven or eight people, and they all lived in the same room, all slept in the same room, and knew each other pretty well. Let me get collected here. I distracted myself with a few other stories.

DM:

That's okay.

KH:

And back to the combat mission. On the—I had a flight—someone who had been a flight leader for a little while called Bill Mailloux, M-a-i-l-o-u-x. And so he was my IP flying back. He's number four in the flight, and checking me out of the flight leader—number one. And we hadn't—we'd been up on the Yalu River and Sui-ho Reservoir up there in that area and close to—right along the Manchurian border looking for MiGs, and didn't see any. And when our fuel level got to the point—when you have just enough fuel to get home safely and land, you call Bingo, and that means that guy's got to go home and somebody's got to go with him. You don't send him alone. But I—we were headed back home when—I guess we might have been thirty-eight thousand feet or something like that at that moment. I looked down and I saw MiGs down below me going this way.

DM:

Okay. From left—

KH:

And I had the advantage. I—immediately, I knew I had the advantage, and all I had to do was time it right, and I'd get a MiG. So I did a Split S—over like this—and was coming down closing real nice, and my flight leader—my IP—said, “Hey, Ken, you're going to overshoot him. You better put out the speed brakes.” Hell, I knew I didn't need to put out the speed brakes. Instead of saying “Negative,” to my IP, I popped the speed brakes out and put them back in. Speed brakes out, speed brakes in. And so that showed us—we lost a little air speed. It was vital air speed. I got down there and I couldn't get any closer—about two thousand feet to him. I wanted to get close enough. I wanted to get in 300 feet or so and let the debris fly by or whatever. And I tried diving, picking up airspeed, easing it back up, and just couldn't seem to close because he was descending. And I'd already played my ace there—and had altitude advantage and air speed advantage that I had—but by now I was going three sixty back towards

the Yalu River. So I started hitting him and one of the—my wingman said, “You’re hitting him, lead.” And I could see puffs of smoke and whatever off of the left wing right close to the cockpit. And the fuel in a MiG is—the fuel in an F-86 is several places, but the wing is one big fuel tank—supposedly a bulletproof one, one that’s self-sealing, but that was the manufacturer’s warranty. (both laugh) He wasn’t there with us.

DM:

What about on a MiG?

KH:

Well, their fuel was along the fuselage, and—did I hit the fuselage? There was—where there’s smoke, there’s fire, so—but things weren’t blazing. And someone called “Bingo,” and the flight IP said, “Well, we better go home.” And I said, “Let me hang with this guy a little bit.” “No, we’ve got to go home.”

DM:

Golly.

KH:

So, he forced me to break off. He screwed up. He screwed up a sure kill for me.

DM:

First of all, by telling you to brake.

KH:

I’m sorry. He’s not living today.

DM:

Yeah. First of all he wanted you to brake and then he called you off the—

KH:

No, no. let me get out of that braking business. This is a different thing. No. We were just flying along like this and the MiGs were flying low, opposite direction, going home. And I rolled over like this. There wasn’t any braking. This was an offensive, “We have the advantage,” maneuver—and absolutely a perfect setup. Well, there’s no excuse in retrospect. There were ways to prevent that, but my sense of discipline meant that I had to respond.

DM:

Right. So you don’t—you know you damaged him, but you don’t know whether he made it back or not.

KH:

No. And some people would have taken a kill on an assumption, and that's not within my honor code. And I didn't see him break into flames and start heading down for a crash. I didn't see him if he bailed out because we were headed the other direction. So I didn't feel I could take a kill. I think it could have been called a probable, but—we had an example to set for those that might want to take an unfair advantage—and you pair up, and make a MiG killer out of someone that wasn't.

DM:

Well, what do you—I know what you—you didn't claim a kill, but what do you think happened?

KH:

I think it was a probable.

DM:

Yeah. Because you saw smoke.

KH:

Well, I saw smoke, and there was some fire. I don't know why or what—you know, shooting metal won't—

DM:

You saw debris.

KH:

It might have been fuel from the cockpit. That's the only place—well, not the cockpit but behind the cockpit and the fuselage.

DM:

Mm-hm. Did you see debris? Any debris?

KH:

No. I couldn't. We were—it was really a long, long shot—two thousand for .50 caliber machine guns.

DM:

Well, it was a good shot. Two thousand—

KH:

Well, I had time to make some adjustments, and that radar arranging helped me immensely.

DM:

Uh-huh. And how many .50 calibers do you have on those? You told me.

KH:

Six.

DM:

Six. Do they train at a certain—do they converge at a certain range?

KH:

Well—

DM:

What's the optimum?

KH:

They—Yeah. They harmonize the guns—take the aircraft out on the ground and have a target out there—I believe it's at twelve hundred feet—so that they'll be—have a nice pattern of bullets at twelve hundred feet. And when you're firing from two thousand, you have to make some adjustments. And when I didn't hit him with the piper right on the aircraft the first time, then I had to adjust and raise my sights a little bit and try to arch them into him. Also, the bullets are—it'd have been all right if it'd been 20mm—but not .50 caliber.

DM:

Mm-hm. Well, considering those things and the great range, it sounds like a commendable shot.

KH:

Well, it made the newspaper in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. No. They—we had good public information officers. They didn't miss a chance to beat the drum for us.

DM:

What happens when someone—

KH:

My wife sent that to me. I never—

DM:

Oh, is that right? Oh, you didn't see it yourself? What happens when you're—someone is pretty close behind an aircraft that starts to come apart? Is there a real danger of getting hit by the debris—

KH:
Yeah.

DM:
—or does it kind of take air flow around you?

KH:
Well, I've seen photographs of some kills that—where the aggressing aircraft—i.e. the F-86—were just very close, and everything—all the debris went around him instead—but you're always—it's always possible to pick up some debris down the intake, and then you have a problem.

DM:
Oh, gosh. Oh, yeah. Did you ever hear of any problems with the birds in the intakes of these planes over Korea?

KH:
No.

DM:
Okay. You were at high enough altitude, typically, or—

KH:
Well—

DM:
that you could avoid it?

KH:
I just don't know. I just never saw birds. At Randolph Air Base—I flew down there—and I had a—I was a director of operations for the wing, and we had our weather ship taking off. And I had a red phone in my bedroom, and it rang, and I picked it up, and was told that a T-38 on takeoff had just crashed. So I went down to find out about it and a flock of birds that had been feeding on the grass there—even though it's very early in the morning—or maybe they were roosting—flew up, and he took some down the intake, and he bailed out. And very soon—both he and his co-pilot—two people in the T-38. And one of them's suit draped over the powerlines out there, and he was hanging in the air. And the other one landed safely on the ground. It was a housing area—the pilot he was laying flat on his back in a briefing room, and went in to talk to him, and he told us what happened, and he'd aimed the airplane a little bit before he bailed out so—and it missed the housing area. No one was killed.

DM:

Okay. Phew. Golly. So many things that can go wrong.

KH:

So many things can go right. (both laugh)

DM:

Well, there's the good, positive outlook. From my perspective, you know, I have a very different perspective from you. You were there. But looking back, it looks like, to me, these are the early days of jet aviation, and lots of experimentation, it would seem like to me. And, I mean, you're only a few years—or several years after—after Mach one. After the sound barrier—breaking the sound barrier. This is early stuff, from my perspective. And to me it sounds like you guys were practically test pilots, you know.

KH:

Well, no. We—they had an F-86A. They had another model called the F-86E, and the F-86F. They were making improvements all the time. The F-86A had mechanical flight controls, and we flew that during training at Nellis. And you had—it had a flyable tail—the whole thing rotated, not just the trim tab. And to pull out of a dive up around the Mach, you just had to pull on the stick too hard—so you trimmed the tail. You got right on—on the—I have the controls—top of the control stick around here somewhere—but you just trim it, that little button right on top of the stick, right there, and you trim it out of the dive. That's the way you did the F-86A, and it had—it was the first operational 86. The E had more power, and the F had even more power and was faster. They put wing fences on the swept wings which were aluminum—that strip of vertical aluminum to try—because they felt that the airflow was being pushed out off the wingtips instead of giving lift. And they did help you with the lift—maintained the airflow over the swept wings.

DM:

Did you guys ever make suggestions for changes in design. You mentioned that people—mechanics would come out and debrief you, but did you ever say, “You know, you could fix this over here and it would make for better lift,” for example.

KH:

No. No, we just—that wasn't our ballgame. We didn't—we all might have had ideas, but we weren't the experts at that level.

DM:

You were the guys taking the risks out there. (both laugh)

KH:
Yeah.

DM:
By the way, when did—you were around when Mach 1 was reached.

KH:
Yeah.

DM:
You were already in the Air Force, I suppose. That was in '47, wasn't it? Or some people say it happened during the war during dives—during World War II during dives. What do you think?

KH:
No.

DM:
Okay.

KH:
No way with a prop chop.

DM:
So do you think—what? Chuck Yeager was the—

KH:
And—and no way with a straight wing aircraft. We had—as you remember, the F-80 was the first operational jet. It was a straight wing, and it was limited.

DM:
Well, was it Chuck Yeager, then, that first broke the sound barrier, you think?

KH:
Yeah.

DM:
Okay. And that was in—

KH:
And that was out at Edwards. And I'm not sure year that was.

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DM:

Seems like '47 or somewhere in there. I can't recall for sure.

KH:

Now, what was he flying? The X-1 or something, something like that.

DM:

Mm-hm. The X-1.

KH:

Well, Chuck Yeager, by the way, came out to Okinawa to fly the—he was one of the pilots who came out to test the MiG-15.

DM:

Oh is that right?

KH:

He was a well-known pilot, way back then, in the Air Force.

DM:

I think he had gotten some fame in his P-51 during World War II. Was in some—had had some kills. In Korea, were there other times, besides on June 22 of '53, that you fired on the enemy or were fired on by the enemy? Were there other encounters like that that you were involved in?

KH:

You mean shooting down a MiG and stuff?

DM:

Mm-hm. Shooting at, or shooting down, or inflicting some damage, or having one shoot at you?

KH:

Well, let's see. That's about three questions. Let me—(both laugh) you're very good at that interrogation. They need you down at the DA's office.

DM:

Well, just answer whichever one you want.

KH:

Well, how many times? You know, I just—I just hadn't counted it. All I can say is not enough times, and I'll—I don't want to use any—a lot of references or anything here, but I—here. I'll

read. Missions early on—my first ten missions. I was wondering and hoping that we would see more MiGs, but—yeah, we had MiGs attack us on my mission number six, and we sighted them on number eight. Let me go back earlier.

DM:

These are your own handwritten notes that you're referring to.

KH:

Yes. Uh-huh.

DM:

Were these notes that you took at the time, or later on thinking back?

KH:

No—every night before going to bed.

DM:

Is that right?

KH:

They were almost contemporaneous.

DM:

Are we going to—is the Southwest Collection going to get a copy of those?

KH:

Yeah. Yeah, I will do that.

DM:

That would just be wonderful.

KH:

Here's a point, you know, where—had a fuel—a hung fuel tank. Here's another one on July: "Saw MiGs above us." I was in a position where I could attack, and that individual, Bill Mailloux, was leading the flight. John Chick, who was an RAF exchange officer, was number two. I was the element leader, and Buzz Sawyers was my wingman—a number three element leader. And I was in a position where I thought I could get a MiG, and number four, Buzz Sawyers, called me, "Lead, I lost you." So here I am; I don't have any protection to the rear. I had an opportunity, and—he wanted a copy of this. I took that page out because I didn't want to

be critical of him. (laughs) You know, it's kind of a specialty kind of thing whether I could have done what I thought I could do or not. Anyway, it didn't happen. And it's a—

DM:

Another example of how—

KH:

Numbers of—we saw MiGs a lot of times, but I wouldn't put a number on them just a number of times. That was our mission. We had to find them. It was a pioneer kind of thing. Had to go up and look for them. And sometimes you'd find them at six. Sometimes you'd find them at unreachable altitude. Sometimes you'd find one—see one in a spin that had been shot up in an air battle above you. Boy—one MiG pilot was shot down—or shot up and bailed out, and Bill Mailloux again—(laughs) my nemesis—saw him and took the flight over there. And we said, “Don't shoot him.” You know? He looked like he was going—well, he said, “I wanted to spill his parachute.” (laughs)

DM:

Did your planes—were they equipped with camera?

KH:

Yes. We had gun cameras. I have gun camera film somewhere in these boxes of that mission.

DM:

Really? So was this information classified for a long time, and then you were allowed to have copies of it? Or did you have copies of it right away?

KH:

No. We got copies the next day.

DM:

So you could take it home.

KH:

Yeah. So I brought it home. (David laughs) And you know, you could see—and that's the proof of the pudding. Sometimes a gun camera didn't work, and people shot down MiGs and that was verified by someone who saw it done.

DM:

When did you reach your ninetieth mission? What—do you know the date and year?

KH:

Oh, this whole issue. We came home in September. We stayed over there for a while afterwards, and—July 27 I reached my ninetieth mission. It was—

DM:

Was that '53?

KH:

Yes, '53. And then it got disappointing. The MiGs wouldn't come up. And you could look. They just weren't there, and earlier in my tour, there might be a lot of them across the Yalu River over in Manchuria, but they were doing training.

DM:

Mm-hm. So you had achieved air superior—or you had uncontested air superiority, I guess—

KH:

Yes we did.

DM:

—and then it got boring.

KH:

Well, it—there were boring moments, and I wanted to see MiGs. Most of us did every time we went up. We wanted to shoot one down every time we went up. That's—that was our intense objective, and we did everything we could do to do that. And there were some people with experience—a lot more experience than people out of combat career training had who really were able to get into them and shoot down quite a few. It wasn't my opportunity.

DM:

Well, it just sounds like, from what you've said, that all of the factors have to be just right. And if this factor's off—the weather factor's off—everything else is in place, well, it's scrubbed. Or—there's a lot of chance involved, it sounds like.

KH:

Well, you just always make sure that you play your strength to the situation. And, you know, everybody has a last ditch maneuver of some sort, and that's if someone has right behind you and is about to nail you. And so I don't know what everyone's last ditch maneuver was. Mine was to lower the nose, pick up air speed, and turn as hard as I could. And then try to fly a maneuver, if he was behind me, I'd try to—I'd brake low. And that's one of the things you could do is fly a

longer distance and fall in behind, and suddenly you're the aggressor. And you had maneuvers like that.

DM:

Okay. So you always had in mind, if this happens then my reaction needs to be this.

KH:

Yes. Everything was programmed in your mind. There wasn't any time for reflection.

DM:

Right, right. You had to know what you were going to do.

KH:

It's like a baseball game, you know?

DM:

Exactly. I was thinking the same thing. You've got to know what's going to happen if they pop up the ball. (both laugh) Really interesting. Really things that I would never think of until you mention them to me, you know, that you can't, you can't know what is going to through a combat pilot's mind until he tells you.

KH:

Well, it was a wonderful experience for myself and others like me who are making a career out of the military. That was the mission of the air force, you know, to fly and fight. You remember, I described the sign on the Chief of Staff's office: the mission of the Air Force was to fly and fight, and don't you ever forget it. (both laugh) Well, I never forgot it.

DM:

After July of '53, the next mission—I assume that the next mission you flew was in Vietnam. Is that—

KH:

Next combat mission.

DM:

Combat mission, yes.

KH:

Well, it was not in Vietnam.

DM:

It wasn't?

KH:

I like to make it clear. It was over North Vietnam where I flew. That was operation Rolling Thunder, and that was an air war against the infrastructure of North Vietnam. The war in the south was where the Marines and the Army and the ground forces were. And they had their own air power station in South Vietnam. We were stationed in Thailand.

DM:

Totally different kind of operation.

KH:

Yes.

DM:

Okay. And when did you fly your first mission over North Vietnam?

KH:

It was late November of 1950—1966.

DM:

Okay. So over more than thirteen years went by between combat missions over Korea and combat missions over North Vietnam.

KH:

Mm-hm.

DM:

And what did you do in the meantime? Just in general terms.

KH:

Okay. I stayed at Nellis and I got to be one of those really highly experienced guys. You know, I'd been around for three or four years, well, at that point in time.

DM:

You were one of the older fellas then, huh? The experienced fellas.

KH:

And I had really—I got—I was able to get in the—I'd flown the F-100 in its early stages as a

pilot just out of Boots Blesse's F-86 squadron. And when I'd become an instructor at a fighter weapons school. And, you know, the Navy beat the Air Force. They came out with their movie suggesting that they were the creators of the school—like the fighter weapons school. Well, the Navy and Marines—from El Toro, California—had some swept—primarily the Marines—had swept wing aircraft. And we'd arranged for them to come up and meet us over Hoover Dam right there at Lake Mead—that's a nice landmark—and we'd have a dogfight, be on the same frequency. And we whooped them all the time. They learned how to fight. We knew we'd done it, and they'd never had that kind of environment. They were reconnaissance aircraft in Korea.

DM:

They were protecting the fleet, I guess. Is that—?

KH:

Yeah, and keeping carriers alive.

DM:

Right, interesting.

KH:

So they learned their tactics and everything from the Air Force, and the fighter weapons school developed them. And while I was there, I—we got a new pilot in, Bob Fitzgerald. And somehow we became friends right away, and he had—he asked me to come over and help him unpack. And I was helping him unpack his footlockers and everything. He was single. And found out that he'd been the member of an acrobatic team in the T-6 aircraft. "Well, what did you do?" "Well, we did lots of maneuvers. We'd do snap rolls in formation." And that's a very violent, fast roll where you pull the stick back and put the rudder all the way in, and the air planes *Bam* and it's on the—you'd make a roll. But, of course, it's a—hopefully controllable so you don't collide, but it—

DM:

Was it a one-eighty roll?

KH:

No. It's a three-sixty.

DM:

Oh, wow. It's a complete—

KH:

You can stop it whenever you want to. Just push the stick forward and get the rudder back. And

it was time for me. It'd been there—it was 1957—it was time for me to do something else, and I had a friend that was on the Thunderbirds who had asked me to try out for the Thunderbirds. And I'd have to have some competition, so they'd selected Cecil Lafevers [?]. I knew I could beat him. I thought, Well I could do that. But I didn't want to be away from home with young kids—I believe I mentioned this before—half the time, which was about the requirement. And then Boots Blesse came to you. He said, "Ken." I guess he was my sponsor, kind of, if you have a sponsor. He was my first sponsor. He liked me well enough and what I was doing to try to help me do more. And he said, "They've asked me to go to the Air Force Academy and set up a leadership department," and said, "I really don't want to do that right now. Why don't you go for me?" And so they were expecting an experienced squadron commander, and I showed up as an experienced fighter pilot. And that was my next career after, in 1957, I arrived the month of March. So I became an original—a member of the original faculty of the Air Force Academy which had just started in 1955 while Eisenhower was president.

DM:

Is that right? I'll be. Okay.

KH:

And so I—The people had been there a while were all busy—we didn't have textbooks. We didn't take ROTC books. They were not comprehensive enough for what we were doing. We wrote our own lesson plans, selected our own reading material, and got in the classroom and taught it.

DM:

That's an incredible amount of preparation.

KH:

And then, not only that, but we'd have more classes than naturally we could teach. And we'd borrow people. We were in the commandant—I worked in the commandant of cadets section. And we'd get people from the academic side of the house to come over, and we'd teach them the lesson and give them a lesson plan. And they'd get in the classroom and do a very good job.

DM:

Okay. But were you in the classroom some, also teaching, or just preparing them to—?

KH:

Yeah, I was in the classroom all the time.

DM:

I see, now was—

KH:

—for about three years there.

DM:

Was this originally situated at Colorado Springs?

KH:

No, it was—we were at Denver.

DM:

Denver, okay.

KH:

At Lowry Air Base, and—using those old World War II barracks. The cadets lived in them. Things were developing, you know, the uniforms for the cadets hadn't even been designed, that they wear today. And we had—the first class didn't graduate until 1959, so I taught all those classes. Our—the commandant of cadets had various organizations, and we were military studies. That was our title. And we had a navy officer. We had an R-double A-F officer—Aussie—and a Brit RAF officer, and a good cross section of people. Quite a few fighter pilots like myself, Alex Butterfield, who I still admire so much. He's the guy, after Watergate, who went before Sam Ervin who was holding the hearings about Watergate and revealed that there had been a tape machine that taped everything that was happening in the White House in certain areas. And I'd been over there to the White House on one occasion and visited with him. And it was all set up in his room—right in the corner. And he explained it to me, but that was when the White—the people working for Nixon were trying to figure out, how do we explain this. How do we break the news? How do we let it out? And there are only about—I was reading a little article on him recently. There are only about seven people who knew about that recording machine, and since I was with the chairman of the joint chiefs that day, he gave me whatever information I wanted. (both laugh) And I asked him if he had any jobs. “Oh, yeah, but I don't think you'd like them.” “Why not?” “Well, they're down in the basement.” “What's down in the basement?” “Well, that's where all the bad guys work that are giving the Democrats hell. They're the guys that are involved in Watergate.” “No thank you. Who else is down there?” “Well, Henry Kissinger's there. He's right down that stairway there. He's a floor above them.” (both laugh)

DM:

That was Siberia down there—is that what that was?

KH:

I guess so—you know, being on the top floor was where you were supposed to be.

DM:

I guess so. (both laugh)

KH:

If you wanted—you wanted to be on the same floor with the president, so he's got to brief—he briefs the president every day. Never told me what he briefs him, about that. I didn't need to know.

DM:

Well, tell me more about the Air Force Academy? When did it move over to Colorado Springs? Was that after you were there?

KH

Yeah. They were building the Air Force Academy at the time, and after a year, I—well, I developed courses for the Department of Leadership, and they asked me if I wanted to go get a master's in Psychology of Leadership or something of that nature. And I didn't want to go back to school at that time, so I did—I taught a wide range of other courses that people in our military studies department had developed. I was in the classroom teaching space systems, support activities—

DM:

Can you explain those to me, space systems and support activities? What do you mean?

KH:

Well, you know, we just—Sputnik was just launched while we were there—the Air Force Academy, and we had Dave Mullaney who had a missile badge. He was very knowledgeable—as knowledgeable as anyone on our missile systems. So we taught the capabilities and uses of the missiles from the Atlas and on up, and of course, to get prepared for that there was a factory—Martin Aerospace had a factory up in Denver where they were building the missiles. They were fired by red fuming nitric acid, and they lightened the aluminum or metal panels. They had a way of doing that so that they could do it chemically, and they'd dip those down in a big trough of acid, and it would eat where they had done the right thing to make it eat. And it would leave the membranes along which were structural strength.

DM:

I see. This was to make the rocket lighter.

KH:

Yes, to make it lighter. And we went out to California—my immediate boss and I and watched the firing of missiles, looked at them, and—oh gosh. They weren't into—into solid fuel at this

point in time, and six missile engines, maybe this size are ringed around with millions of pounds of thrust. Anyway, we prepared ourselves to teach. Plus we learned everything that Dave Mullaney could show us, and he had handbooks. So we had some real experiences.

DM:

You had kind of an inside view as NASA developed and the space program developed. You kind of knew what was going on out there.

KH:

Well, now these are just, you know—they're not anything but just actual things that happened. My immediate—immediate boss, Louis Churchville, asked if I would like to try out for the space program. And this was when John Glenn was making the low altitude orbits and landing in the ocean and that kind of thing.

DM:

Early Mercury Program?

KH:

About two hundred thousand—maybe two hundred miles or less up there beyond the ionosphere. Anyway.

DM:

Early sixties. Early Mercury Program, sounds like.

KH:

Yeah. I think so.

DM:

Okay—'62, '63, somewhere in there.

KH:

Yeah, I hadn't thought of that name.

DM:

So you were interested in participating in the space program as a—

KH:

No, I was asked if I wanted to go try out, and I had friends that did that were on the track team at West Point with me: Ed White, Buzz Aldrin—my company commander at West Point, Frank Forman, was the first one to circle the moon. Buzz was the second one to step on the moon.

DM:

White died in Apollo 1, didn't he?

KH:

He did, so anyway, it was a real offer to go out and try out with those guys that I knew, but I didn't accept it. I said, "I think I want to have—I've got time for another fighter assignment," and that was my objective. So then—so I was talking about preparing for the classroom, really. And the ex—courses that we—had been written. We had a course on strategic air command. Well, I'd never been around strategic air command, so—and they had an alert systems set up, and they had B-47s, and things like that, deployed around the world. Anyway, I asked if I couldn't—I said I'd like to go over somewhere and look at one of those systems, so I got a flight on a B-47 over to England—around Greenham Common just north of Wales and visited the psych unit, and it wasn't necessary that I go in the alert facility because this was a nuclear weapons kind of alert facility. But there wasn't a seat for me in the airplane—in the B-47, so I just put a parachute down there and that was my bed.

DM:

Is that right?

KH:

I could see way up out of the cockpit.

DM:

It's a big plane.

KH:

—but they'd let me come up in the cockpit and look out. And I witnessed air refuelings and—did we talk about a JC maneuver?

DM:

I think you talked more with Andy about some of these things, so tell me if you don't mind. I don't want to—

KH:

Yeah, okay. Well, anyway.

DM:

—I don't want to overlap too much, but I'd like to hear it.

KH:

But anyway, this was a B-47 pilot. They called him dad, I forget it, dad low or something that. He was an older pilot from World War II kind of, and he got into a JC maneuver while he was refueling on the tanker. That's an oscillation where your controls are a little out of sync with where you want to go. It's dangerous. But, came back from that and you know, anything it took to prepare yourself, and then to give you some experience in what you're going to teach, was available, just mention it.

DM:

Right. You were getting a broad education here. I mean—

KH:

Well, they—you know, I'd been teaching people to fly. And you get in the briefing room before every flight and give a presentation in detail, and—oh, one of my funny bosses from down around Dallas in the fighter weapons school, when he found out I was going to the Air Force Academy, "Well, Ken needs to learn how to talk." (both laugh) So I went up there to learn how to talk, and it didn't take long.

DM:

By the way, what were some of the other courses you taught? You did space systems.

KH:

Well, I wrote a course that I—was really a winner called Aerospace Power in Modern War, and it—we discussed general war and limited war and how the definitions were and who coined the definitions, what his name was—Air Chief Marshall So-and-so in England. We eventually got one of those guys son's was an exchange student. You know, I still have all those textbooks. I kept those.

DM:

Did you keep your notes? Did you have lecture notes and course materials and things like that?

KH:

Oh, yeah. Lesson plans. I have a lesson plan specifically of aerospace power in modern war. It started out as air power and then after Sputnik it became aerospace power, and I did a lot of reading in preparation for that. Henry Kissinger had a book that helped me a great deal in preparing the course. Limited war had its own definition as a war limited in some aspect either politically or weapons-wise or scope, so that the enemy knew—it was focused. And we knew who we were fighting; they knew who they were fighting, whereas the general war was just unfolded/

DM:

Right. There's more—

KH:

We all know how World War II was. That was certainly a general war.

DM:

Well, this topic would certainly loom up after Korea, it seems like, when there's discussion—like we talked about last time between McArthur and Truman, the controversy over how limited—limited or not.

KH:

Oh, that was a fantastic assignment, and they had F-86s and F-80s for us to fly. That was an inducement to come. You get to maintain your currency in your aircraft.

DM:

What is it like for somebody as highly trained as you were as a combat pilot to not be in combat? I mean, was that difficult for you—to say I know how to do this. I have done this, but right now I'm not doing it.

KH:

No. It wasn't a problem. No, we were looking—a lot of us were looking for career growth opportunities, and I was very fortunate—and a lot of other people were, too. I just went, I was one of many.

DM:

Well, being in on the beginning of the Air Force Academy is an incredible thing, and I hope that you remember, when you're collecting materials—copies of things that might go to the southwest collection—that those instructional notes you have would also be valuable in the historical archive. That's important material especially since it's ground level.

KH:

Yeah. And then—this is in the archives at the Air Force Academy Library.

DM:

Good. I'm glad you mentioned that because anyone listening to this interview needs to know where they can find materials, and, of course, that's a logical place. That's the logical place for those materials.

KH:

Well, I know that particular course is in there, and it wasn't singled out or—I'm sure it was a broad based effort.

DM:

By the way, in all this process of learning—beyond what you had already learned in pilot training and your own experiences in Korea and then at the Air Force Academy—were you learning more about other types of aircraft? For example, bombers. Did you have any interest in the capabilities of bombers—B-47, B-52? Can you give kind of—?

KH:

Well, yes.

DM:

Can you give an assessment? What do you think about the different bomber aircraft that were coming along at that time?

KH:

Well, the Minuteman was coming along too, and most of the Air Force being—Air Force airplanes being built at a nuclear weapons delivery capability, and they had a nuclear weapons delivery mission. And that included the fighters. They were near enough to the areas of likely combat—not just Europe but the Far East as well. China had developed a nuclear weapon way back—way back there. You never hear anything about that, but they've been nuclear equipped for a long time. But, yes. And so we had a unified programming of where our nuclear weapons were going, and we were—I was in the Pacific—in the Pacific Air Force area out of Honolulu, and they were with CINPAC fleet, the Navy, and they had a CINPAC, Commander in Chief of the Pacific. So we couldn't do any planning on a strategic level without coordinating it, so we went back up and worked with the Strategic Air Command programmers that were, quote, laying the force and integrated our capability in so that we got about a 95 percent probability of damage on all the particular strategic targets. And we were hitting strategic targets—we were planning to. I don't know what would be there of the target because the Minutemen were supposed to be there in thirty minutes. So I thought, I'm sure glad we never saw—had to see that scene. I don't think many of us would come back.

DM:

Right. What were some of the most important strategic targets? Can you tell? Can you talk about that, or is that classified?

KH:

Oh. Let me just talk in general terms not in any specifics. You had two kinds of programs. You

could have a counter-nation target—program, maybe, or a counter-force program, and then you look at what makes a—well, what is a strategic target. In North Vietnam, when we were doing that one, that's what we were hitting: strategic targets with bombers, fighter bombers. And they included steel mills, oil refineries, railroad critical areas, ammunition, airfields. There was a row targeted civilian population things. It's just—you could pick them out, what's vital to making this country run and what will shut it down? Cut its line of communications—that was very important. They were getting supplies from Russia into Hai Phong Harbor on ships, by railway from China—northeast, northwest railway.

DM:

Therefore, you take out that artery.

KH:

And you take that out. That's a very critical thing. Keep them building bridges all the time. Take them out as they finish them, and—

DM:

Paralyze—

KH:

—attract locomotives.

DM:

Paralyze the infrastructure where they just can't function.

KH:

Yes. They can't get their supplies. They can't build their things that they need to build.

DM:

So communication centers, also.

KH:

Communications are very important. Command and control centers.

DM:

How—speaking only of North Vietnam, how many of these strategic spots might there be? It sounds like there could be a hundred or so, I mean—

KH:

Well, doggone it. Let's see. I'm just going to make a phone call, here.

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DM:

Do you want me to pause it a second here?

KH:

I'm just going to—I'm going to call Gary Willard. He did the targeting over North Vietnam.

DM:

Okay.

KH:

Ask him how many targets there were. There were eighty something I think.

DM:

Oh, well

KH:

He's down in Fort Walton, Florida. Let's see, I—

DM:

Can I just leave that running, or do you want me to shut it off a minute?

KH:

Yeah, you can shut it off.

Pause in Recording

DM:

So, probably, you don't have the exact figure yet, but probably eighty-some odd targets—strategic targets in North Vietnam. I assume they're prioritized somehow. You go after certain targets first and then come back, and there're secondary targets—or how would that work?

KH:

Well, you had to write them down. I don't remember whether they were alphabetical or what. My knowledge is based on this: I did targeting for PACAP during the time that I was there, and the Turner-Joy incident had occurred out in Bay of Tonkin—Gulf of Tonkin. And things were getting hostile, and we were positioning and planning for the war against Vietnam. And J5—that's long range plans—I handled the general war plans, and I was in J3 at Headquarters PACAP. And they sent me over to J5—and the individual there that had the task to do—get—pull this together for—from the planners over there, asked me if I was asked to join him in developing a target list. Are we—?

DM:

Mm-hm. We're recording.

KH:

Anyway, and he told me kind of generally what we were going to do, and it was later called Rolling Thunder. We were going to try to let those people know that we're serious, and things were going to get pretty tough. And so we'll start off this way, and we'll escalate, and hopefully they'll fold, and we won't have to go in and occupy or anything—like—well I'm not sure that that's a correct way to describe it, but that's the way I'm thinking of it. And, well, "How's it going to start off?" "Well, we're going to send some airplanes over Hanoi and let them do sonic booms—just harass them. And—

DM:

To let them know that—

KH:

I looked at the task and I said, "Hey, I don't want to do this." I didn't think it—that would be a—sonic booms would have a great effect on the North Vietnamese. And anyway, Gary Willard was handling the conventional weapons stuff anyway in J3, so they said to Gary, "You go over there and help." And he did. And he was instrumental—he and intelligence there at PACAP. And everybody got [inaudible]. His target list eventually had to be approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that means all the services are pulled together, and the chairman of the JCS, who talks to the president or whoever high official he wants to talk to. And it got approval through the National Security Council at the White House, and that's what we did. And Lyndon Johnson was the president, and Robert McNamara was the secretary of defense. He—so the targets were in the eighties as best I recall, and Gary will let me know. I can let you know when I hear from him.

DM:

That's really interesting. Tell me your take on Robert McNamara if you don't mind. And if you don't mind, we'll throw a few names out like that just to see if you have an opinion on them—

KH:

Okay.

DM:

—positive or negative—whatever you, you know—so Robert McNamara. Can you just tell me what you know about him and what your opinion was of his—?

KH:

Well, the things that he did were not necessarily things that were looked on with great admiration

by the people out in the field who had the mission to do it, and they established rules of engagement all based on political factors, and we weren't to bother the Russians if they had ships in the port, and we were to limit our actions, and these were the only targets we could hit. There might be a lucrative target before you get to the one you're assigned to to hit. You can't hit it as because they haven't said you can hit it—they meaning the secretary of defense and Lyndon Johnson. They literally—and Lyndon came out to our air base. I was back on leave, and I remember Lyndon drank a really fine bourbon. And our—(laughs) they had to get some of it out there in our liquor store before he arrived, and we had some—there was some left after he left—after he went home. And it was sure—well I actually got a bottle of that. (both laugh) It was the best I ever had. I wish I could remember the name of it.

DM:

He knew his bourbon. (laughs)

KH:

And we thought of it as the hip pocket war. There was no—it was fought out of our hip pocket and caused economic problems, and that's—we don't remember history too well.

DM:

Right. So you—

KH:

Where are we now? (laughs)

DM:

So you can—the military can do its strategic planning, but it may be foiled by—the politics involved.

KH:

Just like McArthur's plane was foiled.

DM:

Exactly. Yeah.

KH:

So you got to—it is a political—a big political thing. Things could be generalized in World War II, but with all the possibilities and capabilities of nations that can hit us with nuclear weapons and take us out and we take them out and it's all over, you know, the political factors were extremely important. Politically they didn't want to—that wasn't on the list. Those ships were not on that JCS target list, but they were shooting at the flight one of my acquaintances was in—

and maybe we discussed that, and he sent two airplanes down to return the fire and wound up being court marshalled.

DM:
Golly.

KH:
The Chief of Staff of the Air Force came out to the air base where he was stationed, checked into the VOQ until he found out what happened. Somehow—that's really attention, you know. Who do you suppose told him to do that?

DM:
Mm-hm. Yes. Well, that's just—that's difficult, you know, to have military objectives and to not—to be concerned about pursuing those objectives because of politics. That would be a difficult life to live.

KH:
Well—

DM:
—a role to play.

KH:
—well, it was a very—it took a long time to get down to air fields, and when I first arrived over there on my duty—they weren't available to hit. And before it was over we were bombing air fields with MiG-21s and 20—19s and what-have-y'all.

DM:
Okay. I'm going to throw out another name, and get you to comment if you wish—because we were talking about strategic air command; we were talking about nuclear capabilities. How about Curtis LeMay? Curtis LeMay, you know—

KH:
Oh, I have the greatest admiration for him.

DM:
Okay. Can you tell me about him and why—what you admire?

KH:
Well, he was a thinker and—a great strategic thinker. And, you know, I can't pin down the days

of his service up there. Our nuclear capability and war plans were growing rapidly when Eisenhower was president to—before he was out of the office, which was right before the Air Force Academy—or right before the Air Force Academy was built, he was in the hospital up at—with his heart problem in Denver.

DM:

Oh, is that right? Okay.

KH:

Yeah. And one of our—who's the best vascular surgeon in Lubbock?

DM:

I don't know.

KH:

Well anyway, he was in the military, and he was assigned to look after Eisenhower. He's from Sudan, Texas. And he's retired. He did—he was running Covenant Hospital there, getting them out of one of the many holes they seem to fall into. (both laugh)

DM:

Was he involved with Curtis LeMay somewhere along the way, too?

KH:

(laughs) No I'm talking about the conceptional period that LeMay was involved in, and he developed the—he and his people. And he was intimately involved in building up the Strategic Air Command and developing the plan—the strategic plan—that would result in us being able to defend ourselves to the ultimate.

DM:

Did you ever get to meet him, by the way?

KH:

I met him in a receiving line when he came out, before he retired, to PACAP, and that's—picture over there. There was a commander's conference called, and I was just a captain, and—at that time—I might've been a major. And I was invited to come up because some of the wing commanders had come to this meeting; some of the wing commanders—one of them was taking exception to a plan that I'd developed. And I can say I because I was the only one that had the information. It was in my safe over here. So eventually we—Henry Kissinger was instrumental in this strategy as well, and eventually we got to the point where we realized—we felt that we

were dealing with rational people in Russia, although the big problem was their deeds never matched their words. And it's still the case. They're Machiavellian.

DM:

You never know what you're dealing with in—

KH:

You're dealing with liars.

DM:

Yeah. Uh-huh. You never know.

KH:

At which are justified by the national security responsibilities for the country are, quote, justified. I don't know who the judge is about that, but I think I know—it's God, family, country, isn't it? (both laugh)

DM:

Didn't LeMay have a kind of a pet project—a bomber? It was after B-52, it seems like. He was trying to get funding for that. He might have gotten—maybe a little contention between him and McNamara? I'm trying to remember the story, and I may have it wrong. Do you know what I'm talking about? I can't remember what bomber that would have been that was on the—

KH:

I don't know. Really—the B-47, B-52 were the main forces we had.

DM:

This was one in the works. It was a plan that didn't quite come to. I think it was a LeMay plan.

KH:

Was it a flying wing aircraft or something?

DM:

I wish I remembered. I'm sorry.

KH:

I'm—I'd—I can't even guess.

DM:

I'll try to find out and ask you another time. How about that?

KH:
Okay.

DM:
How about—let's see. I'm trying to tiptoe around a little bit here what Andy has already covered because I don't want to make you talk about a lot of things you've already talked about and we already have recorded. But tell me when—what years you were at the Pentagon.

KH:
I was at the Pentagon from 1970 till 1972—and had a wonderful project going. There's lots of things. I was supposed to be the expert on Japan with a backup on Korea, and it was fascinating work. I'd just finished the National War College and was prepared as anybody could get to get in there and work the kind of political military problems that I had to work, and that involved all the agencies in Washington: from the White House to the CIA to Commerce to, you know—you name the secretaries of so-and-so that run all these offices. So—and then it was fascinating, and also—my job was to develop JCS plans and get the agreement of the services. And so they called me a planner because of that, and the Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Army sent their—when I got my stuff together, we'd all meet—just the five of us—in a room. And my job was to get agreement between the services. (laughs)

DM:
Oh, that sounds tough. (laughs)

KH:
And, I believe I mentioned, when I couldn't get—I was having difficulty with the—our policy towards Japan paper and with the services—some men wanting to do things that didn't seem reasonable to me. And so I went down to the chairman's office and talked to his executive officer, and I told him I was having difficulties getting agreement and cooperation out of the services. And he said, "Okay." And then I got a phone call, and he says—it was in the afternoon—and he said, "Tomorrow morning at six, I want you to go down to the National Military Command Center and brief the chiefs and the chairman, and make sure you have the cooperation you have—you need." (both laugh) It's this colonel. He didn't—he'd lost his flying capability, and we called him a slick-wing Colonel. You get a star on there at some point and then you get a wreath around the star as your time increases. But he was just a smart-as-hell person, and he went on—oh, Scowcroft. Ever heard that name?

DM:
I might have it just is not popping up.

KH:

Well he went on over and was a national security advisor at the White House, but he was just a colonel. And everybody thought, Hey, he's down in dead end territory. But we walked in—walked up to the National Military Command Center—me following him. And I stood in the door like this, and the National Military Command Center's here. And he waved me on, "Gentleman. Colonel Hite." Gosh, the adrenaline. Yeah, the adrenaline really flowed.

DM:

Oh, I imagine. (laughs)

KH:

I was ready to breathe. (both laugh)

DM:

Wow. That's something to take on.

KH:

And, anyway, I addressed the chairman—not the Chiefs. He was my boss and told him that I needed more cooperation out of the services to get this plan completed, and we hit some roadblocks, like I need the cooperation of the services. Well, all of the Chiefs were sitting there. And Admiral Moore said a few things. And General Ryan was the air force chief of staff, and everybody—and suddenly the atmosphere changed in the planning room, and we got it done. And it went across, and it became national security policy. Went through the National Security Council, and all the leapfrogs went from—the chairman signed it. Nothing was changed. And it was sent out to SecDef and then over to the White House—the National Security Council, and it was approved and became our policy.

DM:

Wow, that's great.

KH:

That's the way it was working then, and it's been reorganized. And that's declassified. (laughs)

DM:

Wow. What was the gist of this plan? Can you talk about that?

KH:

I can't talk about it, necessarily. It's a diplomatic thing. It's a matter of our national security—it resulted in a national security treaty with Japan and Taiwan before Jimmy Carter came along. (laughs)

DM:

Well, so here you were. You were in Washington. You were one of the resident—or maybe the resident—military expert on Japan and Korea—or East Asia.

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

Were you called in to different agencies as a consultant? Like, if some Washington agency needed some information, were you called in?

KH:

Oh, no. No, I wasn't the PR business. The generals took care of that—admirals. But I was assigned another—a task. It involved the White House. And Richard Nixon had met with Prime Minister Satō in Japan, and he was visiting Japan, and the chairman of the JCS was going along. He needed a talking paper, and I wrote the talking paper for him. I checked with his exec, and he did just—he said, “You really got a good guy to work for you. He did just what you asked him to do.” (laughs) Anyway, it wasn't—that was my—not a true statement, but—he wasn't working for me. (both laugh) I was working for him. He just—he accepted what I sent to him. But in the process there was discussion about American forces and facilities and what we needed now and what we need in the future. Anyway, we had one of the—the military had control of one of the best golf courses in the Tokyo area, and Nixon gave that to him right off the bat. And then he agreed to—the discussion was about Okinawa, which was the hardest battle we fought in the Pacific. It was a discussion about it and the premise that Japan had residual sovereignty over the island yet we were running it with an army general officer—and we had since the World War II was over. And it was under military control when I was out there with fighters, but it was going to revert to Okinawa sovereignty. That was the agreement, and so then we had to have an organization. I was the one. I was the JCS point man, and we had to start working with the State Department. And I had meetings over there with them and worked with them. I had contacts in all the necessary agencies that I could call up and—

DM:

What was your personal take on it? Was Okinawa ready to go to its own sovereignty out of military control?

KH:

Sure. I think it was. I'd lived there, and I knew what it was like. And we lived there for two years with family, there. But we did everything on a quid pro quo basis. We had a vice admiral, three star—with three stars. The vice admiral has three—that was our representative in Tokyo, and he

took the whole floor of the nicest hotel—the top floor—as his quarters and operating area. And—all very impressive, so he could deal with high level Japanese people and show the prestige of America. In the meantime, we were developing negotiating positions and decided it would be—we'd do everything on a quid pro quo basis. We need—we wanted to keep Yokota Air Base here in Japan, and—but we don't have enough barracks. We don't have enough this, that, and the other. So we trade that, and they build us facilities in return. They wanted Naha Air Base in Okinawa—not Air Base—Naha. Well, it was Naha Air Base, but it was originally a civilian airport from the island on the south end. And they wanted to take control of that, and we obtained something in return for everything we returned to them in a value as advantageous to us as we could get in the negotiations. And we developed negotiating positions back where I was, and the Japanese thought Admiral Curtis was doing all this.

DM:

Oh, yeah. (both laugh)

KH:

And—so I made a few trips out there to—in Japanese—in our embassy towards Japan in Tokyo and dealt with some of those people. I had a counterpart, Stub Warfel [?] who was a colonel, and I just contacted him. And I never had to talk to the State Department guys out there. Washington would do that. And, if we got a political hang-up, I'd go there and sit down with their guys that are doing the planning for the ambassadors. You know, we thought we were running things, but we needed—

DM:

But you needed permissions.

KH:

And then there was a treaty and reversion of Japanese sovereignty towards Japan—had a big ceremony at the White House—at the State Department with the ambassador, and the high official from Japan signed the treaty. So we have mutual defense treaties, also. That's what I was really talking about a while ago, strategically. We put the nuclear umbrella over areas in the Pacific which is—puts us in a particular bind and political situation as Japan starts to develop more and assert their authority in Senkaku Islands and the oil—they figured that their rights extend 200 miles from the shoreline out there. Nobody else agrees, but they already had one concentration with Taiwan, a shooting one way back there when F-86s were still being flown.

DM:

It's interesting, the opportunities you had out there to just learn. Learn the politics of what was going on, but just probably the culture as well. Was there a case of culture shock? Did you find out things about Japanese culture that were very unusual to you that still stand out in your mind?

The reason I ask this is when the first Americans went out and tried to open trade with Japan in the 1800s, there was a great amount of culture shock, and I wonder if that was the case after World War II, after Korea.

KH:

No. They were so meek that in a meeting, if state department people were present, they had—we had to encourage them to assert themselves in order to help them learn to be effective. I mean, they were—they were meek. So was Korea. So I look back on Korea—you've been there recently—and I—last time I saw it it was beautiful city. It's just a—one of the more rewarding things that goes with service. I was ready to be promoted, but it's God, family, country. My family wasn't ready to go—for me to go where I needed to go, and do the things I needed to do, and take them with me. They were all—they were either junior high or high school student or first year college. And I had—that had been my objective since I graduated from West Point and I was there, but didn't happen. But it was wonderful experience.

DM:

I want to talk to you a little more about that, but I'm going to turn the recorder off now.

KH:

Okay.

DM:

Unless there's anything you want to add related to what we talked about today.

KH:

No, I think we can look at pride the way every country we've ever taken over and occupied has grown and developed and become friends and a part of the free world.

DM:

Right. There has been—

KH:

That's the way it happened.

DM:

It's a positive thing. Well, one of the things I want to talk to you—I'll go ahead and mention it while this is running for a minute—when we went to Japan and spent some time in Japan, we were so impressed by how friendly people were and obliging people were and willing to help us because we were lost American tourists trying to find this place and that place, and people were more than happy to take their time and call over their friends who spoke a little English and just

did everything they could to help us out. We were surprised because we get crossed messages here from people who really don't know—who've never been—but they have preconceptions. So we didn't know that there would be this level of friendliness. That's what we experienced in our brief time there.

KH:

And so many of them speak English.

DM:

And we were surprised that we found people that spoke English or people that would find somebody else who spoke English. They would go—and in China, too, for that matter. But I'll go ahead and turn this off.

KH:

Okay.

End of Recording

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