

**Oral History Interview of
Kenneth Grissom**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
November 12, 2014
Lubbock, Texas**

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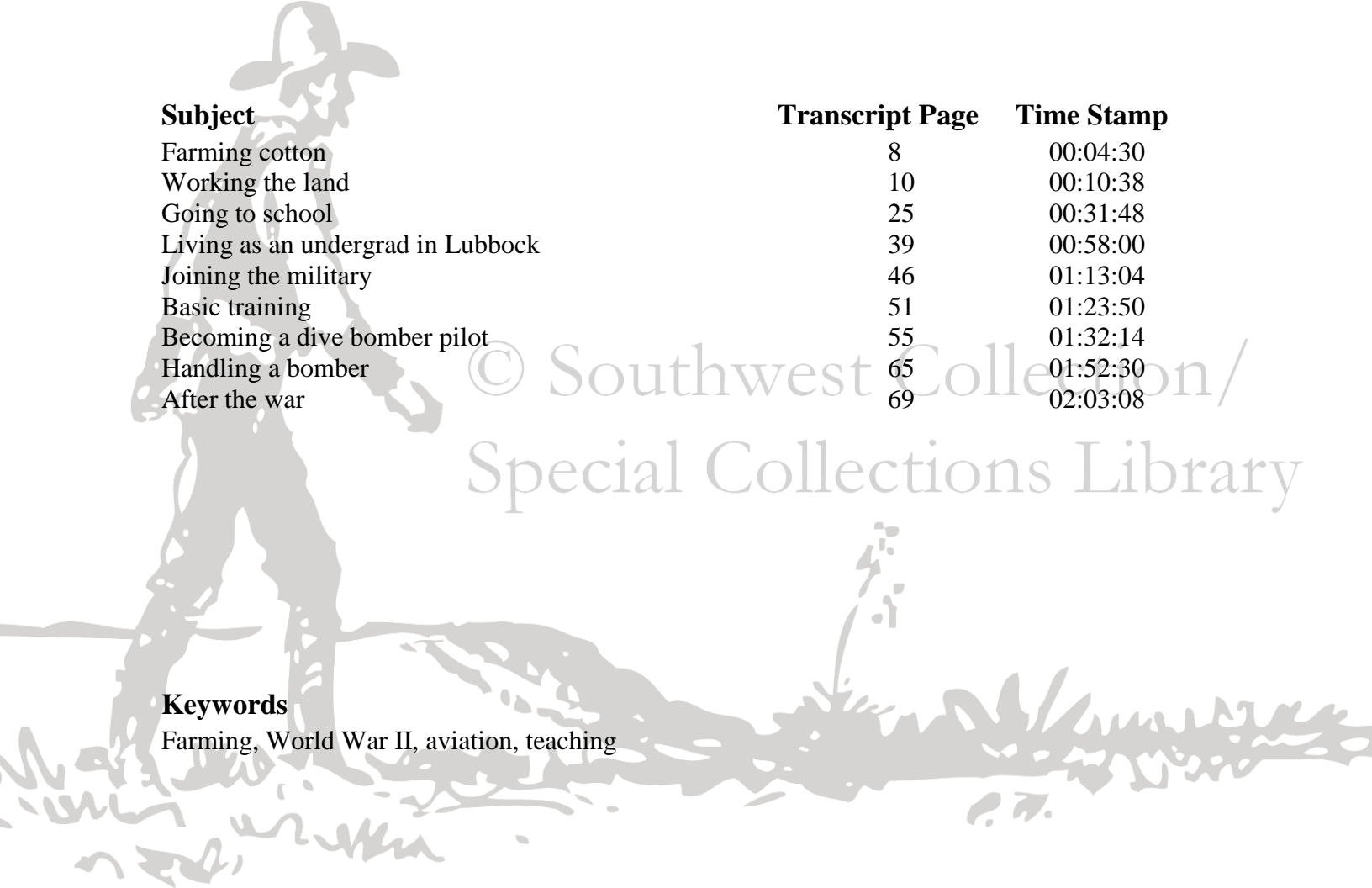
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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Kenneth Grissom, who discusses his early life, experiences as a bomber pilot in World War II, and his postwar career as a teacher.

Length of Interview: 02:12:29



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David Marshall (DM):

The date is November 12, 2014, this is David Marshall interviewing Kenneth Grissom, and along with us is Martin Grissom and Linda Grissom-Swift, and I invite y'all to interject, ask questions along the way, if you wish, but Mr. Grissom, can we start with just your full name? What's your full name?

Kenneth Grissom (KG):

Kenneth J. Grissom.

DM:

Okay, and when were you born?

KG:

Nineteen-eighteen.

DM:

Okay, what day would that have been?

KG:

August the third.

DM:

August the third, okay. Now I have in my record here that you were born in Elk City, Oklahoma?

KG:

Right.

DM:

But your family moved to West Texas.

KG:

Right.

DM:

Do you remember that move?

KG:

Yeah.

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DM:

Can you tell me about it? How did you get out here?

KG:

Well, my dad put some of the—he had registered Jersey cows. So he put them on board a train car in Elk City, Oklahoma, and moved to Farwell, Texas. And at Farwell, Texas he unloaded them, and went out about eleven miles east to Farwell, and he had built a big red barn, and we had room in the red barn to put our cows and our registered Jerseys, he'd put them in there and we would get them in there, and feed them, and milk them. We had to milk by hand, and about as soon as we got electricity, daddy bought an electric "milker," and we would put the cows in there, feed them, and hook up the—

Linda Grissom-Smith (LG):

You had to wait until you were in college before—

KG:

Yeah—

LG:

You got electricity—

KG:

—we had to wait a long time.

DM:

Do you remember what year that was before—I guess it was rural electrification that came out, REA—

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

About what year would that have been?

Martin Grissom (MG):

Thirty-eight, '39.

LG:

Seems like you said you came home from school—

KG:
Huh?

LG:
You came home at Christmas maybe, and the family wanted to surprise you, and instead of having to go out and milk the cows by hand you went out to the barn and they had milkers, didn't they?

KG:
They had milkers, yeah.

DM:
(laughs) That would be a great Christmas present, wouldn't it? (laughs)

KG:
Yeah, it was.

DM:
How many cattle did he move out here when you first moved?

KG:
I would say he—a train—I mean, a car load.

DM:
Oh! He had a big dairy business going already then, it sounds like.

KG:
Well, he didn't have a dairy business at all, we would milk the cow—and run it through a separator—the skim milk went out and fed the hogs, and the cream we took and put it in the car, and took it to Bovina and Farwell, and sold it, and they shipped it to Denver, Colorado, and made butter out of it.

DM:
Okay. How long did he run this business? You were already at least in college, sounds like, and he was still running the business. How long did this business last, up there?

KG:
Oh, it lasted—

LG:

Didn't he have just a few cows, Dad?

KG:

Huh?

LG:

How many cows did you have? Maybe ten?

KG:

Well, ten or fifteen.

LG:

—fifteen at the most. And then he farmed, didn't he?

KG:

Huh?

LG:

Didn't grandpa farm?

KG:

Yeah—yeah he farmed, but half of what he farmed was feed for his cows.

DM:

Right, right. What else did he farm? Did he farm any cotton?

KG:

Yeah, he farmed some cotton, but, it got to be a chore because you had to pick it and put it in a sack, and once you put it in the sack, you might have a sack that was twenty feet long and is full of cotton. You get it up here, and you put it on the scale, you lift it up and you put it on the scales, and you weigh it, and then you drop it and you dump it into the vehicle, and then you pick up this other sack, and do the same thing, and you take all of that to Bovina, and Bovina would run it through the process, and they would separate the seed from the cotton, and they'd make a bale of cotton, and they'd send it off, and they could either make—oh, whatever they—

MG:

Cotton bale?

KG:

They could make something out of it. And they'd separate the—

DM:

The fibers?

KG:

Huh?

DM:

The fibers?

KG:

Yeah, they'd separate the seed from the—

DM:

The fibers—

KG:

Yeah. Yeah, and once they sent the seed and it went one way, it went for cattle feed, and the flint went to make cloth, to make your clothes.

DM:

Now, what about the feed that he raised, was he raising grain sorghum to feed to those cattle?

KG:

Daddy had—he planted "high gear" [tall-growing sorghum] and it came up about this high—

DM:

About three feet.

KG:

And he'd come in there and he would cut it, and it would chop it up, and it would come in a trailer. And once it came into the trailer, he would take it up to the barn and some of it he would unload, and some of it he would just have to stack it up, he couldn't—and he would mix that—he'd mix cottonseed oil meal with that ground feed that he had raised. He raised it, he cut it, chopped it up into little pieces, and mixed it with cottonseed meal, and mix it up, and then he'd grind [inaudible] and put all that together and feed the cattle. And that's what—

DM:

That's pretty self-sufficient, right there, raising your own feed, mixing your own feed.

KG:

We fed from ten to fifteen cows all the time, and we'd go out there and before we got "milkers" we'd go out there and we'd feed them, stick our head in their flank, in their hind legs here, and we'd—

DM:

Ten or fifteen cattle proves to be a lot of cattle when you're milking them by hand, doesn't it?

KG:

Yeah! And whenever you milked five or ten cows, and then we'd take it to the house in buckets, and we'd run it through a cream separator that you turned by hand because we didn't have electricity then. And so, once we got it separated we took the skim milk back to the hogs and we'd put the cream—took it to Bovina and sold it, and traded it for groceries.

DM:

Okay, very good. Did you—the way I'm figuring it, you came out here in about 1924, does that sound right, around 1924? You were only about six years old I know.

KG:

I was six or seven, I think.

DM:

Okay, does that sound about right, that time period?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Did he break out his own land, or was the sod already broken?

KG:

Uncle Tom—Uncle Tom, my wife's brother—

LG:

Your mom's brother.

KG:

—he was in the business of breaking this land up.

DM:

This was your mother's brother?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

And what was his last name?

KG:

Tom Foster.

DM:

Tom Foster, okay, so he was breaking land, and then your dad came out here and farmed it.

KG:

And he broke out two—well, he broke out eighty, and then across the street, he broke out a hundred and sixty.

DM:

Oh really! Okay.

LG:

And Dad, wasn't it true that grandma's family—didn't your grandfather Foster get a job with the land company, to sell land out in West Texas?

DM:

Yeah.

LG:

And so when they moved, your mom kind of wanted to move with her family.

KG:

Oh yeah.

LG:

And I think that they followed them out.

DM:

Right, I see.

KG:

My mother wanted to move from Elk City to Bovina, well, really out there somewhere right, I think it was—he was at Dimmit a while, he was at Friona a while, and I don't know, but anyway.

DM:

Well, eighty acres plus a hundred and sixty acres, that's a lot of land to work. When did he get a tractor?

KG:

When did he?

DM:

When did he? Before the war, or during, or after?

KG:

Oh, he got it before the war.

DM:

Okay. Gas-powered tractor?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Remember what kind it was?

KG:

It was a John Deere.

DM:

Was it? Okay.

KG:

John Deere. And we still used horses because there wasn't any equipment for the tractor. Now Uncle Tom broke out land with his tractor. It was sod, he broke it out, and if you had one hundred and sixty and you wanted it broke out, he'd come break it out for you, and do a little bit, and you'd have to do the rest. Well, it wasn't too much when it comes to horses. It was terrible because you just didn't have the power, and as soon as they could break it out with a tractor, then they could put a disk in there and stir it up, and make it flexible where it would—

DM:

Where you could cultivate it.

KG:

Well, if you come in and you planted, the sod would come together and it would sprout, and you'd have a plant. Now, if it was so clouded and everything, you had a bunch of little knots, well, there wasn't enough soil around for it to catch and start to grow. And that was their problem. That's the reason that they couldn't get tractors to take place of the horses, and so it took them a little while—and once they got that tractor, and the equipment where the dirt would fall around on those seeds when they put them in the ground, and sprout when it came up, and you'd have a plant, cut the head off of it and throw it in a trailer, and if you wanted to you could run it through a thresh machine, you could throw the dummies over here for the cows to eat, and you could throw it over here and take the grain to Bovina and Farwell, and sell it for profit.

DM:

Well I appreciate that explanation. That's really interesting to hear that the tractors early on weren't really equipped to do all of this work, and that it was better to use horses in some things. I'm glad I'm talking to a vocational agriculture teacher who knows these things and can describe that in detail because I've not heard that before. (laughs) That's very interesting. But this was a lot of work I know, because this was a very diversified operation.

KG:

Well, I'll tell you where it is. It was eleven miles east of Farwell, Texas.

DM:

Okay, okay. Now what about a garden crop? Or did you have other livestock like hogs?

KG:

What now?

DM:

Did you have hogs?

KG:

Hogs?

DM:

Did you have and kill your own hogs?

KG:

Ah, Grandpa Foster raised hogs. And so he just planted enough grain. He planted milo. And he would thrash it and then he would put it in barrels, and let it soak, and then he'd put it in the trough for the hogs to eat. And they would grow up fat, and some of the boar hogs he'd castrate them and raise them, and when they got to a certain age, he'd shoot them and take a sharp knife and they'd put foam on that hog, and you'd just scrape all of that hair off, and then you'd cut it and you would have your shoulders, you'd have your hams, and you'd have your—

MG:

Bacon?

DM:

Or pork ribs?

KG:

Ribs! You'd have your ribs and everything. And you could just run a little bit of wire through this one, and you could stack them up here and here, and here and here and here, and hang them on the windmill and if mother wanted anything to eat, she'd have to get Daddy to go up there and get some of that down and then she could cook it and eat it.

DM:

Did y'all scald those hogs? Did you scald them in a barrel before you shaved them? Before you took the hair off?

KG:

No.

DM:

You didn't put them in a barrel of hot water?

KG:

Well we put some in, but we had a vat. It was about this wide. And it was about as long as from here to that furniture.

DM:

So, about twelve feet or so. Ten or twelve—

KG:

And it would be about that deep in water.

DM:

About a foot deep.

KG:

And they would put—they had a rope here, a rope here, a rope here. And it was tied over here on this end. It come under here. The dead hog had been shot. It was dead. Then they'd put it right here, and then they'd get over here, and they'd roll it, and roll it over here, and then they'd take sharp knives and scrape it all off.

DM:

Would they do it on a cold day like today?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Always on a cold day?

KG:

The colder the day the better, I guess, I don't know. That was before my time.

DM:

Okay. Now tell me, Martin, what you—

MG:

Okay. Two of the box cars, one box car from Elk City had the horses in it. The other box car had the cattle, and then his mother, and Dad, and sister rode in a Pullman car. And grandpa rode with the horses, to take care of them.

DM:

Taking up quite a bit of that train it sounds like just to get out here to the Farwell area.

KG:

Yeah, my grandfather, my wife, my mother and father came out—well, my mother was so homesick to see her mother out here at Farwell, Texas, that finally Daddy just—it looked pretty good to him, he sold that and moved out here, and got three sections of land, one hundred and sixty, I mean. Three hundred-and-sixties. Not—

LG:

Three-twenty, right Dad?

DM:

Three twenty? A half a section?

KG:

Yeah, a hundred and sixty, a hundred and sixty, and a hundred and sixty. That's what he had.

DM:

Okay, well pretty good.

KG:

And in one of that hundred and sixty was a lake in the middle of it, and he had it, but he couldn't farm it.

MG:

My grandfather told me that [inaudible].

DM:

(laughs)

MG:

(laughs) That's when they moved.

DM:

Well what did she think about it, what did your mother think about it after they moved out here? Was she happy with this area?

KG:

Whenever her parents moved out here, they moved out and bought a hundred and sixty, and they were happy, and my Uncle Henry was happy, and Uncle Bill was happy, Uncle Jay was happy. The whole family was out here. My mother was out here. My aunt was out here. And they were all at Oklahoma Lane.

LG:

And that's what they named that little area.

DM:

Oh is that right? What was it? Oklha?—

LG:

Oklahoma Lane.

DM:
Oklahoma Lane.

KG:
Oklahoma Lane.

LG:
Yes.

KG:
It's still there.

DM:
It's an area eleven miles east of Farwell, is that right?

KG:
It's eleven miles, or seven or eight miles east of Farwell.

DM:
Is there a cemetery out there? Named Oklahoma Lane, or—?

KG:
That's Oklahoma Lane.

MG:
Yes, its south of Oklahoma Lane.

DM:
There's a cemetery.

LG:
Because there was a Methodist church there, Oklahoma Lane Methodist church.

DM:
Is that right?

KG:
That's where I was raised. I graduated from high school there.

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DM:

Oh, at Oklahoma Lane? Oh I was just about to ask you if you went to school in Farwell but you went at this community.

KG:

I went to Oklahoma Lane.

DM:

Well isn't that something.

KG:

And I came to Tech and I liked to flunk out.

DM:

No!

KG:

Because I didn't have much preparation. But--

LG:

But then he persevered.

DM:

Well let's talk about Oklahoma Lane.

KG:

Two or three of the teachers at Tech I appreciated very much, they knew the situation.

DM:

We're going to talk about them in a little bit and I want you to try to remember names, but let's talk about Oklahoma Lane some. Here's Farwell, so it'd be right—yeah I see it! Good grief. It's right there on Rand McNally, I just don't remember seeing it before. Well, let's talk about Oklahoma Lane a little bit.

KG:

So anyway.

DM:

There was a Methodist church. There was a school. Elementary, middle school, or, junior high school, high school, all grades there at Oklahoma Lane?

KG:
Yeah.

DM:
And you went through all those grades at Oklahoma Lane?

KG:
Well—

LG:
Didn't you say, Dad, that you had teachers that had come from West Texas State? Maybe they had had a year after high school? They were studying to be teachers, and some would come and teach at your school? Maybe they'd be twenty?

KG:
That's a long way, way back.

LG:
Yes. That is a long way back.

MG:
Well that's what he's wanting. (laughs)

DM:
But that's—they still do that, you know, their senior year.

KG:
I went to school at Owl Creek, I had to cross the creek south of Elk City, Oklahoma. And I went up there one day and it had come a rain, and Daddy had put a two-by-twelve across the creek, and he had it tied on one end. The creek got up and washed—and I went home crying, because I couldn't go to school.

DM:
(laughs)

KG:
So they took me to school, Daddy tied the two-by-twelve on both ends, and then I walked to school. We didn't know what a school bus was until we moved to West Texas. And when we moved to West Texas they had--they bought the chassis, they built a bus on there with two by fours, two by sixes, and—

DM:

Well, so you had a school bus out there at Oklahoma Lane.

KG:

They finally got a school bus there, finally.

DM:

Okay, now is the school still there? Do you know if the school building is still standing?

MG:

It's still there, the churches are still there.

DM:

The churches are still there? Now, besides the Methodist church what else was there?

MG:

There was a Baptist church. What was that?

KG:

Huh?

MG:

What is that?

KG:

Well this is at Texas Tech.

MG:

No, that's your barn on the farm.

KG:

That don't look like it.

LG:

Are you sure, Martin?

MG:

Yeah.

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KG:

It looks like one at Texas Tech.

KG:

Well, I'm wrong, that's right.

LG:

(laughs)

MG:

Because yours looked a whole lot like that.

DM:

Let me see it just a second. Ah, that looks like the Dairy Barn at Tech.

MG:

Okay, well that's what it says here.

DM:

Is any of the family place still standing?

KG:

It's still there as far as I know.

DM:

Now besides the Baptist church, the Methodist church, and the school, what other buildings were there in the community?

KG:

They had two houses, and they put three teachers in one and three in the other. And they had come from West Texas State. They had come down there, and that's where they would furnish the three rooms for each. Three teachers in one of them and three in the other. Of course they were all women. (laughs)

DM:

Right, and this was a pretty good school system then to have at least six teachers. It was a pretty good sized community it sounds like. What other buildings? Was there a store? Were there stores?

KG:

There was a—

LG:

Or did you drive Dad? Did you drive to the stores in Bovina and Farwell?

KG:

No.

LG:

Or did you have your own stores there, in Oklahoma Lane? Did you have a grocery there?

KG:

No. We didn't have a grocery store.

DM:

Did you have any kind of agriculture implements or tractor—

KG:

No.

DM:

—no John Deere dealership? No dealerships?

KG:

No.

LG:

It was pretty small.

KG:

If they needed somebody to make a tennis court the farmers would come over there and they'd put a plow down there and they'd slide it around, slide it around. It would be just as smooth as that right there. And the barn—I never had a basketball court. We always had two courts, two here and here. And if you came to Oklahoma Lane, you played on this dirt court and shot at the basket. Or you didn't play. And so we were with Friona, Bovina, Farwell, they all had gyms. We didn't. So we'd have to go to their house and play for home games, and we'd go back to their house to for *our* game.

DM:

(laughs) I'll be.

KG:

And so that happened, and I never had a gym in high school.

DM:

And the competing teams here were Farwell, Bovina, Friona? Any others?

KG:

Oklahoma Lane.

DM:

And Oklahoma Lane, those four.

KG:

Oklahoma Lane, Farwell, Bovina and Friona.

LG:

Was Muleshoe too far away?

KG:

Later on—Lazbuddie, they came in a little later.

DM:

That was a big rivalry then?

KG:

Yeah. Lazbuddie had a dirt court. Oklahoma Lane had a dirt court. We played our home games in Bovina. We played *their* game in Bovina. We played therefore in Farwell. We played Farwell in Oklahoma Lane.

DM:

That doesn't sound quite fair. (laughs)

KG:

No it wasn't quite fair, but that's the way it was.

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DM:

Did the farmers around there grade the roads? Did they take turns grading the roads in the area? With their equipment?

KG:

Well, in Elk City, they did it all. But I remember Daddy saying, "We're gonna do it, but we're gonna separate it out a little bit." So they did, and in a few years they kind of joined together, the whole county did, and they would hire people who kind of knew what they were doing and had better equipment, and they also kept the roads up all year long.

MG:

When you went to your basketball tournaments in Dimmit, who did you stay with? Do you remember?

KG:

Yes.

MG:

Who?

KG:

I stayed with a lady and her husband, three blocks north of Dimmit.

MG:

What was their name? Was it Hance?

KG:

Hance.

MG:

You stayed with Hance.

DM:

Kent Hance's family.

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Up there for a basketball tournament and you stayed with the local families?

KG:

Yeah we would stay with a local family and they fed us breakfast, and boy, it was good. (laughs)

DM:

(laughs) That's pretty good. (laughs) In that case it's good to be the visiting team, isn't it?

KG:

Yeah.

MG:

Did they have any hotels?

KG:

And then we'd play with Bovina. I mean Dimmit.

DM:

With Dimmit, right.

KG:

And of course, Dimmit had never had nothing but an outdoor deal. So they weren't used to—see, we would go to Farwell, or Bovina, they'd let us come up there once or twice a week after they finished working out. We could go up there and they'd let us workout on their court. And of course, Lazbuddie didn't have a court, they were just like we were. But they were so far away from Friona and Farwell that they couldn't do that.

DM:

Oh too bad. What grade were you in—

(Martin Grissom says goodbyes, leaves the room)

—when you started to school in Oklahoma Lane, what grade were you in? Second? Third?

Somewhere in there?

KG:

Seems like it was the third, second or third. I know there were three of us in one class.

DM:

Did they combine any classes, where the second, third, fourth grades were together, with the same teacher? Do you remember anything like that?

KG:

Well, you see, we just had one classroom. And I'd be over here—I'd be here, there were three of us. There'd be four here.

DM:

Three in one corner for one grade, four in another grade in another corner, back in the thing?

KG:

Yeah, and the teacher was at the desk here. There was a student here, one here, one here, one here, and one here. Just around the teacher.

DM:

The students by grade with their teachers gathered around this one room?

KG:

Right. If you were in the first grade, you'd be here. If you were in the second grade you'd be here. Third, here. And you'd get to about—and then I don't know what happened after that, I don't remember. Seems to me like we went to Farwell or Bovina one, but I don't remember.

DM:

Later on maybe in high school you went to another school maybe?

KG:

In high school, maybe, I don't remember.

LG:

Well, I remember you talked about when you were in high school, some of those young teachers that would come from West Texas State, you and some of your friends thought were very nice looking teachers. (laughs)

KG:

Oh yeah, they were, they were. And then of course *that* was when I was at Oklahoma Lane, see, Oklahoma Lane, they got all the teachers. If we went to Farwell, we might, there might be six of us go to Farwell, and six of us that were going to be at Oklahoma Lane, they'd be at Bovina. So you might have half of them at Bovina, half of them at Farwell.

LG:

For high school?

KG:

For school, yes.

DM:

I need to ask you this also. This is a topic that came up the other day with us. How did your school—do you remember how the school was heated? Was it coal? Did y'all use coal heating? In the school, or at home? Do you remember using coal at all?

KG:

They used coal.

DM:

Coal for heating mostly, in the school?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

How about at home?

KG:

Well in the wintertime sometimes it was better to use heads, in other words, cut the head off of sorghum. A lot of times it was better for Daddy to just cut it and make a big pile. And in the wintertime he'd go out, and mother would go out, and take some of this in a bucket, or in a tub, take it up to the house, and then she'd—in the wintertime we'd put those heads in this stove and that's what we'd use for winter. We didn't go—you couldn't buy coal for a long time.

DM:

But you always had a sorghum I guess?

KG:

We always had some kind of sorghums, and a lot of times we would butcher hogs, okay, you would kill a hog, you would skin it, not skin, it but scrape all the hair off of it. You'd have your ham, your shoulders, and in the middle you'd have the ribs, and mother and dad would butcher maybe seven hogs. And that was a three-day job.

DM:

Oh, I imagine.

KG:

And they'd have to scrape all that hair off, and then they'd hang up this ham and put a sheet around it, and a lot of times the cats couldn't get to it, so it was okay. And they'd hang it up here, they'd hang it up in the barn loft, and when—mother, a lot of times, she'd have to undo her rope at the windmill. She'd have to undo her rope and there was a half—I mean a fourth—of a hog, and the rope was tied to the windmill, with a rope through it, and if she wanted any meat she'd have to go out and untie that rope and let it come down, and she'd operate and do what she wanted, and then shed pull it back up and tie it to the post, and the cats couldn't get to it—

LG:

And Dad, you had chickens, and didn't you sometimes have beef that you would use to keep, that grandma put in the freezer later on?

KG:

Then we didn't have freezers.

LG:

Well, that's true. But you had beef and chickens on the farm?

KG:

We had chickens.

DM:

Okay, so chicken and pork, that's pretty self-sufficient.

KG:

You know chickens, you could kill a chicken but it wouldn't last long. They wouldn't last long.

DM:

Did your mother can goods from the garden? Did she can vegetables from the garden?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay, so you had a vegetable garden?

KG:

She—green beans.

LG:

She canned green beans. Carrots.

KG:

And Daddy had corn, he raised corn in the field, and they'd come out and just at the right time they'd strip the rows around, and do what they needed to do to eat it.

DM:

Okay, so corn and green beans, do you think—did you have other vegetable crops?

LG:

Potatoes. Didn't you have potatoes?

KG:

Yeah, we always had potatoes. I got a scar on my elbow right now, I was leading the horse, and Daddy was plowing the garden, and he was leading the horse, and I guess it was twice as, well it probably twice as long, well about the length of this house, a little longer. And I was leading the horse. Well, the good horse for some reason, she wasn't available. And I was leading the horse and she stepped on my foot and the horse jerked away from Daddy, he had ahold of her plow, and the plow hit me, and the plow hit my elbow right here, and I don't know whether it was this one or this one, but anyway, I got a scar there and it stayed with me for a long time.

DM:

What a terrible place to be hit by a plow, right there on that spot of your elbow.

KG:

And so that's the reason we didn't starve to death. We had a big garden, and we worked it. We had green beans, and they'd can it. They had corn, they'd chop the corn off and all it would leave was the stalk—the sole—not the sole—the—

DM:

The shuck?

KG:

Well, the shuck would burn. The cob. And so that's what we did.

DM:

Now when you used the grain sorghum heads, when you burn those, was it a hot enough fire to cook on? Did they cook over that fire?

KG:

We never did do that.

DM:

Okay, you didn't cook over it?

LG:

Did Grandma use wood? Did she burn wood in the stove to cook?

KG:

Wood? There wasn't any wood in West Texas.

LG:

So what did she use if she didn't use wood?

KG:

She burned kaffir heads, and corn. The hogs would eat the corn and leave the cob.

LG:

So she burned corn cobs?

KG:

And she would do that, and Daddy could go to town and buy coal, and they used coal for Mother to cook in.

LG:

And you used kerosene lamps to read?

KG:

We used kerosene lamps, uh-huh.

DM:

Now when you were in school did you take vocational agriculture course when you got into high school?

KG:

What was that?

DM:

Did you take vocational agriculture, "vo-ag," classes when you were in high school?

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KG:

We would want to know whether that stuck or whether it was dead.

DM:

No, I'm talking about the classes that you took in high school. You know you taught vo-ag out here at Shallowater right? Was it not Shallowater? Where was that?

LG:

No you taught social studies at Shallowater.

KG:

I taught some at Bovina, I mean, Oklahoma Lane.

LG:

I think he taught mostly to veterans after he got out of the service. Did you teach agriculture to the veterans at night?

KG:

I did at night, but that was after the war, that was '45.

DM:

Well I was wondering when you were in high school, if they had agriculture classes?

LG:

Or did you have to wait until you got to Tech?

KG:

No.

DM:

Okay, did they have FFA?

KG:

Oklahoma Lane didn't. Farwell did, Bovina did, but Lazbuddie and Oklahoma Lane didn't have vocational agriculture. When I graduated from college, my first job was vocational agriculture, and—

LG:

Did you teach back there, Dad? When you first got out of college?

KG:

No. Wait, let's see—

DM:

That's okay, let's think about that one a little bit, let's talk a little bit about—

KG:

Well, the first thing I had to do was stay out of the draft, and so I wound up joining the Marines because I didn't want to be in the infantry.

DM:

Well, let's talk about Texas Tech first, and then we'll get up there to the war—

KG:

How much are you going to pay me for all of this?

DM:

Oh we don't have any money. (laughs)

LG:

Maybe he'll buy you a Coke, Dad?

DM:

I'll buy you a Coke. (laughs) A Diet Coke. (laughs) It is good information. When did you graduate from high school? Do you remember what year that was?

LG:

Was it '36 Dad?

KG:

Gosh no, let's see. I was fourteen, I was born in 1918.

DM:

Fourteen? That must have been from junior high maybe. I'm wondering when you left Oklahoma Lane and you came out here to Texas Tech. Did you go straight from school there to Texas Tech?

KG:

Yeah, I went from Oklahoma Lane to Texas Tech.

LG:

I think he said it took him five years.

DM:

So maybe 1936? Somewhere in there?

KG:

See they didn't have vocational agriculture at Oklahoma Lane. That's out. All you had was English, math, and "put in more cobs because it's getting cold." (laughs)

DM:

(laughs) Well that's enough to take care of right there. Was it about 1936 or 1937 when you came out here to Texas Tech? Does that sound right?

LG:

Some people, seems like some high schools, only had eleven years, of school, at some time, but I know you graduated from Tech in '41, and it seems like you told me that you took a few of those classes a second time so that it took maybe five years, does that sound about right?

KG:

Yeah.

LG:

So '35 or '36?

KG:

I graduated from high school I think in '35.

DM:

Well, you know what, this is interesting too, then. You were still out there near Farwell during the really bad Dust Bowl days.

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you remember that pretty well?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you remember what they called "Black Friday?" Oh you know they labelled these names, you might not have heard them at the time, but can you describe some of the dust storms? What were they like? I know they weren't like they are today, they were much worse, I understand.

KG:

Well, they were just bad. You could be driving down the road, and there could be one car a block ahead of you, and him standing still, and by the time you saw him you couldn't stop before you hit him. That's how bad it was.

DM:

How did it affect the farm? Did it hurt your crops? Did it hurt your livestock?

KG:

What do you mean?

DM:

Well, did all of this dust blowing over, and this drought for that matter, did it hurt your crops? Did it hurt your livestock? Do you remember there being a time when it was difficult to produce?

KG:

It was difficult to keep the horses and the cows in a grass pasture, where they wouldn't have to breathe all that dust and sand. You don't really know unless you've been there. It's never been that bad since. Because then they came along here and they saw the farmers' plows, that they could plow the land and prevent it from blowing.

DM:

From what I've heard the drought of the fifties was really drier than the drought of the thirties, but by then they had improved things a little bit so that the dust storms weren't so bad. Have you ever heard anything like that? A comparison between the thirties and the fifties? Because you know the early fifties, that was a dry bad time as well.

KG:

I don't know too much.

LG:

Were you able to keep some of the horses and the cows in the barn, Dad? Or did they have to stay out?

KG:

We kept them in the—

LG:

In the barn?

KG:

The horses had stalls. There was a stall here, and a horse here, and a horse here. Every—and all of them were separated, yet they were all in the same barn. And the cows was the same way, only they came in and there would be six or seven of them, and we'd feed them, milk them, and when we got milkers, well, we could put the milkers on and put the milk in a bucket and take it in and pour it in to cream cans, and the next day or two we'd have to take it in and sell it, because if not it would start spoiling. And so we'd have to take it to Bovina and sell it, and they'd take it, and they couldn't do much with it. They'd ship it to Trinidad, Colorado, and Colorado would pay them for it, and then whenever they paid them, they would come to the grocery store in Bovina and he'd pay us. By the time they got their part, and this part and this one, we didn't have much left. (laughs)

DM:

That seems to be how it works alright. (laughs) Now this is interesting, you keep mentioning the business you did at Bovina, sounds like you did more business at Bovina than you did at Farwell. Was that the case?

KG:

Yes.

DM:

Did Bovina have more—?

KG:

They would ship it, they would ship it. The merchant that ran the grocery store in Bovina, he would take it and okay—here's ten gallons of cream. He weighs it, he gives you what he can do, and he'll let you buy groceries. Farwell would ship it, and when it got up there, they'd send you the check back so we took our cream to Bovina, he'd pay us, and when it came back if it was not enough, we'd have to pay him a little extra. And if it was too much, he'd have to pay us a little extra.

LG:

Wasn't Bovina closer than Farwell?

KG:

It was two or three miles closer.

DM:

But that makes sense that the business arrangement was a little bit better you could go ahead and get your groceries and make up the difference later.

KG:

I could bring a ten gallon can of cream to Bovina and they would buy it.

DM:

What could you get for a ten gallon can of cream? Let's say, just roughly speaking, what would that exchange for? Ten gallons of cream, how much groceries could you get for that much cream?

KG:

Not much.

DM:

At least you grew your own food, or a lot of it.

KG:

Well, what would you be buying?

DM:

Yeah, what would you buy there at the store?

KG:

Well you couldn't buy milk, you couldn't buy milk, you couldn't ship milk by buggy, or horses from Amarillo to Farwell. By the time it got there it'd spoil.

LG:

I bet you bought sugar, and flour.

DM:

Dry goods.

KG:

Right, you could buy sugar, flour, and that's the reason the farmers butchered their own cattle. You couldn't buy meat in Bovina or Farwell, either one.

DM:

Well let's talk now about coming out to Texas Tech. You came out here in about 1935. Had you ever been to Lubbock before?

KG:

Yes.

DM:

When did you decide that you wanted to go to Texas Tech?

KG:

Well, Dr. Overton—I mean the doctors in Lubbock—was the best, and we would sell a cow to bring a child to Lubbock because they had good doctors. And you could take them to Clovis, and chances are, you wouldn't take them home. And so, we always, when we got sick, Mother and Dad took us to Lubbock.

DM:

Well that's interesting because it's a lot farther to Lubbock than to Clovis, so there must have been a big difference in the doctors, in those two cities. So how long would it take you to get to Lubbock from Oklahoma Lane?

KG:

It would take about three or four hours.

LG:

Grandpa had a car by then.

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

The roads were still rough I would imagine, it was a bit slow.

KG:

There weren't any paved roads.

DM:

So you knew about Lubbock. You had been to Lubbock. I guess you had seen Texas Tech?

KG:
Yeah.

DM:
Did your parents encourage you to go to Texas Tech, or is this something you came up with on your own?

KG:
I don't remember.

LG:
I remember you telling me Dad, just this past year, that there was someone that told you about this new school, down, and maybe you'd be interested.

KG:
Yeah, and I forgot who it was.

LG:
But I do remember somebody sugg—because some people would go to West Texas.

KG:
Yeah, most people would leave Oklahoma Lane, and go to Canyon.

LG:
But it seems like one of your teachers, or one of your family friends, somebody said, “You know they have this new school, down there in Lubbock, and maybe you might want to try it out.”

KG:
I can't remember it, but, once my mother and dad, once we went down there, I was too old, they took the younger ones down there, and they went to the doctor, Dr. Overton.

LG:
But you were the first one in your family to go to Tech.

KG:
Yeah.

DM:
Well, when you came out here, where did you live? Did you live on campus, or did you have a place to live off-campus?

KG:

You mean when I came to Tech? Well, I don't know exactly, but the second year, you know, we had Jersey cows. And Mrs. Coats, ran a boarding house, and I was talking to her one day and we got to visiting, and so Daddy said, "Yeah, I can do that." So what happened was, you know there where that new place is right east of the stadium—

DM:

The Overton Hotel, is that what you're talking about?

KG:

Yeah that's it, right in there. I talked to those people there and I said, "I think I got a deal where I can furnish milk to a lady on 24th Street, if I could keep my cow here. And I'll pay you so much, and I'll force you—they'll furnish me the water, for the cow." And Daddy said, "Well yeah." So my dad had five, or six, or ten, and he was glad to get rid of them. (laughs) So he made some panels, and just a little shed about as big as a bathroom, but the cow could get in there out of the hail. So I spent four and a half years, riding my bicycle up to twenty-four—right there just east of the stadium. I fell as hard on the stadium as I ever fell in my life. I had gone up there to milk the cow and I was taking it to 2420 Main, and I hit an icy spot, it went up, and I came down on my head, the bicycle on top of me, and the car behind me just barely missed me, and I got up and I said "I'm sorry." So I took her the empty bucket of milk that I didn't have, and she said that's just fine.

DM:

This is Mrs. Coats? Okay.

KG:

Do you know her?

DM:

No you mentioned her earlier, but it was 2420 Main Street? Is that where it was?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Well, I'll be.

KG:

So, from then on I'd go up there and I'd feed old Horns, and talk to her.

DM:

“Horns” was the cow?

KG:

Yeah, I’d talk to her, she didn’t talk back. (laughs) I talked to her, and I’d milk her, and I’d put the milk on a deal on my bicycle, that could hold milk—

DM:

It would hold the canister?

KG:

Yeah. It was tin. So, I’d milk her, take it down and give it to Mrs. Darden, and Mrs. Darden would take it up and the next time I’d have to go up, I’d feed old Horns, talk to her, some days when I talked to her, I wouldn’t tell anybody I’d talked to her. (laughs)

DM:

Now you said Mrs. Darden. Did you mean Mrs. Coats?

KG:

Yeah.

LG:

I’ve heard more about Mrs. Darden.

DM:

Okay, go ahead and add it if you—

LG:

Well no I just remember because later on there was a coach here at Shallowater and he was Coach Darden, and he was related to this lady who ran the boarding school, I mean the boarding house.

DM:

Do you know how that was spelled by the way, Mrs. Coats? C-o-? Do you know how she spelled her name? Mrs. Coats?

KG:

C-o-a-t-s.

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LG:

Did you take milk to both of them Dad? Both ladies? While you were—

KG:

Mrs. Darden was the last one, Mrs. Coats was the first one.

DM:

Okay, so you were milking every day, you were milking Horns—

LG:

Twice a day.

DM:

—twice a day, making the rounds to Mrs. Coats—

KG:

No, no, no. I had Horns in September, October and November, well she was dropping down. She wasn't giving quite enough milk, so my dad came down, he got the old cow, took her home, and put a fresh cow in, and then I had enough to do me, to finish up the year. It took two cows to furnish enough milk for me to get my room and board.

DM:

The first one was Horns. Who was the second one? What was the second one's name?

KG:

I can't remember that.

DM:

Okay, that's alright. Well that's great. That's how you got your room and board. Do you know how much Mrs. Coats was charging other people at that time?

KG:

I would think from sixteen to twenty-five a month.

DM:

A month, okay. Then you did pretty well, then. And did you have to pay the people over across from the stadium? Did you have to pay them something to keep your cow?

KG:

I paid them so much, I forgot now how much. They were very nice people. See, I had to carry the water from their windmill to my tub for the cow. So I would milk her and then I would cut another bucket, I'd have to carry one or two bucketfuls to put in the tub for the old cow to drink. If she couldn't drink water, she wouldn't make milk. So I would give her all the water she wanted to drink.

DM:

Well, that was a lot of work on top of taking classes and everything else that was going on at that time. Do you remember any of the professors, any of the teachers' names? Were there any that made a real impression on you? Whether they were good teachers, or not good teachers? Do you remember—?

KG:

Oh, I couldn't find fault with the teachers. Ray Chappelle, W. L. Langley, Coats.

DM:

Coats? Mrs. Coats' husband? What did he teach?

KG:

I don't think he taught anything. I think that they ran a boarding house. Their son went to college.

DM:

What about people who taught classes? Are there any classes that you really remember, that you remember as being good classes, or bad classes? Are there subjects that you liked better than other subjects?

LG:

You told me once about registration, and how hard it was because they didn't have very many options. If you got there to register and the classes were full, you just had to wait.

KG:

Yeah. If you had to have a certain, say—

DM:

Certain course?

KG:

Yeah.

LG:

And you registered with a pencil didn't you, Dad?

KG:

Yeah I did it with a pencil. And they fussed at me because "surely you can afford a pen."

DM:

(laughs) Do you remember how much it cost to go to school? How much you had to pay at the registrar's office?

KG:

Well let's see, I don't know.

DM:

That's okay; I can't remember what I had to pay when I started. (laughs)

LG:

I remember you said you had the same English teacher. He kind of struggled with his English class. And didn't you have the same teacher? One semester, and then you had to take the same teacher again?

DM:

Do you remember his name?

LG:

I think it was a lady. Was it a lady?

KG:

Oh, the woman—I can't remember her name. Chappelle was one of them—

DM:

Chappelle?

KG:

But he wasn't one of those teachers. I had him, he was a good teacher.

LG:

And Dad, didn't you help with the football team?

KG:

I did!

DM:

Well, tell me about that.

KG:

I was one of the managers, for the football team. And then it got to the point where [Dean Latty] called me in and bawled me out, he said, "If you don't quit watering those elephants over there," he says, "You're going to flunk out of college, and, you don't do nothing." And he'd just chew, chew, and chew.

DM:

Now, he was talking about you taking water to the football players? (laughs)

KG:

Right!

DM:

And he thought they were drinking too much water? (laughs)

KG:

Right! (laughs)

DM:

(laughs) What else did you do for the team? Did you have other responsibilities, helping with the team?

KG:

(laughs) I don't remember, I had a good time, though.

DM:

You were there at a good time for football, because they did real well in the late thirties. Thirty-eight or thirty-nine, they went to the Cotton Bowl one of those years, do you remember that? Do you remember Elmer Tarbox and all those guys?

KG:

Yeah I went with them. Yeah Elmer, old Elmer, sure!

DM:

Oh I wanted to tell you where were going to keep this recording. We have Elmer Tarbox's football uniform from that time, yeah, we've got his football uniform.

KG:

You mean you're going to keep this?

DM:

Yeah, were going to keep what we're talking about here—

KG:

(laughs)

DM:

(laughs) —in the same place where we keep these things, we have Elmer's uniform from back when you were there helping with the team.

KG:

See, Elmer Tarbox was a friend of mine. He didn't know it, but he was. I helped him out, I made sure that his shoes were shined and they had strings in them.

DM:

Right, his cleats, his football cleats. You mentioned earlier that there were some teachers that worked with you. That Oklahoma Lane schools didn't quite prepare their students for a place like Texas Tech. but that some of the teachers here worked with you? Did I understand that right? Did you have any teachers, kind of, help you along the way?

KG:

I don't remember them but nearly every English course I took, the teachers had to help, or I wouldn't have made it.

DM:

But you found them helpful?

KG:

They were very helpful.

DM:

Do you remember any of the teacher's names, when you were out here?

KG:

Name 'em.

DM:

Oh well, that would be hard for me, now I might would recognize them if I—

LG:

You had chemistry too. Didn't you have to take chemistry?

KG:

Oh yeah! See I had to have chemistry. And most Ag teachers—if you were agriculture, why are you taking chemistry? But I had to take it because I thought I might want to fly.

DM:

You were already interested in aviation?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Uh-huh. Well, how did that begin? Did you ever see any planes go over when you were at Oklahoma Lane? Did you have barnstormers, or anyone like that who flew over, and put on shows?

KG:

No, I just thought it would be fun to fly.

DM:

Even as a child?

KG:

Yeah. I enjoyed watching airplanes. And when I came to Tech, of course, I couldn't—I had a hard time at Tech. I didn't have much help at Oklahoma Lane.

DM:

But you did end up graduating from Texas Tech? In 1941? Does that sound right?

KG:

Huh, I guess. Yeah.

DM:

Which is also the same year of Pearl Harbor, December seventh of '41. So, what it sounds like is, you graduated from Tech and then all of a sudden the United States was at war. Do you remember those times? Do you remember when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Where were you? Do you know? Do you remember where you were, what you were doing?

KG:

Yeah, I was in my car at Oklahoma Lane, with my mother and dad, and I was going to Clovis, I was going to the show by myself. And on, I guess, about three miles between Oklahoma Lane and Farwell, we lived ten miles east of Farwell, and I had gone about five miles and I heard over the radio that the Japanese had plastered Pearl Harbor. So, I turned around and I go back and I talked to Mother and Dad and I told them about it and we started listening. So, I stayed all night, and the next night I went back to Tech and when I got back there, several of the professors or something said something about it, and there was a recruiter [that had] come in and my number was right on top. I was going and I wasn't about to be drafted. So, when I saw that, I said, "Well, to heck with it," and that's when I joined the Marines, joined the Navy. I joined the Navy and I went through Navy flight school. And then when I went through Navy flight school, then when I got my commission, I got my commission as a second lieutenant in the Marines, rather than a ensign in the Navy.

DM:

Was this your choice? Did you choose to go into the Marines?

KG:

Yes. The reason was, there was a recruiter coming through Lubbock earlier, and I had nearly joined, but I didn't. I've always been grateful that I didn't. Because then I was going straight into infantry. But anyway, I decided then that I was going to be a pilot. Why not? They were going to pay for it.

DM:

And you had that interest already, aviation.

KG:

Yeah I thought I would love to fly. But anyway, as soon as I got a chance I joined, and I started and when through flight school.

DM:

Okay, so this happened very quickly after Pearl Harbor?

KG:

As quick as I could—well, I finished what I was taking at Tech. And a recruiter came in, and he was a good kid, we visited a little bit, and he was an enlisted man and he knew what he was talking about. And he said, “Why don’t you join to be an officer?” I said, “Well, what about it?” And he told me about it. He said, “They have it a little better than us enlisted men.”

DM:

So he talked you in to going to OCS [Officer Candidate School]?

KG:

So I went to Officer Training School, wound up going to Quantico, Virginia, and I was a second lieutenant in the Marines. Well, they didn’t say anything about flying, and I went through the training there, and I went through some there, and they were hunting cadets to join the flying. So I joined. And I come home and I told Mother and Daddy, I said, “I joined the Marines and I’m going through flight school, and they both just nearly fainted. ‘Here you are, trying to go to college, and you wind up joining the Marines, and you’re going to fly.’”

LG:

I think you had already graduated. Seems like when you graduated from Tech, you got a job up in the Farwell area?

KG:

I did. I got a job at Bovina.

LG:

Right, and so I think he had been working for a while, and he told me that after that attack on Pearl Harbor, everybody, there was a lot of fevered pitch to join the service.

KG:

Well, see I had joined, but it was early, and so I think I met once a month. We met once or twice a month, I don’t know, down at Tech.

DM:

You had to come back down here?

KG:

Well, yeah, I was still in school. So I was in school but these two or three guys that I liked and everything, they joined, they were in the Marines, so I went with them.

LG:

Was it like ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corp] Dad?

KG:

Well, it was kind of like ROTC but it wasn't.

DM:

This was early, and eventually Texas Tech set up a civil air patrol, and cadet you know—

KG:

It was real early. I didn't even tell Mother and Dad about joining the service. I didn't think I was joining the service, I thought I was just joining the Marines and everything—

DM:

Going into the flight training at least?

KG:

Yeah. I didn't know what I was doing. I did know that I was going to be drafted. I was going to be drafted, and pretty doggone quick. I knew I either had to do something, this old boy said "Do something or get off the boat."

DM:

I'm going to pause this just a second—

DM:

Well, let's talk about your flight training.

KG:

Okay. I enjoyed it.

DM:

Where did you go? Where did they send you?

KG:

I went to—now you'll have to, I'll have to think a little about this. (laughs)

DM:

Did you go to Dallas first?

KG:

I went to Dallas, and I went to talk to them, and I talked to one or two people that I knew, and I knew I was going to be drafted, and it was pretty doggone quick, because the war was just about to start. So I went to talk to Chappelle, or one or two of the teachers there at Tech that I knew, and they suggested that, "With your training and your ability, you'd make one hell of a good officer." And I said, "Well, it looks like they're going to pull me in whether I like it or not," and then they smiled and said, "I think you're right, I think in three months you'll be drafted by either the Army, the Navy, or somebody like that." So I joined. And I went home and told my mother and Dad, and Dad cried by himself, but Mother just broke down. And Mom said, "Why did you do that?" And I said well, I thought it was going to be the best for me, and she said, "Well, I hope it is." And lo and behold, I finished Tech, and when I finished Tech they called me and I went in and went through.

DM:

Is this when you went down to Dallas?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Did you get any training there, or did they just sign you in?

KG:

I went to Dallas and joined up and everything, and they shipped me to somewhere in Louisiana, I mean—what's the University down in—?

DM:

In Louisiana?

KG:

No, Georgia?

DM:

Oh, in Georgia. You went to Athens, Georgia.

KG:

Yeah. I went to Athens, Georgia and I went through three months of training.

DM:

Was this basic training?

KG:

Basic training. We took four or five courses in math, and some in this, and some in that, and then we had, of course, athletics, and I went through that, and I wound up doing what I was supposed to do. Then, I forgot now what the next step was.

DM:

Somewhere along the way you went—well at Athens you didn't receive any flight training, did you? It was all basic. Did you start your flight training in the next stage?

KG:

Yeah, and it was in Dallas.

DM:

Do you know what base you were at?

KG:

There wasn't a base. It was a little airstrip between Dallas and Fort Worth.

DM:

Do you remember what it was called?

KG:

Yellow Peril.

DM:

(laughs) What was it? The—?

KG:

Yellow Peril.

DM:

"The Yellow Peril." That's interesting.

KG:

It was yellow. And we learned to fly. We learned to land. We learned to come up here and do a slow roll coming straight down doing this, pull out, and everything.

DM:

Was this in the two-winged plane? The biplane?

KG:

Yeah. Yellow Peril. That's what we called it, the Yellow Peril.

DM:

This airstrip was called the Yellow Peril?

KG:

Yeah. We landed and everything between Dallas and Fort Worth. And last time I was by there, it's still there. So, I went through that. And when I got to there, I never will forget it, I felt so sorry for my mother, but it turned out okay. I came home and told her that I had joined the Navy Air Corps, and I was going to be a pilot. And she cried; it just bothered her.

LG:

But you know you were a good start. My other Uncle, the second son, joined the Marines, did Leon join the Marines?

KG:

Yeah.

LG:

And your younger brother was in the Navy, so—

DM:

It was going to happen.

LG:

—it was going to happen.

DM:

So it really worked out well—

KG:

I knew it was, and I thought it would work out the best, and it did.

DM:

And it did, right.

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KG:

Then I went through flight school in Dallas.

DM:

Now, in Dallas, this was the first time you ever flew a plane right?

KG:

Right.

DM:

They started you at the very basics of how to fly a plane and then you advanced through barrel rolls, and dives and—

KG:

I had never been in an airplane.

DM:

(laughs) Can you see these guys at a young age like that, you put them out there in planes and they're doing all kinds of acrobatics? (laughs) That's incredible.

KG:

So.

DM:

So after Dallas?

KG:

I was flying the Yellow Peril, what we called the Yellow Peril. I got a picture of it here somewhere, but anyway—

DM:

And after that training—

KG:

After that training I went to the Naval Air Station down in Texas, Corpus Christi.

DM:

How long were you at Dallas? Do you know how long that training lasted?

KG:

Probably two or three months.

DM:

That's a lot of learning in a short amount of time.

KG:

And then when I went to Corpus Christi, it was two or three months, but then I had to learn to fly by instruments. See, I didn't have to fly by instruments at Dallas, it was all—and then, when I got to Corpus, then I had to—they put me in this cage and put a—and you learned to fly an airplane from what's in this picture.

DM:

So it's a flight simulator?

KG:

Right, so I had to go through that, and then I had to learn to fly—had to learn to do everything I had to do, I had to do it. And then when I got a little further along I had to learn to fly at night. And I also learned to fly without any—blind. I couldn't see anything but the instruments. I had to learn to fly an airplane, how many feet from the ground, how fast I was going, where I was going. I had to do all of that blind, I couldn't see a thing.

DM:

And hope that your instruments are correct. (laughs)

KG:

And hope the instruments are correct. Right.

DM:

Did they put you in an airplane at all down at Corpus Christi, or were you just using flight simulators down there?

KG:

It didn't bother me at all, I said—I stuck my head in it, I'm going with it, if I never make it I tried, I wanted to, I tried. And I told my mother and dad about it and I know at night they just sat down and cried. But it turned out that that's what I wanted to do and I did it.

DM:

At Corpus Christi, did they ever put you in an airplane down there, or were you just using the flight simulators? Did you just use the panels or did they put you in an airplane down at Corpus?

KG:

First, they put me in the panels. You learned to fly the airplane.

DM:

And then they put you in an airplane?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you remember what kind of airplane it was?

KG:

The SB2C Stearman. Two wings. And we would come up, and they'd tell us to get to twelve thousand feet, and we'd go straight down. Straight down at the Earth, and then pull her out. And you'd do that. And a lot of times, a lot of times I've come home with—there'd be heads of feed up like this, and I'd come back with heads of feed in the airplane. And I'd come down, and then I would pull out, and get the hell out of there.

DM:

It sounds like they were already teaching you to dive bomb.

KG:

They are! That's what they taught me to do.

DM:

But it seems like kind of an early stage, but they already had you in it. And this is happening so fast you know—

KG:

Then all of a sudden, I realized what I was doing. I was going to be a dive bomber pilot. And about three or four weeks, three or four weeks, or six weeks maybe, I don't know, I got my commission. I was second lieutenant. And—

LG:

Where did you go next Dad, after Corpus Christi?

KG:

Once I dived here, I had my flight lessons, I was able to dive, and I think I got two weeks' vacation. And I went to Farwell and visited with my family, and then I went from there to San

Diego, went up to Marine base at El Toro, and at El Toro I joined the ship that I was supposed to be on. It turned out, when I was on this ship, I went to Hawaii. We were stationed there a while. And we went on out to the Pacific, I mean out to the Philippines. Well, I had never had any training of dropping bombs or anything, I would just fly. Well, when I got to the Philippines, then I realized what was happening. I'd come straight down on the target, I'd hit a certain altitude, I'd drop my bombs, pull out, get the hell out of there—

DM:

Similar to what you were doing in Corpus, but now in a nice aircraft?

KG:

I was dropping something that would explode. And one or two boys got a little low, and when their bomb exploded it nearly broke up their wings. They made it back to the base, but they never got that low anymore. I've come back with tree leaves in the airplane.

DM:

Yeah, it seems like if the explosion would throw some shrapnel your way, some debris would hurt your plane if you were too close to it. When you were at El Toro, did you do any flight training there? Did you do any flight training at El Toro? No?

KG:

We just practiced.

DM:

But at Honolulu it looked like you did, because you have some photographs of flying in formation, over Diamond Head—

KG:

Yeah, we were flying—

DM:

You were learning? Is that where you learned to fly in formation?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

But you weren't really dive bombing there, you were flying in formation?

KG:

But then, whenever we got out in the—when the war started—when we got out where the war was I was a leader. I had—here I am, I got a wingman here, a wingman here, one under here, one under here, and one under here. And the target is here. We'd come in at about fifteen—oh I guess twelve thousand feet—and all of a sudden, there's the target. And we'd open our diving flaps, and they came like this. Now landing flaps, like this, but diving, whenever we were diving it wasn't like this, it was straight down, and we'd come in straight down and we'd drop our bombs and get the hell out of there as fast as we could.

DM:

Those Douglas dive bombers were really powerful airplanes, I understand, they had quite an engine, on, do you—

KG:

Well, it wasn't too much engine.

DM:

It wasn't?

KG:

No, but it was enough.

DM:

Did you ever hear how fast you were going in those dives?

KG:

Well, we were probably going—well, see, when we started down we would open our flaps like this, well what we would do is we'd give it the gas, okay, when we come down, say here at a thousand feet, we'd drop our bombs. So when we'd drop our bombs, what we'd want to do is close our flaps. Well, if you don't look out you'll get too low, and when you close your flaps you're going to crash. So we'd have to come in and it didn't—you can't do it by the instrument, that's too slow. The instrument was too slow. And so we'd put our flaps down, we'd drop our bombs, break our dive, and get the hell out of there. For some reason, it made those people mad.

DM:

Made what people mad? People you were bombing? (laughs)

KG:

Yeah.

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DM:

Where did you first go? Did you say you went to the Philippines first, from Hawaii? Was your first bombing mission in the Philippines?

KG:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you know which part of the Philippines, starting out?

KG:

It was the one that Manila is on.

DM:

Yeah, Luzon? On Luzon—

KG:

We were north of Lingayen Gulf, between there and—there was a lot of areas right in there north of—

DM:

Manila?

KG:

Manila.

LG:

You always talked about Mindanao.

DM:

Now that's southern, that's southern. Yeah you were southern Philippines at Mindanao, you were northern Philippines at Luzon, and north of Manila, but you said you were also around Leyte, which is in the center of that cluster of islands so, sounds like you had a lot of action in the Philippines.

KG:

We did.

DM:

Started out in the north it sounds like.

KG:

We wound up down on the big island.

DM:

That's Mindanao.

KG:

Mindanao. That was our last—generally that was our last bomb.

DM:

What were you bombing? Were you bombing Japanese military installations, or were you bombing their ammunition dumps, or did you just bomb what you were told to bomb?

KG:

We didn't know what we were bombing.

DM:

Okay, so you were given a target—

KG:

We'd come over, if we were up here say at twelve thousand feet, or fourteen. Okay, we call in there and we didn't want to tell them where we were going to bomb, but we knew exactly where we were going to drop the bomb. So we would talk to the people back there, and they had us on TV, and they would tell us about a little bit of this or that—

DM:

That had you on radar up there?

KG:

Yeah, and so they'd say, "This, this, this, this," and we would say "Okay, okay." And all of a sudden there it was. If I was leading the flight, and I was leading the flight most of the time, all of a sudden I would open my flaps like this. Well, I was coming straight down, right straight down on the target, and when I got where I thought it was about right. You couldn't depend on the instruments to tell you the truth—

DM:

You were eyeballing it—

KG:

You eyeballed it. You either did it or you didn't. So I would come straight down, drop my bombs, and get the hell out of there. Because there were seven, or eight, or ten planes right behind me, and if they'd come off the target a little bit, they might hit me. So, we'd drop our bombs here, and as soon as I had dropped my bombs, I broke my dive, closed my flaps, come down on tree top level, and I was going just like that, I was getting the hell out of there.

DM:

How many dives like this do you think you participated in?

KG:

Do what now?

DM:

Do you have any idea how many times you did this during the war? You dive bombed targets?

KG:

I had over sixty drops.

DM:

In the course of any of these, did you lose any planes in your squadron?

KG:

Yeah, we lost some. I didn't.

DM:

No, because your right here with us today. But it just seems so difficult—it seems like it would be so difficult to eyeball this. Coming down on the earth as fast as you were going, and being able to say, "This is the time." It seems like there would be—one little bit of error there would be a catastrophe. Because, I mean, what were you going by? Where you looking at trees? Were you looking at buildings? How did you know how to judge how far away you were from the target?

KG:

Don't stare at the target.

DM:

Don't stare at the target.

KG:

If you stare at it, you'll hit it!

DM:

Okay, that makes sense.

LG:

And Dad, did you have a gunner? Didn't you have a gunner in the back of your plane?

KG:

Yeah, I had a gunner in the back, but he was looking at where we had been, and I'm in front, I go straight down, and he's setting back there at the back, and if there were any enemies coming out, well, he shoots them. But all of the targets that were there, is what's on the ground.

DM:

Where there any other crew members besides you two? How many crew members did you have on that plane?

KG:

Two.

DM:

Just you and your gunner?

KG:

Me and my gunner.

DM:

So you were getting your instructions by radio—

KG:

We didn't have instructions. They told us where the target was. Why let the enemy know what you're going to do? They told us where we were going. They told us what the spot looked like. And we just hoped we got it right.

DM:

Did you ever encounter any Japanese aircraft during? During these sixty-some-odd missions, did you ever see—were you ever attacked by Japanese aircraft?

KG:

No, we were lucky.

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LG:

So your gunner never had to fire on anybody? Your gunner never had to fire on anybody in the back?

KG:

No.

DM:

He was along for the ride.

LG:

That's pretty good.

DM:

Yeah. (laughs)

KG:

Well we were just hoping that the gunner in the back didn't cut loose and get one of our own planes, because they were just kids, they might not have been over nineteen. I kept telling mine; don't shoot another airplane until you're sure that it's the enemy.

DM:

Couldn't you see how that would happen though, you know, you have a whole squadron—

KG:

And I don't see—I imagine somebody has killed probably somebody in a dive.

DM:

In the middle of this, what were your thoughts? Were you worried? Were you afraid? Did you feel fear? Were you just concentrating on what you were doing and not thinking of anything else? What went through your mind?

KG:

I don't know.

DM:

You don't remember being afraid maybe the first time you dive bombed on a target?

KG:

Well, I was afraid the first time, but when you practice it, I knew exactly—all I had to do was go straight down on the target. Here's the target over here, well, if you dropped the bomb over here it won't do any good. So, and a lot of times we would have this. The infantries down on the ground, and they send up, "Hey, check so and so, so, so, and so," and what that so, so, so was, they told us what it was. They might say, "Cow." Or they might say, "Car."

DM:

A code word?

KG:

Yeah. Well, if they say "car," you watch for the leader, and when he gets ready to go, everybody else just about ready to go. He'd come straight down. When he came straight down, he gets to here, he drops his bomb, and he does heck to get out of there, because if he doesn't, if this guy behind him mixes up and moves over here, then the two of you will crash. Whenever I was leading it was a lot of fun, because I'd come straight, down, I'd drop my bomb and I'd go just as low as I could. I came back a lot of times with tree leaves in that airplane. If he's going to get me, he's going to get me from above, and not underneath. I'd get the heck out of there, and we'd get out here and turn up and go back to the base, land, go on in, give our report over and sit down and have a cup of coffee.

DM:

And wait for the next one?

KG:

And the next day, you'd do it again.

DM:

Was it pretty much daily?

KG:

Yeah I had fifty-four missions against the Japanese.

LG:

And Dad you talked about, I don't know where, which location, but you talked about living in sort of a hut, and you had—there was a Filipino girl that would come, and you and your friends would pay her to kind of sweep the floor. Do you remember telling me that? I don't know where. It seemed like you were actually living on a base.

DM:

Yeah. I think it was a man. I'm not sure. Are you sure it was a woman?

LG:

Well, I just remember you saying that you stayed in a place, and it was like a dirt floor, and they would come and kind of clean it up.

KG:

We called him a "houseboy." We had a houseboy and every day he would come in, and if there was anything that wasn't in its place he would put it there. And then it was a dirt floor you see, and he would sprinkle water on it where it wouldn't be dusty. So when we would come in from flying, we would come in and the floor would be a little damp, but it wasn't dusty.

DM:

The missions that you have described so far are against land targets, did you ever target a ship? Did you ever fly and dive bomb a Japanese ship?

KG:

I think once or twice we did, but not often.

DM:

I know earlier in the war they used those Douglas dive bombers—

KG:

We more or less supported the army.

DM:

Things had changed from earlier in the war because the dive bombers, the Douglas dive bombers, were used to sink carriers at Midway, for example, and they sunk a lot of Japanese ships. But now you were going after Japanese positions on the Philippines, that's interesting. That speaks to the way the war was changing by the time you came in. Did you fly always off of airstrips, or did you ever fly off of an aircraft carrier?

KG:

Well, I can't remember whether I—I don't think I ever did.

DM:

It was always off of an airstrip. And that's another telling thing about how the war was changing, it was early on off of carriers frequently, and now it was off of land based.

KG:

We were on land. It's safer to land on—it's dangerous to land on a carrier.

DM:

You know it took a while for the U. S. to take control of some of these land areas where they could build air bases, so, at least that had happened by the time that you got in. Can you tell me what kind of weaponry you had on your dive bomber? You had your tail gunner.

KG:

Tail gunner had a .30 caliber and we had bombs. .Fifty-calibers—

DM:

On your wings?

KG:

No, through the propeller. Here's the ship, here is the wing right here. They had .50s over here and .50s over here. When we were going straight down we had our finger on the stick, our hand on the stick, and our finger on the button right there, and that released the bombs from both wings.

DM:

Do you know how much weight in bombs you could carry on those planes?

KG:

Most of the time maybe fifty pounds, maybe one hundred pounds. If you just took one on each one, well it would do a lot more damage, but you would also miss more. We had two on each wing, and if we had a bomb it was underneath. The airplane was like this, you have the propeller right here. If you have got the bomb under here and you turn it down like this, and if you turn it down too quick, or press the button too quick, you'll shoot your propeller off and there you are with an airplane and no propeller. So, we wanted to make sure we have dropped our bomb here before here, otherwise we may be in trouble.

DM:

It seems like the airplane would handle differently before and after you dropped the bomb. That's a fair amount of weight. Did it handle differently before you dropped it and after you dropped it?

KG:

Well, if you're carrying a thousand-pound bomb once you release it that airplane is a thousand pounds lighter than it was.

DM:

You know, that just seems like so much that you would have to do by feel. Just practice, practice, practice, and get the feel of how this is going to, you know, handling a plane like that with a thousand pounds, and then you lose the thousand pounds, that sounds like a talent you had to develop. Did it take a while to get used to that?

KG:

Yeah. Well, we practiced.

DM:

How did the Douglas dive bomber—how did it handle generally? Did you fly other types of planes enough to say, “Well it was rough,” or “It was smooth.” Did you like it, did you like handling it?

KG:

Whether we liked it or not, it didn't make a difference.

DM:

I know, but I just wondered, (laughs), because some pilots—

KG:

We're going to carry another one in the morning, why worry about what happens—you got through the first one, now you got one in the morning. Well, once you get through with it, I hope I don't have one in the morning, but I do. (laughs)

DM:

(laughs) Somewhere along the way, I think when you were still in the service, they came out with a [Curtiss SB2C] Helldiver, do you remember that plane, the Helldiver?

KG:

Yeah, that was a good airplane. I wouldn't mind flying it, but it wasn't a dive bomber, and it wasn't a fighter. It was just a halfway, either way. And so, sometimes you used it and it wasn't quite enough. And then sometimes they used it another way, and it wasn't quite enough there. So, what you really wanted—you wanted airplanes that came straight down. And when you got a bomb under this wing, a bomb under this wing, and a bomb underneath the belly of the airplane, and when you mash the right button you release this one, this one, and this one. And it's coming straight down. Well, you just hope to heck, when you drop yours, the man right behind you, you just hoped he didn't drop his too quick. And if he would have dropped his too quick he would have got you. So, once you drop your bomb you go down there to the tree tops, and we'd join up on the tree tops.

DM:

You would get back into formation above the tree tops?

KG:

You get back in formation and go back to the base, and get up a load and do it again tomorrow.

DM:

So you're saying that for the kind of work that you were doing the Douglas, the SBDs, were probably better suited than the Helldivers that later came out?

KG:

I couldn't say, because I never bombed with the other one.

DM:

Well, you know, I bring it up because there is a little talk about this plane was better, no this plane was better, so I just wanted to see if you had a take on it.

KG:

I'll tell you what. That old SBD, they couldn't hardly knock it out of the air.

DM:

Obviously it was a successful—

KG:

I saw an airplane come in. It had twelve big holes about this big around, where the shell was, in that airplane, and he brought it in, and he set her down, and they took one look at it, took a bulldozer, pushed it over a deal away, somewhere out there, it never flew another time.

DM:

They say they were very rugged.

KG:

It was a rugged airplane.

DM:

They also say—well, they know this for a fact, that these SBDs sunk more Japanese ships than any other plane, including the four carriers, Japanese carriers, at Midway. So that speaks for the success of them. So you had a good plane?

KG:

You know, we thought we had fun whenever we could land, dive on a carrier. Japanese, if we could bomb on a ship, why that's [inaudible], boy. If you get a lick or two, a lot of times you're better off if you miss the ship and it goes, the bomb goes below the sea level, explodes and knocks a hole in the ship, it'll sink. (laughs)

DM:

I don't remember how that happened at Midway, but it was a successful attack anyhow. Well you've talked about these raids on the Philippines, whether they were in Luzon or in Mindanao, you were also in the Solomon Islands, did y'all fly any missions, any bombing missions in the Solomon Islands?

KG:

I think so. I don't know they went where they told us; we went where they told us.

DM:

There is a history of your squadron here, so we can access that to find the detailed information on missions and whatnot, and I'm mentioning this for the record incase someone's listening to this, they can refer to this history because we'll get a copy of it at the Southwest Collection. It's the history of Marine Scout Bomber Squadron 142, so that will give us some more detail.

Because this many years after the fact, it's very hard, it would be very hard to remember all of that detail, I realize. What can you tell me about Imaru? Is that right? Imaru?

LG:

Weren't you at Imaru Dad?

DM:

Imaru, you have some photographs that are labelled Imaru. Can you remember anything about that?

KG:

No, Imaru?

DM:

Well how about Zamboanga? Could you remember anything about that?

KG:

I don't know, you know, you don't remember everything.

DM:

Oh, I know. Well, I'm sure it's mentioned in this history, and you have some photographs, and I hope that we'll get some copies of those photographs as well. What else can you tell me about those war years? Besides combat missions, you mentioned living in a hut in the Philippines, and having somebody come by and help you keep the hut clean. What other—what about recreation? Did y'all play baseball? Did you play basketball?—

DM:

Did you think of anything else during the war time that you would like to mention, today?

KG:

No.

DM:

I know that's a lot but—

KG:

I could probably mention more but I can't really think of it. If you asked me a bunch of questions I could answer them but it's been a long time.

DM:

I know it has, it sure has.

KG:

Where are you from?

DM:

I'm from Fort Worth. That's where I grew up, Fort Worth, that area.

KG:

See, I went to flight school there.

DM:

You said Yellow Peril. I'm going to find out where that is, so I'll know.

KG:

Yellow Peril, it's about four miles west toward Fort Worth.

DM:

Well I grew up in Handley, that's kind of in between Fort Worth and--it's on the eastern edge of Fort Worth, so it might be near there. I don't know. I'll find out. But I wanted to ask you a little bit about after the war. Do you remember when you came home? What year you came home? You were sent home, I believe, before the war was over. Is that right?

KG:

Well, when I came home, I had so much leave, and I used it up, and—

LG:

Didn't you—you and Mom got married in August 1945. And when you were on your honeymoon, and you were driving to New Orleans, didn't you hear that the war was over?

KG:

Yeah, that's right.

DM:

That makes perfect sense timing wise because they dropped the bombs in August and then the war officially ended in early September. So that would be just right.

LG:

And then, I think you and Mom went to the Chicago area because—

KG:

We went north of Chicago.

DM:

On your honeymoon, or?

LG:

No, you went to New Orleans for your honeymoon I thought.

KG:

I guess so—

LG:

And then, it seems like you had been promoted to captain by then. And I think if you had stayed in the military you would have had to have given up that rank and gone back to first lieutenant, maybe, I guess first. And I think you decided that maybe you would just get out of the military if

they wouldn't let you stay a captain. Seems like I remember you telling me that one time, Dad. You were in Chicago several months weren't you?

KG:
Yeah.

LG:
You and Mom lived up there, north of Chicago.

DM:
What is her name by the way?

LG:
Wilma.

DM:
What is the maiden name?

LG:
Thompson. Wilma Lee Thompson. T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n.

KG:
She died here—

LG:
Ten years ago.

KG:
—ten years ago.

LG:
And then I think you started farming. You moved back to the Muleshoe area.

DM:
Okay, so you kind of went home? Pretty close to home, and started farming. Did you buy a farm up there? Did you? Okay.

LG:
He had a small dairy.

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DM:

And had a dairy. How many dairy cows did you have?

KG:

Oh, thirty or forty.

DM:

Did you stick with Jersey or did you go to Holstein?

KG:

Oh, maybe half and half. I don't want to get into that.

DM:

Okay, you don't want to talk about your farming? How about your teaching? You taught.

KG:

I enjoyed teaching.

DM:

Now where did you teach?

LG:

Now see, we had a farm here. We moved here when I was five, in 1954.

DM:

Here at Shallowater?

LG:

Yes, and we had a farm, and a dairy, out there. Until 1960, and then he started teaching.

DM:

So in the sixties you started teaching? You don't want to talk about farming, but we can talk about—

KG:

I taught at Muleshoe for several years.

DM:

Is that when you were teaching vocational agriculture?

KG:
Yeah.

DM:
Did you teach them all about how to dairy farm, or whatever just the curriculum was?

KG:
I won't comment from now on.

DM:
No? Okay. Can you talk about your teaching after Muleshoe? Shallowater? You taught at Shallowater also.

KG:
Yeah, several years.

DM:
Okay, but not vocational agriculture anymore now it was—

KG:
I taught government and history. I enjoyed teaching—

LG:
And you taught driver's ed.

KG:
I enjoyed the kids. I had a good time.

DM:
And as you were mentioning—

KG:
You know, this is my daughter.

DM:
Right, and she was mentioning that the kids loved it because you could talk about World War II, in your history classes.

KG:
Well every now and then I could.

DM:

I wish I would have had a history teacher in high school that had been in World War II. (laughs)
That's pretty incredible. But you liked teaching?

KG:

I enjoyed teaching.

DM:

Well when did you go back to Tech? You went back and got a master's, is that right?

KG:

Yeah I went back and got a master's.

DM:

When was that?

KG:

Oh I don't know.

DM:

Sixties?

KG:

I really don't know. And I don't want to look it up.

DM:

Okay, but that was in education, Master's in education?

KG:

Right.

LG:

Well, you went back too and got some hours to teach driver's ed. So he went back to school while he was teaching in the summer, and worked on his master's.

KG:

I taught driver's education.

LG:

In the summer—

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DM:

That sounds kind of risky. (laughs) Maybe not as risky as being a dive bomber, but that sounds kind of risky. (laughs) So you've lived in Shallowater for forty years or so? Fifty years?

LG:

Yeah, since '54.

DM:

What do you think about this outstanding couple of years that Shallowater had in athletics a few years ago? Do you keep up with the athletics here in the school? Didn't they go to State? Once or twice?

KG:

Well, see, I've been out several years.

DM:

Do you keep up with that at all? Just watching to see what they're up to?

KG:

I substitute up there every now and then. I wanted to kind of keep up with basketball games. I'm kind of old to do that—

LG:

He used to keep the clock—

DM:

Oh yeah the clock—

LG:

—years ago.

DM:

—but they said, “No, you've got to be a teacher. You've got to be in the system.”

LG:

Well, and it seems like you tried to substitute when you first retired, but Dad liked to play golf, and it kind of interfered.

DM:

What year did you retire? Do you know?

LG:

I think you retired in the early, to mid-eighties. I think, so it's been a while.

DM:

Well, I don't have any more questions for you today but you know, y'all will think of things, especially about World War II, if you do, try to jot a note, because we can't think of everything just sitting here today, but things come up later on, and if you think of any other topics to talk about, especially in regard to World War II, I would love to hear about it, so just keep a little note, and we will try to fill in some gaps.

KG:

Well, sometimes when you have got lots of time, come by and ask me questions, I have got some good answers, but I don't want to put it in paper.

DM:

Okay, that's fine, I'll come by and just jabber sometime—

KG:

I enjoyed teaching, and if I had it to do over, I wouldn't change it.

DM:

Good, good.

KG:

I wasn't the best teacher in the world, but my students were very nice to me.

DM:

Okay, it was a good school district to teach in?

KG:

Yeah, yeah it was.

DM:

Do you have anything to add, or anything else to ask?

LG:

You know, I can't think of anything.

End of interview