

**Oral History Interview of
Ken Hite**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
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Lubbock, Texas**

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Ken Hite. Hite discusses his experiences as a fighter pilot for the United States Army Air Corps. Hite focuses on his training in this interview and the process of becoming a pilot. Hite also discusses his time in Korea and the combat missions he flew.

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David Marshall (DM):

The date is February 5, 2014. This is David Marshall interviewing Ken Hite at his home in Lubbock, Texas. And let's just—let's just start by talking about Korea. You were in the military beginning in 1947, as I recall. Is that correct?

Ken Hite (KH):

Well, I entered the United States Military Academy in 1947 and graduated in 1951, and by the time I graduated, the class of 1950 was already fighting over in Korea, and we had lost several over there—army buddies—over there already.

DM:

I'm curious to know if you had ever heard of Korea before you entered the military.

KH:

No.

DM:

Okay. Not very well known to Americans, was it?

KH:

Well, no.

DM:

But then when did you first hear about it? You must have been at the—you were at the military academy when you heard about this, I guess.

KH:

Well, yes. That's when I heard about it, and I had to find out where it was. And, of course, the war was going on and we heard about it big time.

DM:

Do you remember your very first recollection when you heard someone say, "Korea. Something happened in Korea"?

KH:

Well, I can't really pin it down, but I recall at the—our generals and men were very well at war. They made a landing at Incheon, which is just west of Seoul which is the capital—and they landed there, and the history of that battle, whatnot, all the way up to the [inaudible] MacArthur, and Truman—President Truman didn't see eye to eye. President Truman was—seemed to be—we understood, concerned about the actions that China, with all of its millions of people might

have because, certainly, they could put more people on the ground quickly and they were just across the border in Manchuria. And so—

DM:

You think the Incheon landing was the first you heard about this? Because North Korea invaded South Korea, UN forces came in, they were pushed back towards Pusan, and then this big counter—

KH:

At Pusan, yes.

DM:

And then this big—

KH:

Down on the southern tip.

DM:

Down in the southeast, and then this big Incheon landing that MacArthur led—was that the first thing that you think Americans pretty much heard about, was the—was the entrance of the UN into this or the Incheon landing? I mean, that was a big thing, was a big battle.

KH:

Well, I wasn't out with the American people at that time, but I know that it was a big event when MacArthur was fired. And he just—Americans had lost a lot of lives to get up to the Yalu River, and that's where he was. It was winter, and it really was cold and damp.

DM:

Not a good time to have to go into retreat from—in front of a Chinese invading army.

KH:

No.

DM:

Well, you entered the military in '47, and, at that time, World War Two was two years over. Was it a general impression at the time—especially for people at the academy—that things had been settled for a while? That peace would continue? I'm just wondering how big a surprise this was, that all of a sudden, only five years after World War II, we're back in another war. Was that kind of shocking that suddenly after everything was finished—victory in World War II—then things get turned around?

KH:

No. I didn't—I thought it was business as usual. I was studying military history, and—starting with way back there—spent a lot of time on Napoleon for some reason.

DM:

Mm-hm. It's alright. So your insight into the military history told you that things—these things happen. They don't hold together.

KH:

Yeah, that's it.

DM:

Because, you know, the idea after World War I was it was the war to end all wars, and things would be at peace for—for some time, things were settled. Countries were redesigned, and peace would come; and then that kind of fell apart.

KH:

Well, and Russia was just right up there—Vladivostok—the submarine place, and all of that, so it was really the confluence of power of Russia, China, and the U.S.A, and we were—we had just had it out with Japan, and now they were—and written their constitution, and they were very subservient and no longer aggressive.

DM:

You know, the way you put it there, it makes me—it makes a person envision—this was a very vulnerable location. I mean, you do. You have China right here. You have Russia right here. You have Japan here, and the U.S. very much involved in that area. And Korea right in the middle.

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

What a touchy—it's kind of like a powder keg.

KH:

Well, and Korea had been occupied by Japan, and they were just neighbors, you know, geographically.

DM:

Right. Right. Which I believe is why Truman was so very touchy about Korea and North Korea taking over South Korea. It was so close to Japan and U.S. interests.

KH:

Yeah. That's exactly it.

DM:

So it's—yeah, it's—

KH:

That peninsula, as people have said, points towards Japan like a dagger.

DM:

Yeah. So, then—so you have this activity in Korea. You have the Incheon landing, and then the advance to the Yalu River, and then the Chinese invasion from the north. And then, of course, the—probably one of the most well-known aspects of the Korean War, or police action, or conflict—what would you call—?

KH:

Police action's the way I knew it.

DM:

Police action. Okay. Was the Truman-MacArthur controversy, you know—the question of limited war or all out victory.

KH:

It was the first limited war that I recall. I don't have a memory of the full history of the world, but it's the first that I'd heard of such a thing that was limited—well, let me listen to your questions.

DM:

Well, I was just going to ask if—were you lined up on that? Were you more supportive of the MacArthur perspective or more supportive of the Truman perspective?

KH:

Well, I was supportive of MacArthur, and it was—I thought it was a totally unnecessarily aggressive way to behave before—to treat the situation. I thought it could have been treated more diplomatically. But Truman was a great president, too, and I had great respect for him, and the fact that he chose to use the atomic bomb to save so many lives—American lives. And we knew he had the fortitude to do things, and he didn't mince words. It was just his way of doing things. And MacArthur was the ultimate military man, and I'm sure that he didn't sit silently. I imagine they probably had a pretty straightforward conversation.

DM:

Right. Do you think that most of the people at the military academy at West Point pretty much had the same perspective? Here's MacArthur. We know him to be a great commander. We believe in his idea of going for victory, and not limiting the warfare—or not limiting the effort, and—but we also respect Truman—this kind of back and forth in your mind? Do you think that most people there at West Point—?

KH

I think that's probably—

DM:

Saw it the same?

KH:

—a fair statement.

DM:

Okay. Well, looking back now, would you say that maybe we should have taken it farther when China invaded? We should have taken some kind of action against China? Does hindsight help at all in assessing the situation?

KH:

Well, let's see. Back in those days, China's population was around three hundred million people, and our total population was—here in the U.S.A.—was maybe what, a third or a little more of that? And you think of the way—the means of war that we had. You know, to take a whole territory, we had to put soldiers on the ground, and we didn't have all the weapons systems that we later had to cover and protect the troops. We had plenty of air power of the vintage that we had. We had the first operational air force jet fighter over there and some other propeller driven airplanes. We had allies. It was a U.N. operation before it was over, and the U.N. flag flew beside the United States flag at our air base. Within that small unit, we were—we had a fighter interceptor wing and squadrons. And the squadron that I was a member of had flights—four flights. It was a group of a dozen men, maybe.

DM:

Okay, well this is what I wanted to talk about next. After kind of getting the overall look at things, to look at exactly the air power situation in Korea, and specifically your role in that. But, now, as far as air power is concerned, did the U.S. have absolute overwhelming air power, or what was the opposition?

KH:

In numbers and types of aircraft, it was not overwhelming. It was very adequate, and we had plenty of resources to call on after World War II.

DM:

Were these already stockpiled in Japan, and—?

KH:

We had—it wasn't stockpiled. We established air bases throughout Japan, and—Yokota Air Base, Tachikawa, and up at Hokkaidō we had an air base up not far from Vladivostok and right adjacent to the Kuril Islands. So, no, we had plenty of air power. We had bombers down in Okinawa which was ours—it was such a fierce battle. We had a three star army general who acted as governor. And he wasn't the dictator, but he gave the Japanese that, "Hey, we're a strong country, and this island doesn't belong to you. It's belongs to us. We fought and died for it, and you guys jumped off the cliff."

DM:

Now, these runways that they had in Okinawa, could they—and the bombers—the bomber base there—could they—was Korea within range—within easy range?

KH:

Well, it was for certain types of aircraft. We used B-26s at night, and they were painted black, and they—Pusan was a good launching pad for them. They're far back from the Imjin River area and up there. They were—felt protected, at least. They only needed to look to the north. The North Koreans didn't seem to have much of a navy at that time, as I recall.

DM:

Pusan was comfortably back from the fighting. Incheon would not have been necessarily a good place because it could be overrun. Is that the logic, you think, in placing it at—building it at Pusan?

KH:

Well, the bombers have longer range, and there's no reason to get yourself up there where you have to deal with artillery from North Korea.

DM:

How about the fighters? Were most of the—was most of the air power based down at Pusan, or were there—?

KH:

No, that was solely, as I recall—well, it depends on what time of the war you are talking about, and my—most of my knowledge is based on when the DMZ was stabilized along the Imjin river north of Seoul. That's—those things I can speak to with specificity.

DM:

Yeah. Well, let's talk about that, then. When did you arrive in Korea?

KH:

I arrived over there in about December of 1952.

DM:

And you had graduated from the military academy the previous year, correct? In '51? Does that sound right?

KH:

Well, I graduated in June of '51.

DM:

June of '51.

KH:

So I'd had about six months—or rather, sixteen months of training. Flight school was a year, and then we went to combat training, and had plenty of gunnery ranges to practice on, targets—firing at airborne targets.

DM:

I want to talk a little more about this before we even get over to Korea again. Tell me a little bit more about your training? Where did you train? What—what did it involve?

KH:

Okay, right out of West Point we received our air base assignments, and we had a very generous two month leave before reporting in. And they had—didn't have enough air bases to do all the training, believe it or not, back here, so they had contracts with civilians. And they had a contract airfield down at Moultrie, Georgia, and that's where I did my first half of the training. They call it basic and advanced. And that was propeller driven, you know, soloing in a T-6 prop driven radial engine aircraft.

DM:

Had you flown before that, or had you—?

KH:

Oh, I'd had—yes, I got almost to the solo point flying out of Littlefield in a Piper Cub, but—no, I wasn't. A T-6, to me, was a huge thing, you know. My brother described it as, "Hey, the exhaust on that thing is big enough to stick your head up in." About size seven and eight, you know.

DM:

Was it a single prop?

KH:

It was a single prop, single engine.

DM:

Right, okay. But it seated how many? Two people?

KH:

It seated two people.

DM:

An instructor and a—

KH:

And it was a tandem seating arrangement.

DM:

Typically you were with an instructor starting out?

KH:

Yes. Well, yeah. I was so—I was with an instructor until he felt I was confident enough to solo, and—

DM:

Well, considering its size, was it—did it feel bigger, to you? Was the feel different from anything that you had flown before?

KH:

Well, yes it was, but it was comfortable and easy to adapt to. And it was fully acrobatic capable, and just a lot of fun to fly. You could do loops, rolls, and spins.

DM:

Did they teach you these things they wanted you to learn: loops, rolls, and spins, or—?

KH:

Oh, yes. I mean, right off the bat.

DM:

They wanted you to know how to maneuver, and they—

KH:

Well, yes. The main thing I think they wanted you to teach you how to recover from situations you might find yourself in, if you over-controlled it, as I know—we had team flying, later, and I was flying with a Belgian pilot who was an exchange pilot. And he wasn't one of the best pilots in the fight, but he wanted to go out and practice loops. So he practiced a loop, and his airspeed was right going in. But he flew the loop like an egg instead of like a globe, and that meant he ran out of airspeed on the top and spun out. And I'm a student in a team ride, and I'm in the backseat. And he just quit. He said, "You've got it." So I took the airplane and recovered it.

DM:

So he did this on purpose.

KH:

No, he didn't do it—

DM:

Oh, he didn't do it on purpose?

KH:

No, that was an accident.

DM:

Oh my goodness, but he quit.

KH:

Had he been solo, he might have done something.

DM:

What happened? Did he just kind of panic and he couldn't react to it?

KH:

You know, I didn't fly with him, but that one time, but we sat down at briefing table with each other every morning and maybe in the afternoon. And he was a very nice, personable guy; I think he was just—it must have happened to him before. My instructor told me to watch him closely, and I might have to do some flying.

DM:

It seems like something like that—a main thing would be you really had to have your cool. You had to keep your cool when something bad happened.

KH:

Well, fear is a fighter pilot's worst enemy. I mean, if you hadn't got that conquered, you don't become a fighter pilot.

DM:

By the way, was this first stage of training all for fighter pilots, or were you there with other pilots as well?

KH:

This—with this incident—particular instance—no. It's just he and I in the airplane. And I talked to him and asked him to pull it in, if we were going—a pilot can't really describe flying without another airplane to show you where it is. So the lack of an airplane, most pilots talk with their hands. (both laugh) So I try to be very careful about gestures, but that's got to be as we carry on this conversation. This can be an airplane just right quick.

DM:

That's fine. I get it. You can never convey it on the audio recording, but that's okay. We'll do the best we can. The egg as opposed to the—as the sphere, for example, was—or the circle. The egg as opposed to the circle was a good.

KH:

Yes. He just—he—he didn't have confidence in himself, and, you know—I don't know. He spoke good English, and there was no problem understanding—misunderstanding on his part. But this was just almost above his head. Being an allied pilot he got a little more special treatment than I—an American pilot might have got washed out and sent to do something else.

DM:

I'm sorry. What was his nationality, then?

KH:

They said he was Belgian.

DM:

A Belgian. Okay.

KH:

Belgic. I was stationed in Europe and that's what we learned to call them over there.

DM:

Right, okay. Well, how about you? Just speak frankly to me, and don't worry about trying to be modest or anything. Just tell me what was your personality like? Was it such that you could go in, and fly this plane, and maintain your cool pretty well without getting too rattled?

KH:

Yes.

DM:

Or did you sometimes get rattled and scared out of your wits?

KH:

No.

DM:

Okay. Is this where they find this out, in this first stage of flight training?

DM:

Well before they—before you solo—take off and fly it by yourself—you've been through all the situations instructors put you through, everything the airplane will do, and they've let you practice it with him in the backseat, you in the front seat. So you're prepared, and in this country, my experience of—we had the best instruction system and instructors of anyone in the world, and you were prepared, you know. When you get prepared, for example, it's a lot easier to get up on the podium and speak to 500 people, but if you hadn't done your homework, it can be terrorizing.

DM:

It sounds to me, and please correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds to me like in this stage of training the instructor had the responsibility to teach you the mechanics of it, but also to evaluate how you could handle it, maybe evaluate your personality to see if you can handle this kind of stress.

KH:

Well, sure, and—it—I never saw it as stressful.

DM:

That's the kind of person they're looking for. (laughs)

KH:

Well, and I just had a routine visit with my MD—my internal medicine doctor—yesterday, and he's a big kick. His dad was a navy pilot. He didn't go that way, so he got his doctor's degree and then became an MD. And we get along like old buddies in the hangar. But he said, "Well, you're a Type A personality. You can't be a fighter pilot if you're not a Type A personality." Well, not necessarily so. I've seen some seemingly shy, harmless people get in an airplane and turn into tigers, you know? You got to be a Type A when you get in that airplane, anyway.

DM:

Right. Their Type A comes out in them. (both laugh) You have to have confidence to be able to take this on.

KH:

Sure. You get it from your instructor and the training, realizing you can do it. You can do all those things the instructor showed you.

DM:

Have you known of any cases where there was a person who knew what to do mechanically, technically—they could handle a plane, but they didn't make it through the program just because they couldn't keep it together in their own mind?

KH:

Sure.

DM:

Okay. People washed out for that.

KH:

Sure.

DM:

And the only way to find out, I guess, is to put them in the air.

KH:

Yes. I might go back—digress to my Belgian friend. His name was Rahulst, and when we got on the ground, he thought that was a big kick—you know, to spin out and give it to me. And we got on the ground and he pulled a picture out of his billfold, and he had a jumping—maybe like an Aeronca Taylor craft or Piper Cub, those airplanes back that day, single engine props—and it was an airplane that was crashed up on its nose, and he laughed and said, “I did that.” (both laugh)

DM:

Makes you wonder if you want to ride with him anymore.

KH:

So, I mean, it—you’ve got to have a sense of humor. It’s a little bit like being in the OR if you’re a doctor. You—if you’ve ever been there—I’ve heard them relieve their stress with funny things, funny stories, funny remarks, and that also relaxes the patient.

DM:

Uh-huh. That’s a good point. So this first phase of training lasted how long? It was at Fort Moultrie, Georgia, you said, I believe. Moultrie, Georgia?

KH:

Yeah. Moultrie, Georgia, and it was—it lasted six months there. And we did everything that we could do and demonstrated it, had flight checks. You know, when the—our instructor thought we were ready, then he would put a flight check pilot in the backseat, and give us a grade.

DM:

Did they—did they intentionally throw situations at you—emergency or dangerous situations at you—

KH:

Oh, sure.

DM:

—to see how you would handle that?

KH:

Sure.

DM:

Can you give me an example?

KH:

You lose an engine, you're going to have a forced landing. So, sure. The instructor would pull the throttle back—after having briefed you and everything so you understand what's happening and what you've got to do, and also demonstrated to you, and—but he could pull the throttle back any time up there and say, "Okay, now, your engines dead. Where are you going to land?" And look around, and, "Well, I like that field over there." And then he can instruct from that. "Well, it's sod down there. Why not find some grass over here," and that sort of thing.

DM:

Okay. How interesting. While you're on the subject, what would you look for? Obviously not rugged, rough country—but grass instead of sod, for example.

KH:

Well, if I didn't find anything, I'd use my parachute—climb over the side—but if I found something, I'd like it to be very (laughs)—not like a golf course. I wouldn't like sand traps around there or big mounds. I'd like some level land with grass and—firm—and no water.

DM:

But not farmed field?

KH:

Well, not as I remember them after—when you're—in the spring you're preparing your land to plant, and it has no vegetation, and it has furrows, maybe—or even if it's been disked, it's still—it's soft. You want a firm surface. And the idea of landing on a highway was not—it's best not to do that.

DM:

Just because of the traffic on the highway?

KH:

Yeah, that really—

DM:

Did they say—did they ever encourage landing on water if water is calm?

KH:

No.

DM:

Okay, never. Try to avoid water.

KH:

Well, you could actually—we call that ditching. And you're going to have to give me a minute. You want to cut that off?

DM:

Sure, of course.

Pause in Recording

DM:

Did you come out of this first phase of training feeling competent?

KH:

Absolutely.

DM:

Comfortable?

KH:

Yes.

DM:

And looking back, after all that you went through afterward, all of the combat missions you flew—for example, the additional training and then the combat missions—was it good training? When you look back at that first phase of training, was it good preparation for the next step?

KH:

It was absolutely excellent, outstanding. I wouldn't have asked for anything better.

DM:

Okay. I wonder if World War Two helped in that because so much training went on in World War II.

KH:

Oh of course.

DM:

I mean, the program must have been excellent by the time—

KH:

It was. Yeah. And—well, we had—you know, my instructor had military background as a matter of fact, even though he was a civilian at the time.

DM:

By the way, this is a little off to the side, but while it's on my mind I want to ask you. When Army Air Corps became U.S. Air Force—

KH:

1947.

DM:

—were there people at that time, in '47, that said, “No, no, no, no. It needs to stay Army Air Corps,” or did most people say, “Okay, it's a separate—it needs to be a separate military division”?

KH:

Well—

DM:

Especially for—

KH:

I had—I heard no rumbles about that. My goodness, the Air Force did so very, very much in the Battle of Britain attacking Germany, and it wasn't really in consonance with the army tactics. The army needed close air support, but they didn't have to have the internal capability—organizational capability—to do that. And if they could talk with the commander and let him know what they needed, that's what they got.

DM:

I always kind of had this impression—as someone who was born fourteen years after the end of World War II, but still growing up in the shadow of World War Two. You know, we—I was born in '59 and we—we lived and breathed World War Two. That's what we knew about as kids. That's what we played.

KH:

Did—were any of your family members involved?

DM:

I had one uncle that was in the Army Air Corps right at the end of World War Two. And then my

father was—and uncles—other uncles were in the Korean War, but my dad was state-side. So—but anyway, we just grew up in that generation that knew about World War II, but we didn't experience it. But the impression was always, from our—from the mind of a child and still today—that the Air Force really came into its own and proved its essential nature in World War Two, and that that's why it was given—it became its own military unit, but—

KH:

Yes, I think it's a screw into it, and from World War One events and knowledge that was gained there over France and Germany.

DM:

Well, and then, kind of the—related to that—when you look at the Navy, the aircraft carrier became the big vessel—the essential vessel of the U.S. Navy, whereas, before World War Two—early World War Two—the battleship was the symbolic power. So that kind of shows the air power—the recognition that air power was so essential.

KH:

Sure. Well, and—of course, that air raid against Tokyo where they took sixteen B-25s off a aircraft carrier, the *USS Hornet*. You know, you need a mobile air base, too. I might add that I was in a meeting in Washington one time over at the White House and—I'd gone over with our Senior JC—Joint Chiefs of Staff and the chairman—and Henry Kissinger was chairing it, and all the undersecretaries of commerce and the CIA and all those people, treasury—were there. And one of—he had a few funnies, a few jokes, to say, and he accused Admiral Moorer—well, Admiral Moorer wants more carriers. He wants enough carriers so he can walk over to Tokyo. But that was the first joint operation of that nature, ever in history—in our history. I hope that got the answer you wanted.

DM:

Right. It kind of proved—proved the value of air power, though, as associated with the Navy in this case, it seems to me.

KH:

You cannot—I'm sorry.

DM:

Yeah, I just said, "Yeah, I think it proves the point."

KH:

Okay. Sure.

DM:

Because it shows that air power was beginning to be seen as essential in warfare. So now we're through the—I've digressed now, but let's go back. Let's talk about your second phase of training.

KH:

Okay.

DM:

You weren't at Moultrie anymore. You went somewhere else, right?

KH:

Yeah, I went to Williams Air Force Base in Arizona right outside Phoenix, and they—there we had a program for six months. And, as a matter of fact, this whole training—both basic and advanced—was 265 flying hours in one year. So they had T-6s out there for us, initially. For a couple of months we flew T-6s—get used to the area and learned to fly a formation with four aircraft, and we called it fingertip formation because—looking at your hand, I'll show you—this would be the leader here and this is his wingman. So he's the number one, and he's number two. And this is an element leader over here—two aircraft's an element, four is a flight—so the element leader over here had a wingman too, so they were three and four.

DM:

Were they lined up that way?

KH:

Yes. Generally, the—you flew off the aircraft, took your position—whatever it was—a thousand feet away in formation—or close formation if you're going to fly in weather—you took a position off the wing which is a little bit behind.

MD:

Okay. What would you line up with? If you could see the cockpit up a little ahead of you, what—were you lining up with the fuselage—a certain spot on the fuselage?

KH:

Well, you were scanning lots of things. And a fast scan is good because you have things in the cockpit that you want to know about too, sometimes. So you have to be able to glance back and—depending on the airplane you're flying, it might be the navigation lights, which are generally on the wing tip, lined up with the cockpit. You may stack your airplane. Normally, you wouldn't stack it level. You'd be just a little bit below so you could avoid any direct collision, and you'd get over there about three feet away from his wingtip with your wingtip and fly there.

DM:

Three feet.

KH:

Uh-huh.

DM:

That close?

KH:

That close. And not only in an AT-6 but in a F-105 at 500 knots.

DM:

You kind of have to trust that everybody's keeping everything under control, not just yourself (laughs) but the other people in formation.

KH:

Yeah. Well, the flight leaders—

DM:

Okay. Slightly back, slightly down, typically.

KH:

Yes.

DM:

Do you get any wash?

KH:

Oh no.

DM:

The wash is straight back, so you're not going to worry about wash.

KH:

It's straight back, yeah. No, you don't get any air disturbance over where you are.

DM:

Right. Now, you said something about weather. Does weather mean that you have to be in closer or farther out, or how do you adjust according to weather?

KH:

Well, you just—that same formation that I described is what you would fly in weather.

DM:

I see.

KH:

And the lead aircraft—Number 1 in the flight—is on instruments, and you fly formation—you don't look at your instruments. You do whatever he does. If he makes a steep turn—and vertigo was a common thing, but it's—pilots learned to tolerate that, and respond just normally. And I've taken off, as a wingman, in the early morning, and you fly along, and the clouds thin out a little bit, and the sun that was over there suddenly seems like it's straight overhead. It somehow it seems like it ought to be straight overhead, so you feel like you're flying like this, and you have to tolerate what your inner ear is telling you and stay in formation. People have spun out because they couldn't handle that.

DM:

Ah-ha. Okay.

KH:

But a spin is not a disaster. To stop it, in most airplanes, you get the full left rudder and pop the stick forward.

DM:

How much altitude do you have to have?

KH:

It depends—

DM:

If you're going to get out of the spin.

KH:

It depends on—altogether on the aircraft that you're flying and what its capabilities are. In a Piper Cub, you might go into a spin at fifteen hundred feet. That's just landing pattern altitude for a jet aircraft. But for a jet you better have some space.

DM:

Were you still working—in this second phase of training, where you still on propeller planes?

KH:

No. We stayed—I don't know whether it was six weeks or—might have been six weeks doing that, and then we moved to a jet trainer. They had the first operational jet aircraft was the F-80. They stretched it just a little bit and put a back seat in it, and called it a T-33. So they gave us three rides in a T-33 with an instructor, and then sent us over to get in a one seat airplane.

DM:

Which was called a what?

KH:

Which was called an F-80, but same controls and everything. And so you're on your own—taxi out the runway and do the thing that you were briefed to do, and that first time you've got to get it right or you don't—it's all over. (laughs)

DM:

Now, is it a world of difference going from your first propeller plane to a jet plane—an F-80?

KH:

Well, yeah, quite a bit of difference because it's an aerodynamic thing. In the prop driven airplane you have a lot of drag. In the jet you don't—you have a very streamlined fuselage that you're flying with. And the big adjustment is the fact that in a propeller aircraft, when you pull the throttle back, the airplane slows down right away. In a jet, you pull the power back, and you have to pull the power back a long time before you want it to get to its particular air speed. It's so slick it—you pull the power back and it just keeps on going, it seems like, when you're first learning that. So your judgement of distance and the capabilities of your airplane are things that are essential to learn.

DM:

Were they—did they start to teach you spins and loops in a jet, as well?

KH:

Oh, in every aircraft we did all the acrobatics we could—it—the aircraft could do, and—but I—we didn't practice spins in jets. I never—that was never a part of training. We were briefed on how that—what—on the characteristics of that jet aircraft that you were flying. Some people spun—went out and spun it purposely. I never had an occasion to spin one, and I've been in all sorts of situations. No airspeed and everything else, you don't have to—it doesn't have to spin unless you aggravate the controls.

DM:

Which suggests that probably why they didn't make a point of making you do it because they opportunity shouldn't come up.

KH:

That's right.

DM:

Okay. Well it seems like everything like that—a spin or a loop—if this jet is so much more aerodynamic, it's a whole new dynamic, it seems like.

KH:

Oh, yeah. It was really great. You know, in a prop job, you have to handle a torque, so when you give it the throttle, you have to give it a lot of left rudder to keep it going straight down the runway, and that takes care of the torque. And then it's not—it's not a—when you get airborne, it's a factor, maybe, in trimming up your aircraft.

DM:

Okay. Now, did you have to have to begin to take Gs into consideration when you got into a jet?

KH:

Yeah. They gave us a g-suit. Tight—you know, fit very tightly, and around here had a hose and an outlet. And you plugged in there, and when you pulled Gs it tightened your lower body so you could push your blackout away from you. And, at this time, seven Gs was the—generally max, and you'd probably black out at four without a g-suit.

DM:

I see. So a Three-G difference if you have a g-suit on, if you—

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

Whereas you would black out at four, the G would give you three more—the g-suit would give you up to a seven.

KH:

Yeah.

DM:
Wow.

KH:
And then, of course, the later fighters—it's nine and ten.

DM:
Did I—

KH:
We have a maid coming.

DM:
Okay.

Pause in Recording

DM:
No, so you were—you were training. You were in a jet. This was a whole different kind of thing. And when you got comfortable with the jet, is this when they started doing the formation training or did they start that with the propeller planes?

KH:
We had formation training at Williams Air Force Base in the prop job—in the T-6. And as I—we had about six weeks. I don't think it was two months. I think it was probably six weeks of T-6. It was primarily just to get used to the area, so it wasn't a strange bit of airspace we were flying around—and to learn how to fly formation.

DM:
Okay. But then you continued your formation training, presumably, when you got into the jet—

KH:
Oh, yes.

DM:
—really cranked up then. Besides the speed of the plane, were there other, whole new dynamics that you had to deal with?

KH:

Well, you had to deal with a different kind of engine and burning a different kind of fuel, and the engine that we had in the T-33 and the F-80 was a Whittle—it was a brand from England—designed and used by the Brits. It sat right behind the cockpit, and you had to learn to deal with how fast you could advance the throttle without getting into a compressor stall, for example. And the fuel—you had to keep track of your fuel very, very closely. You burned a lot more fuel, and you—when you got used to the speed—

DM:

Now, you're talking about in a jet.

KH:

Yes. In a jet.

DM:

Burning a lot more fuel and dealing with the speed. It seems like you would have to make finer adjustments on everything as well because things happen more quickly.

KH:

Well, the flight controls were more sensitive. You didn't have torque. That was the joy. You didn't have to be pushing pedals down there unless you wanted to do something that required it. You might do a quick maneuver in a roll, or something like that, and use the rudder instinctively to keep your aircraft going in the direction you wanted to go.

DM:

How many people were in training at this time at Williams?

KH:

Hundreds. They had, oh, two or three squadrons of us, and—I mean, they needed us over in Korea, so they—it was a large number. It was a whole wing of pilots, and how much was in a squadron, which is a subunit, I really can't—I really can't guess. Probably thirty or forty—I don't know.

DM:

It seems like, with a large number of guys out there training and different kinds of aircraft, that accidents would happen. Were there any fatalities in training? Amazing.

KH:

No, I don't remember any. And—no. We had airspace, for propeller aircraft flying, that's dedicated, and the CAA keeps out airliners of that area—and the same way for jets.

DM:

It just seems like, with everything happening quicker in a jet, that a—

KH:

Oh, yeah.

DM:

—if a mistake was made, well there'd—it'd be harder to correct, but that's just an impression. That's just my impression.

KH:

No. It—you get used to it. And airspeed wise you might be coming down final approach at a 120 knots, and preparing to land at some speed down there—100 or 90 knots, something like that.

DM:

Were you in radio control all this time? When you were soloing in these things, did you always have radio control?

KH:

Well, we always could talk to—we had a VHF radio at that time, and then when we went up to newer airplanes, we had a UHF frequency. And that was so you could talk to other aircraft, or you could talk to the tower, or you could—if you had a real emergency—call “Mayday,” and get some help or some attention or some priority.

DM:

Could someone call into you, for example, if you were flying in formation, and say you got a problem with your plane, a C-something, whatever it might be—someone could call to you from the squadron? You could talk—I mean to the formation.

KH:

Yeah, the squadron monitor what's going on. They can talk to you.

DM:

Okay. You weren't just out there cut off from communication or anything like that.

KH:

No.

DM:

Okay. At the end of this train, do you have the same impression about it as you did the first phase of training? Was it sufficient? Was it—

KH:

Absolutely.

DM:

—excellent like before?

KH:

Absolutely.

DM:

Okay, and during that training, were you hearing about what was going on over in Korea?

KH:

Yes.

DM:

What kinds of things would you hear? I mean, I know probably about the major events of the war, but were you hearing specifics about, Well this pilot—something happened to this pilot, or something—?

KH:

Well, we had the *Air Force Times* which was an internal Air Force newspaper. And it kept us up to date with what was happening on the ground and in the air, and conversations, that sort of thing—people who had been there and came back.

DM:

Was it—Oh, okay. Do you think it was pretty open and straightforward like—for example, if a pilot was shot down in Korea, do you think they'd mention that or would they kind of censor it?

KH:

Absolutely.

DM:

Okay. It was an open newspaper.

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay. Good. Did that cause concern? If you read about some mishap or some turn for the worse in Korea, was there discussion among the trainees?

KH:

Well, if there was some question as to—you know, if there wasn't full information on an event, we'd discuss it, and suggest, and think, and prognosticate.

DM:

Oh, learn from mistakes, maybe.

KH:

And try to apply anything we could learn from it to what we were doing in the learning process.

DM:

That's great—and great incentive, too, because it might keep you out of a similar situation.

KH:

Right.

DM:

Were you guys ready to go?

KH:

Absolutely.

DM:

In the course of training, if they'd said, "We need you to go tomorrow," would you have been ready?

KH:

Well, see, I—from this, gaining proficiency in jet aircraft and learning to fly 265 hours, took a year, and then we got assignments. And I knew what I wanted to fly, and where, and was able to get just that. I traded assignments with someone who was getting married—wanted to get married—and wanted a long leave, and I had a long leave because my wife was expecting our first child. And they gave us that long leave, and I traded that for an assignment in Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, so I could have a shot at flying the F-86. And there we went through

training in the F-80—complete gunnery, ground bombing, air to air—and then, if they thought you were capable, they put you in the F-86. There were no two seat trainers for it. You got a good briefing, and—

DM:

(laughs) and then you were in your F-86.

KH:

[inaudible] go there's the runway. (both laugh)

DM:

I don't want to get too far into it, but tell me just a little bit about the F-80 training. You said bombing and other—can you give me a little more detail on that.

KH:

Yes. Okay. Well, let me get to—down to the smallest unit, and that's the flight. We had an instructor—flight instructor—and he had three students, and we flew together every day. And we had one student whose dad owned an airfield back in Carolina. I—and then a friend, Bob Hall, like myself, who had just been through flight training, and our friend from Carolina had some flight training back there—you know, with his dad owning the airfield—but each of us had our own individual needs, and picked up some things faster than the other. It seems the one that had had—his dad owned the airfield, had some problems, and ultimately—I'll describe what happened, but—we had two gunnery ranges—ground to air gunnery ranges up at Indian Springs about ninety miles from the air base. And we'd take off in formation in the F-80 and go up there, go to the air—to the air to ground gunnery range—perforate one, perforate two with the ranges at the time, they were on dry lakes. There are a lot of dry lakes around in Nevada, there around Las Vegas. I'm sure you've been there and seen that. So they had strafing at targets for your guns, and they had strafing targets—I would guess they were probably ten-by-ten, something like that, with a bullseye and everything, and rules—and it was another learning process because we have—we put four airplanes into one area, firing on the same target—you know, just one at a time—and we go around the pattern we call it, and like—here we go around the landing pattern except this time we're lining up on a target, or we might be dropping a practice bomb—they're all practice bombs up there—the guns had real bullets, but—

DM:

This is live ammunition on the guns but practice bombs.

KH:

Yeah. So we practiced dive bombing, and we practiced skip bombing, and napalm release—that sort of thing.

DM:

What is skip bombing? Skip bombing.

KH:

Well, its releasing a bomb in level flight, and you may be releasing it against a wall or something may be the target—a building—and you drop it, and it hits, and it'll bounce. And you try to get it to skip into the target.

DM:

Because it's hard to hit it direct, but if you skip it it'd be kind of lie shooting a torpedo in a sense.

KH:

Yeah. That's right.

DM:

It would bounce along the surface. Okay, interesting. Now how is—how would you bomb with napalm differently from other bombing? Do you have to be low and level?

KH:

I never dropped any live napalm as—but it was a flight—it was a straight and level thing.

DM:

Okay. Were you low?

KH:

And you had a gun sight, and you took a lead—took into—you had to account for the airspeed you were flying and the distance.

DM:

Right. You had to maintain at least a certain speed, huh?

KH:

Well, it could vary, but if you're—if you dropped at a higher air speed, you'd have to drop further from the target. And the closer you get, the easier it is.

DM:

Right, okay. Well, that sounds like pretty extensive training right there in the F-80. Was it the same kind of armament you would be using on your F-86?

KH:

Well, it was. We had six .50 caliber machine guns. There's that bullet right there.

DM:

Now, are you talking about on the F-80 or the F-86?

KH:

On the F-86. But let me go back and—in this bombing—in the dive bombing, the instructor taught us to go in at a pretty steep angle—even steeper, maybe, than forty five degree—degree angle—maybe up to sixty. The less—the higher the angle, the less lead you had to put on the target, the more accurate you could be. And my friend from Carolina was having trouble with that. He was bombing—he didn't feel comfortable in a real steep dive towards the ground, and the instructor pushed him pretty hard. And he finally got up there where he was doing it steeply, but—we were all four up there—Bob Hall, my instructor, and North Carolina friend—and he didn't pull out of the dive and spread himself and the airplane all over the desert up there. There was an accident investigation, and the instructor was a very aggressive guy. He was trying to do the best—give him the best training he could, but he exceeded his capabilities. And Bob Hall and I could tell because we were talking together, and, in the accident investigation, both Bob and I told them that we thought that the instructor pushed him too hard with his capabilities. Anyway, the instructor was reassigned.

DM:

Did you ever feel any repercussions from that?

KH:

Myself, no. I don't know what—I don't know anything other than he was reassigned. I don't know where or what the conclusion of the accident board was, but it must have been adverse.

DM:

All right. Sixty degree towards the ground—the ground comes up awfully—awfully fast it seems.

KH:

Yeah. I always like to drive—bomb at sixty degrees. It's just a question of keeping track of your altitude and starting your pullout at the right time.

DM:

And what is your speed when you're doing that in the F-86?

KH:

Oh, you might be going 400 knots in training. It depends on what your situation is—and what your plan is. You adjust your gun sight according to what you're going to do. If you're going to plan to hit the target and drop at 3,000 feet then you have a certain—you can adjust your target which is a little reticle on the windscreen with a dot in the middle—has two circles—which helps you judge the size of something at a distance out there, and you adjust that so you pull lead. And so you would tilt it down, so that—on the ground before you took off.

DM:

You have an instrument on the panel that you can use to adjust your sight?

KH:

No.

DM:

Okay. Well, how—is 3,000 typical?

KH:

No.

DM:

Altitude of 3,000—is that close?

KH:

Oh, well—jumping ahead—we used 5,000 or so—we were using freefall bombs. Laser hadn't arrived yet. It did arrive later in the war in Southeast Asia. But in Korea, no, we didn't have that capability. It was—has a—we had a saying. It's "eyeball, needle, and speedle." We had a (both laugh)—well, anyway, I won't explain that.

DM:

Okay. Oh, you won't explain it. Okay. (both laugh)

KH:

Well, needle really was the—we had a ball and turn needle, and it—if you were coordinated the ball was in the center—and the needle up here would tilt if you were in a turn and that sort of thing. It kind of gave you an idea of where you were.

DM:

Yeah. It'd give you your bearings a little bit.

KH:

And you had to get the speed right to drop the bomb, and look at the target, and—it's not all that different. I thought the skeet shooting I loved to do helped a lot.

DM:

Oh, really. Hmm.

KH:

Because you have to pull a little lead on that clay target and then judge accordingly to whatever the distance is to the target.

DM:

So much of this seems to be—

KH:

—it can affect the drop.

DM:

Some—there's so much to take into consideration. When you're flying a plane and you're firing or dropping bombs, your rate of speed, your level of incline—it would be—it seems overwhelming unless you're really, really well trained at this and get a feel, it seems like. You would really have to develop a feel.

KH:

Yeah, it—when you couldn't—hadn't done it, it looked formidable. But the best trained guy around was our instructor. And he could do it, and we had great confidence that we could do it. And he showed us how, and we did it.

DM:

Was your confidence rattled at all when this fellow you knew crashed his plane?

KH:

No. It—I'd seen airplanes crash before. No, I never felt rattled. I felt emotionally sorry for the person, but it was something that happened in this business.

DM:

Do you know of people—you flew a lot of combat missions, eventually. Do you know of people who went through training—all the training—no problem, through a number of combat missions, no problem, but at some point they became jaded by it, or at some point just lost their confidence? Does it happen, or is it—?

KH:

I think it's a—I would say that—a little bit to the contrary of losing confidence and getting stale, there was always a thrill-a-minute, and you could—but people got overconfident. And I witnessed crashes of that kind.

DM:

That was more dangerous, you think? Overconfidence more dangerous than—

KH:

Oh, yes.

DM:

Okay.

KH:

The people that got rattled had long since been weeded out—washed out.

DM:

Oh, I see. I see, Okay. Well, now, Nellis. Was it the place to go if you wanted to fly an F-86?

KH:

Nellis had a sign on the gate, at this time, "Every Man a Tiger." And then a little later they had "The Home of the Fighter Pilot" out there. And it was known as the home of the fighter pilot.

DM:

Okay. It was the place to go.

KH:

It was the only place to go to learn how to fly the F-86. If you wanted to fly the F-84, you'd go to Luke Air Base outside Phoenix.

DM:

Okay. When did you finish your training at Nellis?

KH:

I finished it in the fall, and then we had some survival training and shipped out.

DM:

What kind of survival training?

KH:

Well—

DM:

Jungle survival. Desert survival.

KH:

No, not jungle survival. It was really kind of an abbreviated course of how to survive in the terrain where you're going to be operating. And you had a survival kit that you sat on and a backpack parachute.

DM:

What kind of items would you carry in your survival pack? Would you carry flares?

KH:

Well, let's see—I'm meshing the—too many airplanes here at a time. In the F-80 we flew in a seat packed—in a seat parachute.

DM:

Uh-huh. You ejected the whole seat if you—

KH:

Yeah. That had the parachute in it. In the F-86, we wore a backpack and we could carry survival things—water and there was a drug kit and—we were briefed and shown in a room, and I never had occasion to look at one because I never was in a position of survival on the ground.

DM:

Well, I'm glad you never had to open one. (both laugh)

KH:

Well, I'm sure it had some morphine and—but initially, the adrenaline takes care of the pain and that sort of thing.

DM:

Did it have MREs or what—C-rations or whatever you called them at that time?

KH:

Well, yes. Water and some C-rations. And a knife. Matter of fact we carried a knife on our parachute with a hook on it. And that was if you bailed out and you needed to cut a riser—riser was something which you might want to do if you wanted to—you had to do that or pull it and

slip. And we practiced parachute landing falls. And of course we had ejections seats in all the jets: F-80, F-86, and everything since.

DM:

Did they have a means of practicing ejection, or—?

KH:

Yes. They had a seat on a metal ladder-like thing that was up in the air pretty far. I don't know—twenty-thirty feet—and we'd actually fire one and practice.

DM:

They really put you guys through some serious training and the commendable thing about it is they needed you overseas, but they sure put you through the training first. You know, it seems like there would be a temptation to give them a little training and get them over there, but it sound like it's very thorough.

KH:

No. Like, a pilot, like an airplane, is a valuable asset. They don't want to waste it.

DM:

Exactly. What was—you were already married during all of this, is that correct? When did you get married?

KH:

Oh, I got married June 16 after graduating from West Point June 3 and 4.

DM:

So your wife kind of went through all of this training also.

KH:

She—of course we lived—all of our friends were pilots, and it turns out we're all about the same age. Most of us were married. Some were not. And yeah, it was quite an experience for her too.

DM:

It's one thing for you to have the confidence and to be able to handle something like this. Did you wife do pretty well?

KH:

Yes.

DM:

—during all of it?

KH:

Yeah—

DM:

Okay.

KH:

—she sure did. And—

DM:

They would need a—

KH:

—the wives come together and they had their own conversations about what their husbands were doing and saying.

DM:

It seems like a wife would need to have a lot of fortitude to see their husband go through these risks.

KH:

Well, yes. Fortitude and perseverance.

DM:

It's an interesting other aspect of this whole thing—

KH:

Yes.

DM:

—what the wife has to concern herself with. So you were assigned. You've got through your training and then you were assigned to be in an F-86 overseas, is that correct—can you tell me about that?

KH:

Yeah. Okay. It was more of the same. We practiced air to air gunnery quite a bit, and that was a—about a five by thirty—well, not nylon, but another substance that was used back then. It was

similar to nylon. We called it the banner. It was towed behind an F-80 at an airspeed that would simulate an enemy aircraft, and we would—

Pause in Recording

DM:

Now the banners you're talking about, you were—were these—it was pulled behind an F-80, and was this a target or—?

KH:

Yeah, it was a target, air to air target. That's the technology we had at that time. It had a limit on the airspeed. It couldn't realistically be pulled with an F-80 at combat airspeeds, but it nevertheless gave us practice in hitting a target in the air and learning to pull the lead that we needed to and keep the gun sight on—in position.

DM:

How would you do that without live ammunition? Were you using tracers or something?

KH:

We used live ammunition.

DM:

Oh, you used live ammunition.

KH:

Yeah, in the F-86.

DM:

Shooting at this banner pulled behind an F-80. Who was the poor guy in the F-80?

KH:

Well—

DM:

You see—you would think—

KH:

Well, we also towed them behind B-26s—that twin-engine prop bomber.

DM:

There wasn't any fear—?

KH:

But—well, I've been tow pilot quite a bit and—

DM:

It didn't worry you?

KH:

—you watch them, carefully, so they fire at an—at, we call, an angle off. The banner has a cable on it. I'm not sure how long it was. It could have been thirty, forty, fifty yards—put it back there, so it hung on a cable forming a [inaudible] and it had a weight on the bottom so it'd stay upright—had a bullseye. And so you go up there, and normally with two aircraft, you can do it with four if you want to, but two was the best because when you're instructing you have to focus on one guy, and it's not—you can't crowd the pattern too much. So, again—if I can demonstrate here—you position—we would—on the banner. It'd be flying a straight line up in the air-to-air range, which was north of the air to ground range, over a dry lake, and—Dog Bone Lake, we called it—and it was an isolated, unpopulated area of Nevada. There's a lot of it up there. And we would position our self, oh, perhaps 3,000 feet—maybe 4,000 feet—above the target and slightly behind the target, and then roll in, pick up airspeed, and make sure that we didn't fly—fire up at the target, because the tow pilot's watching you, and he's not going to allow that. He might get a bullet himself, so we always tried to fire—we always did fire down at the target. And we used anything from a—oh, a ten to a thirty degree angle off—angle to the target, so that—and you were pulling some Gs to get—make the turn.

DM:

Were you—you were angling into it like this, turning—

KH:

Well, yeah—this is the target. Come in like this, and then roll out. So you're into a shallower down—dive towards it, and you position your pipper—your gun sight—on the target and then fire your rounds, turn this way—

DM:

Turn out. Turn out.

KH:

—and go on off, and come back around.

DM:

Is this typically the way you would approach an enemy plane?

KH:

No. You know, it's one way you'd like to, but—enemy plane doesn't stand still. (both laugh)
He's looking for [laughter inaudible]. Then you have a dog fight, maybe. That's what we call that.

DM:

Now, you were doing this training over Korea, or—

KH:

No, I was doing this training at Nellis.

DM:

Okay. This in-flight training.

KH:

And we did air combat maneuvering as well. We—

DM:

Did you—?

KH:

—take a flight up and have another flight—or another airplane to fight with, and anything goes.
Any maneuver you can use to take advantage.

DM:

Really? Huh. Well, obviously you can't use live rounds on this.

KH:

Well, no. Of course, we picked up some terminology, I guess, from the French. If you were in—
if you were after a target—an aircraft—and he's flying level, and he just kept turning—you tried
to turn tighter than him, so you could get the lead, necessarily, to get your bullets to go out there
and hit the target. And in World War II, they called that a Lufberry, so so did we.

DM:

Oh, okay. But it becomes a problem because you're—the turning too fast, I guess. I mean,
there's only—if he's turning as hard as he can—I guess it depends on the plane—whether you
can turn sharp enough to—

KH:

Well, yeah. If he's turning as hard as you are, you have to find some way to get behind him. So you might do a yo-yo—come up like this and come back down again.

DM:

Right. But you practiced all of this, actually, over the deserts of Nevada.

KH:

Yeah, yeah, we were in Nevada.

DM:

(laughs) Pretty exciting.

KH:

We had a block of airspace for our combat maneuvering, and Los Angeles Center controlled the traffic through there and kept other airplanes out of it with radar.

DM:

Okay, so you'd done all of this, and then you headed to Korea.

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

Where did you arrive, and where were you based in Korea?

KH:

Okay, I'll answer that. Let me tell you, if I may, start—I was visiting my sister in Doylestown, Pennsylvania—my wife and child and I—and my brother was a B-25 pilot. He came back to visit with us. And then they learned that he'd flown his B-25 back, and he said, "I'll take you to Camp Stoneman," which is out in California just outside San Francisco—and the Travis Air Force Base right nearby. And so he flew me across country, and the first stop from leaving an air base in Pennsylvania was Nellis Air Base, Nevada. And as we—he set himself up for traffic pattern. There was an F-80 ahead of us who made his traffic pattern—we had a traffic pattern where we called it a Pitch Out, and the—it was developed, I guess, during World War II. And you—the airplane would come down the runway like this, and make a sharp break, and a 4G turn, come around on downwind, and then turn down on final like this. The idea being, for that tight turn, if there's an enemy behind you trying to get you, that was to throw him off—his lead off, that tight turn. Well, this F-80 in front of us that did his pitch out, and that's all he did. Something

went awry with the flight controls and the airplane crashed right in front of Base Ops, and so we finally, after that—it didn't get—it wasn't near the runway. It was near the building, and he could very easily have hit the whole building—wiped it out. Well, we landed, and the first thing my brother said to me was, "Ken, you might have picked the wrong business." (both laugh) "These B-25s don't do that." Well, I assured him I was in a different kind of airplane, that there F-80 had mechanical flight controls, and the F-86 had hydraulically controlled flight controls. All of them flew with a stick between your knees. Okay, and, now—and then we went from there to Camp—to Travis Air Base, and before I—before he left to go on to his next place, he said, "Ken, it's going to be cold over in Korea." I said, "Well, I will go to Base Exchange, and they have them there. I'll pick up a coat first thing." And he said, "No—" He had this really heavy wool, blue coat on. He just took it off and says, "Take mine."

DM:

Is that right?

KH:

And I thought that was a pretty good—pretty nice send off. And He gave me a movie camera. "Take pictures." So I have a few things in that family photo album—movie album.

DM:

You have a—it's a moving? Like a—

KH:

Movie.

DM:

Like an 8mm camera—something like that?

KH:

Yeah, it's an 8mm.

DM:

Is that right? You have it from your cockpit?

KH:

No. It's been put on CD. Compact disc. (laughs)

DM:

A DVD, I guess, that you can play. You can play the movie.

KH:
Yeah.

DM:
And this is from your cockpit in—where? In Korea?

KH:
Oh, no. I never took any movies in a—

DM:
Oh.

KH:
I never took a camera on a flight.

DM:
On a flight—you're talking about on the ground.

KH:
On the ground.

DM:
This was a sendoff present.

KH:
Yeah.

DM:
Oh, well pretty nice.

KH:
And you've been to Seoul recently.

DM:
Yes sir.

KH:
—and everything was burnt out buildings, and walls, and ox carts, and small motorcycles, bicycles galore. And when I saw it again, several decades later—back in the seventies—it was

fantastic how that place had rebuilt. And to be able to compare the two, I felt real good about what we did for that country.

DM:

Whole different world now. Now, you still have this. You have this movie footage. What would it take for the Southwest Collection to get a copy of that?

KH:

Well—

DM:

If we took it and just transferred a copy—

KH:

It's a—it wouldn't take much of anything except that there's not a lot of footage. There's a footage of downtown Seoul and the people doing their business, and a little orphans home, and—they were in a little area, fenced in. And we'd stop by and give them some chewing gum or something through the fence—if we were downtown.

DM:

How much time do you think you have—how much movie time?

KH:

Oh, probably not more than five or ten minutes, I don't think, of all of that.

DM:

Are you okay with the idea of us having a copy of it?

KH:

No, I—

DM:

Because it'd take (snaps) that long to make a copy. I'd love to put a copy in the collection. You know how much film we have of Korea at that time? I'll bet zero.

KH:

Yeah.

DM:

We have so much I can't know what all we have, but I be we don't have any. I'll bet we don't have any. I'll talk to you about that later on, see—

KH:

Okay.

DM:

So you arrived over at Korea. Were you stationed near Seoul or Incheon?

KH:

Yes, I was. I—we went to 5th Air Force in Tokyo and picked up our assignments. And we couldn't get there fast enough, so Bob Hall, my friend that we went through training—I went through training with—and, gee, there wasn't going to be an airplane leaving for Japan and on to Korea for two or three days. And he was a very ingenious guy, and he looked around and found out that they needed a courier for a little bag on a C-54 aircraft—four-engine—that was leaving the next day. And he says, "And I need a partner." There are two seats back there—in the back of the airplane, okay? So we go there early and got our choice of assignments—even to the squadron we asked for. And we landed at K—the air bases had a K and a number after them. We landed at the base at Seoul and I was assigned to K-14 which was a fighter base. And they met us with a truck with—and put us in the back, open. We started to Kimpo. It was several miles, and it was astounding what we saw. There was a lot of rain and a lot of rice paddies, and there were people who had—were deceased out there that hadn't even been picked up. You might see an arm sticking out of the water or other body part. It was shallow in a rice paddy at that time. It was wintertime and not much rain.

DM:

Mm. Were these combat troops that you were seeing out there, dead?

KH:

No. Those were Koreans that were left there. And I asked about it, and he said—and I was told that, "Well, they're—" not that I don't—they're—it's like they're provinces. Someone's in charge of one, and someone's in charge of another. And what I was told was that the two guys are arguing over who's responsibility it is to get those people back to where they can be—

DM:

They were Korean, but were they civilian or were they soldiers.

KH:

I have no idea.

DM:

Okay.

KH:

I would guess they were civilians.

DM:

Anyway, that's some culture shock, isn't it, to go over there and see that right away.

KH:

Oh. It sure was, and it was quite a smell that went with it. But we arrived out at Kimpo. It was an air base with one runway, and we had lots of F-86 fighters. We had some RF-86s. We had some Gloster Meteors. We had some Brits over there—RAF people—Royal Air Force.

DM:

Right on the same—on the same base at K-14.

KH:

Well, right, and—squadron with—

DM:

Oh, in squadron. Wow okay.

KH:

Right in the flight with them—we lived with them. And we had Australians up there flying. And they were flying a lot with—there were a lot of Brits, of course, there in the Meteor. But we had an exchange officer with us, John Chick, was his name. But he was a good pilot—really good, good pilot. Everybody—he was a great guy. So, we arrived. We were assigned quarters. They were kind of cement-like buildings with four—room for four different flights. In other words, one squadron had all their pilots in one building, and—with adjoining doors, so we could talk to each other, and a little sally port entry in-between. So that's where we lived.

DM:

This is interesting. It's, you know, you're getting kind of a flavor for the UN effort here when you have a lot of American Pilots, but also some Brits and Canadians. Were there other nationalities represented in this particular location?

KH:

Well, yes. We had some South African pilots.

DM:

Oh, you did?

KH:

And they were—we observed them mostly at the club, and they were a great group. And we learned lots of songs—and in the evening we'd sing. Now—there was mission whisky. After so many missions you got a bottle of Old Overholt, or a group of people would. We didn't overimbibe, but I think the South Afs were the ones that set the example there. And they had a song (Ken singing):

High zigga zoomba zoomba zoomba.

High zigga zoomba zoomba, Ay!

High bigga zigma zoomba zoomba.

Mow them down, you in—Zulu warriors.

Oh mow them down, you Zulu chief.

And there were some rather profane songs, then. "Sally in the Alley Sifting Cinders." (both laugh)

DM:

Blowing a little steam off, sounds like. (laughs)

KH:

Oh. And there was one about (Ken singing):

We're coming home with thirteen chicks.

One MiG—one fox eight six,

Twelve MiG fifteens,

We're coming home with thirteen chicks.

And, oh, (Ken begins singing another song)

May—made—set up from across Normandy

I turned the final—made my final turn.

My gosh, I racked it tight.

The air speed read one-twenty.

The engine gave a wheeze.

Mayday! Mayday! Spin instructions, please.

Oh hallelujah, hallelujah,

Throw a nickel on the grass,

Said "Save a fighter pilot's—"

(both laugh)

DM:

This is over sixty years ago. You remember these lyrics real well. Have you—when's the last time you thought about that?

KH:

Oh, it goes through my head occasionally with a lot of songs.

DM:

Does it, occasionally? That's really interesting.

KH:

I sang the Illinois Fight Song to dentist one day, and he broke my jaw pulling my tooth. Dentists don't like songs, but yeah. I know the Michigan fight song if you still—

DM:

Now as far as your daily duties at base—and we're still talking about K-14, I guess. We're still at K-14 when you're talking about this?

KH:

Yes.

DM:

Did you fly every day? Did you log a lot of hours, I mean.

KH:

If hour—well, if the local weather was above minimum—so it's 300 foot in a mile or a half mile—we would go if the weather looked good enough that we could recover there with a ground control approach. And so minimums were—we could do that generally, and I have flown missions where we were in the clouds all—for all of except maybe ten or fifteen minutes.

DM:

Is that right? Flying all on instruments?

KH:

Yeah. Well, the lead was flying on instruments and we were flying in formation on wing.

DM:

Did it ever get so thick that you lost sight? Is there—did it ever get so thick—the clouds—that you lost sight, momentarily, of the lead?

KH:

No.

DM:

Oh. Because that would be bad.

KH:

Well, it would. I just encountered some terrible weather, and when you're that close it's like walking down the sidewalk together, sort of. And you turn on your navigation lights—white light on the—behind the cockpit and a green light and a red light on the wingtips.

DM:

When you were flying in—out there in formation—were you flying patrol. Were you flying along the DMZ or any particular location?

KH:

Well, I—we—I was a part of the 4th Fighter-Interceptor Wing in the 334th Squadron, and we, as I said, had four flights. And when we left on a mission, it might be top cover for reconnaissance aircraft or for—or F-80s, or Gloster Meteors bombing ground [?] targets, so we saw quite a bit of flak in North Korea. It wasn't devastating. You just didn't want to get hit by a hailstone.

DM:

Did you pretty well stay in you—I assume that along the DMZ there was designated airspaces.

KH:

Well, there was a strip of land there that was neutral—supposedly neutral.

DM:

Did—

KH:

It was—DMZ by definition.

DM:

Did you wander? Did you ever wander over the—the safe airspace into enemy airspace or did they? Was there—?

KH:

Well, it wasn't airspace. It was the ground at DMZ. And you had to fly across the DMZ to get to

up north to where the MiG-15s were flying. Our mission was to shoot down MiG-15s, primarily, Russians made, and we did not drop any ground ordinance. We didn't strafe anything.

DM:

It was all—

KH:

That was—they gave that mission to the F-84s to the south, and they just did the bombing and what have you. Well, they were a fighter-bomber unit. We were a fighter-interceptor unit.

DM:

As long as you weren't firing on the ground or dropping bombs above the DMZ, you were not violating that—

KH:

Oh, no. I never heard of any complaints about violations of the DMZ. Air space wasn't protected.

DM:

Right. Okay, see I didn't know if the DMZ also applied above—

KH:

No.

DM:

—or if it was just a ground thing.

KH:

Just on the ground.

DM:

So it was fair game to go after MiG-15s? Control—

KH:

Well, no. They wouldn't be down that far close to our air base. As a matter of fact, they did most of their work up north near the Yalu River, and most of our missions were combat air patrol, to go up there and look for the MiG-15s, find them, and shoot them down. And that—during the war we had a thirteen to one ratio of kills over losses.

DM:

Right. What was the difference? Was it the—which plane—which aircraft was superior: F-86 or a MiG-15?

KH:

Neither. The—it really—that gap in losses between us and the North Koreans—by the way, their aircraft were flown by Chinese and Russians, as well—so. Give me a [inaudible].

DM:

So what is—what is the difference there? Is it the difference in personnel? The difference in pilot training? Pilot skill?

KH:

Yeah. It's really—we had the best training. On the other hand, you had to know the other aircrafts' capabilities, your aircrafts' capabilities, and you'd find—and so you would use the weak spots of the MiG is the key to attack.

DM:

Okay. So you were taught this?

KH:

It wasn't necessary to lose one of our aircraft just trying to shoot down a MiG-15. As a matter of fact it was highly avoided.

DM:

Okay, it wasn't an even swap. If we lost one of ours and they lost one of theirs, that wasn't good.

KH:

Yeah. So the MiG-15 did have superiority, and these—the F-86 and the MiG-15 were the first two swept wing aircraft in history—aviation history. So our performance was similar. The manufacturing of the MiG-15 was a little rougher. They had mechanical flight controls. We had hydraulic flight controls. They had a lower wing loading than we do—did—and wing loading is the measure of the results in a performance level, accordingly. So they had an aircraft that was lighter than ours in pounds and had a lower wing loading. And they would operate above fifty thousand—fifty-two, fifty-three thousand—and the highest I ever operated in the F-86 was forty-seven, and it went—up at that altitude you can't—you know, you need the thick air to really maneuver an aircraft otherwise you get wing buffet and you're just on the edge of a stall. The MiG-15 would take off—you start them both at the same time—the MiG-15 would take off a little bit before the F-86 and accelerate away. So it took us about thirteen minutes to get up to forty-thousand. It took them maybe seven minutes at a higher rate of flying. They were not

supersonic. At about Mach .94, they became uncontrollable. We could go through the speed of sound—Mach 1, 1.2, something like that. It was—it was just a capability that I don't remember ever using in combat, but we had a wing roll we developed as you go through the Mach, and then you're out the other side and the aircraft flies normally. And that was because of the rigging of the wings on the aircraft. I flew one aircraft that the pilot had been—gone out and worked with the people that rigged the airplanes, and got the wings so close to right that it would go through Mach 1 with no wing roll, belonged to Bill Lilly. He had ten kills, and, when he left, he gave me the airplane. (laughs)

DM:

Is that right?

KH:

So I put my name on it, and I left the ten stars on the top of it. They weren't mine, but no one wanted to take them off. They looked good. That's okay. Let's see. We had a higher rate of roll, as a result. They could pull more Gs because of their wing loading. We were right close to them.

DM:

Very comparable then, it sounds like, in a lot of ways.

KH:

Yes.

DM:

But the personnel made the difference, the training—the pilot training.

KH:

Well, pilot training did, and also, our tactics were superior. We had a gentleman, George A. Davis, who was—has just departed the squadron—or just departed life—but before I got there he'd been shot down. But he—his incident was incorporated in our squadron tactics to avoid a situation like he was in. He went up there as a four ship flight. He was supposed to maintain integrity. We flew what is called a fluid-four formation. The lead element would fly lower and, over here, the second element would fly higher.

DM:

Two higher, two lower.

KH:

Yeah. And then each man in the flight had a specific job. The flight leader was a shooter. He looked forward. He looked everywhere for MiGs up front, and he also covered his own aircraft a

little bit with his eyeballs. And so did the element lead, over. He was a shooter. Wingmen, their job was to tell—keep track of any attacks from the MiGs, there's a blind spot down below us, so we could roll up like this and look down there. And, if we saw MiGs, tell lead, so he could pick them up and we could take combat action.

DM:

You had a shooter and someone to protect the shooter and to keep the eyes out.

KH:

Yeah, and he covered the rear. I flew, a lot of the time, like this. (both laugh)

DM:

Yeah. Okay.

KH:

Since I was a second lieutenant, I flew half my tour without ever being a shooter.

DM:

How many combat missions did you fly over Korea?

KH:

Ninety. And the truce was signed.

DM:

How many of those—in how many of those missions did you see the enemy—see enemy aircraft?

KH:

Well, I have that documented over here, and when we get ready to transfer things, I'll give you a copy of it. And I found the original one in here. Let's see. Anyway, it's copied from the original which is just getting kind of old.

DM:

So you have all the data—?

KH:

Yeah. I have all the data.

DM:

We'll have copies of that. Well, I'll refer, since it's recorded right now, I'll just refer the listener

to the records that will also be at the Southwest Collection, so someone listening to this will know that there are records there and they can go take a look.

KH:

Yeah. Great.

DM:

How about encounters with enemy aircraft?

KH:

Okay, encounters. Well, I was on a mission with a Major Bill Cosby, and we were a flight of four one day. And a MiG flight came at our altitude about just flying right a—flying across like this. And it was the most phenomenal thing I've ever seen. Major Cosby—you know, you didn't have time to get in position to track them, but he just took some Kentucky windage on the lead aircraft—and hit it with six .50s, and it blew up right there in front of us.

DM:

Wow. Six .50 caliber guns.

KH:

Yeah. A thousand rounds a minute.

DM:

Wow. No hesitation. You just see the enemy, you go at it.

KH:

Absolutely.

DM:

Wow. What is Kentucky windage?

KH:

Well, it's guess-and-by-golly. (both laugh)

DM:

I love that term. Kentucky windage. (laughs) Okay. No communication. No hesitation. There's the enemy, you go after the enemy.

KH:

Absolutely.

DM:

Whatever. If you can go straight at the enemy, you go straight at the enemy. If you have to maneuver, then you'll maneuver, that kind of thing?

KH:

Yes. Major Davis' wife lives here in Lubbock, and one son. And he won the Congressional Medal of Honor. I think I may have shown you a picture of him, but I'll give that to you along with this citation and a picture—I can show you best—if you'll stop just a minute—and describe it better.

Pause in Recording

DM:

Okay, the other plus for the MiG-15?

KH:

Other strength of the MiG-15 is that they had one 23mm cannon and two 37mm cannons. And with small antiaircraft guns use 37mms, quite a—but the thing is, the rate of fire was slow enough you could fly between the bullets.

DM:

Oh, is that right? Wow. (both laugh)

KH:

That's what they told me, but that was at the bar. Instructor didn't say that. (both laugh)

DM:

So the MiG-15—you said that he came across a formation of twelve MiG-15s. Do they typically fly in such a large formation?

KH:

No. They—they're—I have observed MiGs in all sorts of class—sort of, single ones, pairs, three, gaggles—that's what we call twelve aircraft like he was involved in. And he was involved at low altitude. I'm not sure what geographic area was. The Yalu River, from time to time—depending on the political climate—was okay to go across because that's where the enemy air bases were, up there at Antung. And there was one other air base up there. That's in Manchuria, which was controlled by China.

DM:

It was the same thing, though. As long as you weren't firing on the ground—as long as you were after aircraft—that's a different political situation, I guess.

KH:

Well, no. They—at one point they forbade any aircraft going across the Yalu River. At other times we could go and get in their traffic pattern—not to land but to shoot.

DM:

Right. (laughs) But did you ever go after—did you ever go after enemy air bases?

KH:

No, we didn't.

DM:

Okay.

KH:

That was—it's one thing to go after the aircraft, another to go after the terrain that China controlled.

DM:

That's the interesting distinction, you know, the difference in the air space and the difference in what's going on on the ground: you can fire on the aircraft, but you can't fire on the ground.

That's kind of interesting.

KH:

Yeah. Of course, you own the airspace above your property.

DM:

How many time do you think you were in a formation that fired on enemy aircraft—that actually engaged in combat with enemy aircraft in Korea?

KH:

It wasn't all that many out of ninety missions. It was because some days we'd have a combat air patrols—have combat air patrol schedule, and MiGs wouldn't even take off the ground. And so we'd look for some of their light bombers or something of that nature. There was an air transport shot down on one occasion, and we were flying combat air patrol up above, protecting the people below. And we later found out that—not much later—that the aircraft carried some of the negotiators working on setting up a better DMZ and doing some things like that. And one of our

pilots shot the aircraft down. It was an enemy aircraft as far as he was concerned. How many times did we actually engage or see MiGs. I'm not sure I can tell you without looking in those ninety flights. Often, we saw them and we couldn't engage them due to our location. The young people have the good eyesight, and as some of our more senior pilots—maybe they'd have been World War Two pilots—were getting nearsighted. So this is the way it went in our squadron. Our squadron commander became James Jabara, and he liked to call on myself and a friend by the name of Dick Frailey to fly the number two and four positions—to cover the rear with our 20/20 vision. (David laughs) And to help him up ahead, too, because we called a squadron commander—lieutenants had their own little group that called people whatever we wanted to call them. They all had a nickname. And we called him Jabby, James Jabara, or Blinky. He had myopia. And when he had shot down several aircraft—when he got there previously in World War Two. So we flew with him, and he was very, very aggressive. One day we took off, and the briefing specifically forbade anybody from going across the Yalu, thing we didn't know was that was so Jabara could take a flight across there without anybody messing with it, and his objective kind of unfolded. He didn't explain it to us. We were just going to—we're hunting for MiGs, and we were up at high altitude. And we got up to the Yalu River, and just kept going. And he started a high speed letdown, like this. We were going down. And we could see the aircraft on the runway, and the aircrafts were landing. It was timed just right. Aircraft were in a traffic pattern, and that sort of thing. And so then, his objective unfolded. He wanted to get in the traffic pattern behind an enemy aircraft on the downwind leg—the downwind leg being the one like this. And so we were covering behind us. We were getting down low, and when we looked up, we found that this jet ace had—instead of coming in behind the aircraft, he was meeting them head on in the traffic pattern, and that meant we couldn't shoot at them. So that's why he needed the eyeballs with him to help him. And they just flat didn't do it. If it had been 180 degrees different, we could have shot down some MiGs. Instead, we got copious flak fired at us, and no one was hit. We were going at maybe, fifty—six hundred knots.

DM:

You can't do without your eyes. You've got to have your eyes to keep you oriented.

KH:

Yeah. And so that's one time where we engaged but didn't get anything. And another time, flying with him, he picked up a flight of MiGs up high and got behind them, and we were watching and when—in order to stay in formation—if this is an airplane, this is an airplane—you're flying in formation and you start a turn; the distance starts like this because he's on the inside of the turn. It's a smaller distance to fly. So I was crossing over to get inside where I could stay up with my element leader, and crossed over just a little high. And he was about to fire on the MiG ahead; it was pretty far out. It looked like it might have been fifteen or two thousand feet out front which is a little far for .50s. And as I flew over behind this aircraft, my aircraft flamed out. We were up around forty-two or three thousand feet, and I became a glider. My

canopy frosted over, but before that happened, I had spotted MiGs behind us, too, and called them out to Jabara. But then this happened. So I was a glider, and there were about eight MiGs out there. So Jabara broke off, and he was able to protect me because you can't get an air start at that altitude in an F-86. You have to get down where the air's heavier and you get more oxygen—oxygen in at your gliding speed which is under two hundred knots.

DM:

How long would it take to get from that altitude to get down to where you could fire it up?

KH:

It took a long—it seemed like forever. I tried about three or four air starts before it—I got down to the altitude. I thought, you know, it might start up here, and I was really in a hurry, and I was on instruments. I didn't know what was going on outside. That was described to me later, but he took his flight and set up a weave over me and below me, and protected me. And—

DM:

He was fire—

KH:

I glided down to about eighteen thousand—eighteen to twenty—low twenties—maybe twenty-two—thousand square feet, and my engine started—air start switch over here, and the bad—

End of Recording