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Kleinwolterink, Arlyn

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Narrator's name: Arlyn Kleinwolterink
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Interviewer's name: Taylor Warntjes
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TW: All right, today is April 12, 2007. I am Taylor Warntjes. I am conducting an interview with Mr. Arlyn Kleinwolterink. Arlyn, how about you tell us first about the things that you did before the war. We talked about this a bit before the interview, but let's just talk about these.

AK: Well, I farmed. I was a – I farmed with my dad northwest of Orange City here. I was actually in the service twice. I went first, I went to basic training in Tech School. It was with the 185th Air National Guard out of Sioux City. It was a six year military obligation. My last year of the six years I was called back to active duty, then I spent a year in Vietnam.

TW: So did you volunteer to go into the service?

AK: Yes.

TW: So you weren't drafted.

AK: No, I volunteered.

TW: Did you sign up right when you graduated from high school or when you turned 18?

AK: No, I was 21, about draft age at that time. A lot of them did that then. When it got up close to your draft number, you know, they joined either the National Guard or the Air National Guard. I always had a big interest in airplanes, and I just thought the Air National Guard was a good fit for me. I could still farm with my dad. I just had to be gone one weekend a month and two weeks of summer camp. But then it turned out to be a little more.

TW: Yeah. But in non-war time, it'd be a good deal.

AK: Yeah, yeah really. And it was a good deal. And it was a terrific outfit. We had a lot of college kids in it. Over in Vietnam, all the records that were set, like of numbers of missions flown per day or per month, whatever, per year, there was nobody that came close to our outfit. And it was because of the age and the maturity of the men in it. It was unbelievable. You never were in the service, so you don't know, but

servicemen can be pretty rowdy. You didn't see any of that. I don't think there was one of our guys that got in trouble the whole year.

TW: That's pretty good.

AK: Yeah, it was just an awesome bunch of guys. And another thing we had in our favor was we went as a unit and we stayed there the year. We had no rotation. We didn't have guys coming in and guys going out. We went, we had a job to do, we did the job and we went home. And I think that was the big difference.

TW: Yeah, you keep the continuity of your group and everything.

AK: Yes.

TW: Where did you, where did all the guys come from? Were they like in a 60 mile radius of Sioux City, or was it farther?

AK: No, I'd say about that. Rock Rapids would probably be the farthest north, then about that far south of Sioux City. Then like Hulstein, Ida Grove, that area. Quite a few from Orange City and Sioux Center, Hull. A lot of them from Hull. There was quite a few.

TW: When did you first learn you were going to go over to Vietnam?

AK: Like I was telling you a while ago, we got activated with that Pueblo crisis¹. That was January 26 of 1968. We left in May, about the 15th of May. It was all the time kept top secret, but we had the feeling that was where we were going to end up. Like it says too in this report, it says here [reading from report]: "There have been reports that the fighter group was destined for Vietnam. But its commander, Colonel Don Forney², issued an official no comment on such reports." And it was a secret move. When we actually left that morning, we weren't even supposed to say where we were going. We knew, but...

TW: So you couldn't tell your family or anything?

AK: We weren't supposed to, no.

TW: Were you married at the time?

AK: Yes, I was. We were married just a little over a year.

¹ The USS *Pueblo* was captured by North Korea on January 23, 1968. One crew member was killed and several were wounded. The crew was held captive by North Korea until December 1968. (Goldlust, Stevens)

² Colonel Don Forney served as Commander of the 185th Air National Guard from January 1953 until April 1976. (History of the 185th Air Refueling Wing)

TW: I bet that was tough.

AK: That was tough. I didn't, like now days, the communication with Iraq, these kids, they talk to them by cell phone every day. I didn't talk to my wife for a full year. Never.

TW: You never got like R&R³ or anything to go...?

AK: I did. At that time, you could meet in Hawaii, but we didn't. We said, I don't want to say good-bye again. Boy, the guys that did it, when they came back, they had a pretty tough time to readjust back into it.

TW: I can imagine that'd be...

AK: So I took R&R, I went to Tokyo for a week, a friend and myself. We had a good time. That was fun too. I was glad I saw that country. But no, that was our feeling then, so we didn't. I left Sioux City, and then I called her a year and three days later from Travis Air Force base that I was coming home.

TW: That was a good surprise for her.

AK: Yes. I said I'm on the way, I'll be in Sioux City in probably three or four hours. [Laughs.] That was awesome. Yes, it was. It really was.

TW: Did you write letters back and forth?

AK: Yes, we wrote every day. But it was always like a 5, 6, 7 day turn-around. I lost my...I had an aunt pass away and a cousin. By the time you got word of it, the funeral and everything was over. It just took that many days, you know.

TW: You didn't really get to call any time, but that was quite a bit of time difference anyways just for everyday times. Calling would be difficult.

AK: Yes, right. And they had a MARS⁴ station there, they called it, where you could go and try to call, but then you had to say a few words and you had to say over, and it went down the line. But they could never hear, so I just didn't even try it.

TW: Kind of like on the show M*A*S*H when they called back.

AK: I always get a kick out of that, because that was Korea, that was before Vietnam. They're always like "Yeah, well, we're talking to somebody in Washington, D.C." No. Impossible. [Laughs.]

³ Military acronym for rest and recuperation or rest and recreation.

⁴ Military Affiliate Radio System. Servicepeople use a phone-patch connection over short wave radio to communicate. (US Army MARS)

TW: How long is it to get there, to fly across? How long did it take you? Do you remember?

AK: Well, I didn't go direct. I was on an in-route support team. So I went from Sioux City to California to Hawaii to Wake Island then to the Philippines then to Guam then to Vietnam.

TW: Wow.

AK: When I came home, we did the same thing. We went back to Guam, then we were going to go direct from Guam to California. But we had to, those planes had to get back home to Sioux City. We had one go down on Wake Island with an air conditioner out, so we had to go back down to repair it. I ended up coming back, Guam, Wake Island, then California, then home. I thought we spent like 26 hours from the time we left until we were home, with all your waiting time and stuff.

TW: That's not too bad, then, I guess.

AK: No, no. That 26 hours took about 4 days. [Laughs.] It took from Friday afternoon, we left Vietnam, and I got home in Orange City here Wednesday afternoon.

TW: If you can try to explain, what did it feel like as you were heading across? What were you thinking?

AK: On the way home or over there?

TW: On the way over there.

AK: Some pretty mixed feelings, you know. You really wonder, and then when you land there and see all the trip flares and stuff going off, you wonder really what is this all about, how dangerous is this really going to be. It plays on your mind.

TW: What was it like when you got there?

AK: Hot. Oh man, hot. It was so unreal hot. That sun came up that morning – we probably landed like about 4 in the morning – it was just a red glow. Your clothes just stuck to you, everything was just hot.

TW: Where you landed, how far was that from where you ended up being?

AK: We had a runway right on our airbase.

TW: So you landed right there.

AK: Yes. We landed right where our planes were and stuff. We landed right there.

TW: Could you see any action or anything going on from the plane?

AK: No, just the trip flares. We landed in the dark.

TW: That's right. So how was it to get adjusted there? Was it quite a bit different than you had gotten from your training and stuff over here, or was it pretty similar?

AK: No, we did a lot more there than what we ever did in Sioux City with the planes. A lot more. In the first place, in Sioux City, they didn't come home with bullet holes. If they take a shell in the front, it come out the back. We had to repair those engines and get them back in service. We had to have so many spare engines or so many aircraft on the alert pad all the time. If the ground troops would call that they were surrounded or something, they had to be there. Just had to. The first, I don't know how many months we were there, we worked 12 hour shifts, 12 on and 12 off, 7 days a week...in that heat.

TW: Wow. How many of you were on at a time? How many went over there total, first of all?

AK: About, uh, I was going to say about 300. Well, here it says 350. It was 300 with the pilots. We had probably 30 pilots. The rest were maintenance men.

TW: About half of you, then, on and off?

AK: Yes, probably. Of course, there were a lot of different sections. When you got aircraft like that, you know, you got a hydraulic section, you got an electrical section, you got an engine section. It's all different people in different fields. There's a lot to keeping a fighter jet in the air.

TW: Yes.

AK: A lot. There's a lot of different steps. Quality control. Boy, you just have to be on top of something all the time, because if you...I did a lot of... I was a crew chief. It was in my last year, so I had the rank. See, I was an E5 over 5⁵, which probably doesn't mean anything to you.

TW: What is that like?

AK: You start with one stripe, and I ended up with four. That's how much I could have got in my five years. You test. You have to test to get rank. And you have to pass the tests to get rank. It's called time and grade. You keep advancing yourself. With more rank comes a lot more [Laughs], what would you say, what word would you use...

⁵ E5 over 5 is a way to describe one's military rank. The E5 refers to his position, which would have been staff sergeant. The second 5 refers to how many years he served. (Enlisted Rank Charts, Rank Insignia Charts)

TW: Responsibility?

AK: Responsibility, yes. And the responsibility gets pretty big. You take an airplane like that, an engine like that, there's...Have you ever seen a jet engine?

TW: Not up close.

AK: Well, I mean it's unbelievable what they are. All your lines...Okay, if you got an air line and a fuel line or an oil line, the air line has to have a different clamp on than the oil line, to clamp together, because nothing can rub because of the tremendous vibration. Every nut on there, like if there's a bolt with a nut on it, the nut has to be safety wired. You may only safety wire three in a group. You got to pull that nut the way it turns on, you got to safety wire that. That all has to be inspected. Whenever you take anything apart, that thing all goes back together. They're like twenty feet long with the after burner on. You got to make sure everything is safety wired so that nothing vibrates loose.

TW: Pretty complicated system.

AK: Oh man, yes it is. It is. And that was one thing that we had to learn fast. We got there right after Tet Offensive⁶ in '68, and things were pretty run down. I'll tell you what, everything was in pretty tough shape. We had to learn that fast. That was a tough year. It was a tough year to be there.

TW: Was there, when you worked on those, when they regularly went up and would come back down, did you have to do something right away usually? Did you always go over and check things after a mission, or were there times where it would go through a few missions before you would?

AK: Oh no. It never made two missions without going through something. They always said for every hour in the air, it was five on the ground. I believe a lot of times it was that too.

TW: Wow.

AK: I mean, they have to be reloaded. They got to be reloaded with ammunition, they got to be reloaded with bombs. You could probably ruin a set of tires on one landing. A crosswind, so tires probably have to be changed. Your engine would have to be checked again, or something wouldn't be quite right.

TW: A lot of things you don't think of when they're...

⁶ In January of 1968, the North Vietnamese launched an attack on South Vietnam during an agreed ceasefire for the Tet holiday. The surprise attack is often considered a turning point in the Vietnam War; Americans began to lose their support for and belief in the war. (Land)

AK: Maybe something in the hydraulic system got hit. Maybe a wing flap got hit or something. There are just thousands of parts on them. If everything doesn't check out, you can't send him out because he's not going to come back. You have a person's life in your hands when you're working on that all the time. That's quite a strain. You know that his life depends on you. If you have one person on your crew or you didn't inspect something right, and something happens, he's not going to get back. Obviously, they all wanted to get back.

TW: So what was your specialty? Did you have a specialty for each plane?

AK: Yes, I was the engine.

TW: You talked about hydraulics and all that kind of stuff. When you got higher up in rank, were you in charge of more things on the plane, or just the engine?

AK: Engine.

TW: Just the engine.

AK: I stayed with the engine, yes. I was called, they called it a jet mech, they called it. A jet mechanic. I stayed with the engines. Your airplane would be outside, and you'd split the plane to get the engine out. You'd do that all outside. You'd get the engine out, then it can go into a shop. And it goes back out of a shop and then it gets mounted in the front half of the airplane. Then it gets run. Well, first, when you work on the engine, when you're done with the engine, then it goes to what they call a test cell where they leave it on a trailer and they tie it down with huge chains and they actually run it. Then it goes into the front of the airplane. If everything checks out there, then the half section of the plane goes back on. That gets all bolted on, then it gets run again. If it passes, it's ready to go. You're talking a lot of hours.

TW: No kidding. Did you basically do this every day, in and out?

AK: Yes.

TW: How many planes did you have?

AK: It says here about 20, but there were 23 of them left. I remember that. There were 23 of them left. Then we left with 4 of those C-141s⁷, those transport planes. With all their equipment – it takes a lot of equipment to work on those things, a lot of special tools, a lot of special tools.

TW: Did all these planes come from Sioux City then?

⁷ As Mr. Kleinwolterink indicates, C-141s were designed to be cargo transport airplanes. Manufactured by Lockheed and officially titled C-141 Starlifters, the all-jet aircraft moved cargo and troops to and from Vietnam. (Boyne, C-141B Starlifter)

AK: Yes.

TW: Do you know how long can one of these go without having to refuel?

AK: Oh, I want to say about 3 hours maybe, I think is what it was. Three or four. I think they had to refuel twice between Wake Island and Hawaii.

TW: So they did that with, uh...

AK: Tankers. Oh yes.

TW: What was the mission of your...what's the word I'm looking for...

AK: What was our goal there?

TW: Yes. What was your goal, what was your prime mission?

AK: We were supposed to stop the spread of communism. [Both laugh.] That was supposed to be the goal. And to help the South Vietnamese, you know, to separate themselves from the North Vietnamese, which were the Communists. That was the main goal.

TW: Were these planes basically for raids, where they'd go and drop bombs, or were they ever involved in any . . .

AK: Yes. They could also shoot shells. They were shells probably about 8 inches long. They could actually take on another airplane with those shells, like a MiG⁸.

TW: Did that happen very often?

AK: Oh yes, sure. They got into some scraps with MiGs and stuff, oh yes. Most of it was bombing. When we got there first, we still bombed over Hanoi⁹. Towards the last, they drew an agreement that they couldn't go that far north.

TW: So the 185th was doing some of the bombing of Hanoi?

AK: Oh yes. We went as far north as the other pilots did, yes.

TW: Did you have any involvement with the napalm¹⁰ or anything like that?

⁸ MiGs, which stand for Mikoyan-Gurevich, were Russian-designed aircraft used by the North Vietnamese fighters. Four different MiG fighter planes were used extensively during the Vietnam War: MiG15 Fagot, MiG-17 Fresco, MiG-19 Farmer and the MiG-21 Fishbed. (Boyne, MiG)

⁹ The city of Hanoi was the capital of North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. The United States bombed the city under Operation Rolling Thunder. (Gendzel "Hanoi", Guilmartin "Rolling Thunder")

¹⁰ Napalm was a chemical weapon used during Vietnam for defoliation and tactical bombing. (Schuck)

AK: No. Our planes carried it. I've seen it. I've seen what it does. Our planes carried it, yes.

TW: I'm curious. Did they manufacture that stuff there, or was it all shipped overseas?

AK: Shipped over. That, and of course in 1968 they started Operation Ranch Hand¹¹, which was Agent Orange¹². That was terrible. Operation Ranch Hand flew a lot of their planes out of our airbase there. They kept foliage and everything around our whole camp stone dead.

TW: So you could see...

AK: So you could see if they were coming, yes sure, if they were going to try to sneak on and night and stuff, you know.

TW: Did you ever have any direct contact with any of that stuff?

AK: I have never had it directly sprayed on me, but I seen it sprayed around the perimeter.

TW: Wow.

AK: Did I stand in it? No, I didn't stand in it.

TW: Did you ever actually handle putting it in the planes or anything like that?

AK: No, I didn't. Even like the bomb loaders, that was called armament. That would be another section again. Everyone has his little...

TW: Job to do.

AK: Little job, yes right. There's several different things, you know, to keep them going.

TW: A well-oiled machine.

AK: [Laughs.] Yes, yes. They're a well-oiled machine. It's amazing what they can, what they'll land sometimes, what they can come back with, how badly damaged they are and they can still... You can hear them... You know the engine, it's not like

¹¹ Operation Ranch Hand was a defoliation campaign. Herbicides, including Agent Orange, were sprayed on forests and crops to reduce the food supply and destroy the natural cover the verdant environment provided for the North Vietnamese. (Guilmartin "Agent Orange")

¹² One of many herbicides used during the Vietnam War. Agent Orange was given its name because of the color band on the drum containing the chemical. Used extensively during the War, Agent Orange contained dioxin, a chemical later discovered to be toxic to humans. (Gaspar, Williams)

a piston engine. It's round, it's air compressors, it's double-stage air compressors. Then you got your combustion cans and that's all rotating. But if it takes a shell on the front it'll go out the back and take about as many parts as it can out of the back. But you can hear them come in just screeching like crazy because there is something bad wrong, you know. Then we'd tear them down and get them back in shape and send them out.

TW: How long would it take, for something that would be damaged like that, to fix?

AK: Oh, the engine would probably [be a] turn-around time of maybe four or five days, you'd have it back, parts availability and stuff, yes.

TW: You would fix those, then. If you could, you would fix them, you wouldn't just put a new one in or anything like that.

AK: No, no. No, no. Some of our planes had so many hours on them that their wings were starting to crack. Then they got sent to another place where it would be saved and they called it a depot. Then they got completely rebuilt there. Then they came back and then...Ours mostly had that once. They got rebuilt once. They had a depot, then they came back. And by the time we left, they had just about too many hours on again to fly back.

TW: What do they do with them when they have too many hours? They just scrap them then?

AK: Scrap them, I suppose. Or rebuild them. Maybe when they came back to the States they rebuilt them again. Well, like B-52s, they're 50 years old and they're still flying.

TW: Yes.

AK: It's amazing what you can do if you keep rebuilding, keep putting new parts in them.

TW: Probably more cost-effective that way too.

AK: Yes.

TW: Was there any kind of, the technology while you were there that year, did it increase at all? Did you have to continually learn new things for these, or did it pretty much stay the same?

AK: That pretty much stayed the same. You had tech manuals and stuff, but that pretty much stayed the same, yes. It probably wouldn't change as much as today.

TW: Yes.

AK: Like you know, on a farm, when you tightened a bolt, you tightened it tight. You don't tighten a bolt tight, you do it all with a torque wrench.

TW: Because otherwise it could....

AK: You don't touch anything until it's torqued to the proper so many pounds per square inch or so many pounds per square foot.

TW: It's pretty precise stuff then.

AK: I always remember the main fuel line. It took a four-inch crow's foot, which we called it, to put on there. When you torqued that, that had to be 4,000 foot pounds. I always remember that. It was a huge fuel line. It was a fuel line probably three inches round with a four inch nut on the end. You had to put that back on from the main fuel control.

TW: That's a lot of fuel going through there.

AK: A lot of fuel. Yes, a lot of fuel.

TW: Did you have any contact with the Vietnamese people at all while you were there?

AK: Yes. When you're in a foreign country like that, you have to hire so many of them. There was a certain percentage of them on our base all the time. Some worked in food service, some cleaned our barracks. You have to hire them. They couldn't come around the aircraft. Oh no. That was a no-no. You wouldn't want them around there either, because they would sabotage something. You had to really hire a certain percentage to do some of the low-key jobs around.

TW: Try to keep up relations and stuff that way?

AK: You had to keep the relations with them, if you could, you know. Even as a war, you're really a guest in their country, really, you know. It really sounds strange, but that's really kind of the way they act or they treat it.

TW: You talked about earlier in that picture where those planes are surrounded by kind of a wall for mortar attacks. Did that happen often then?

AK: Yes. Yes, it did. We really had two really bad mortar attacks and one rocket attack that was pretty close.

TW: Describe those for me?

AK: Well, like one night...We had a three-wing chow hall. That's where you eat. It was probably half a block from the barracks where I stayed. And the next morning,

one wing was gone. We spent just about all night in the bunker that night. But the next morning, the whole third wing was blown off of it, there was nothing left of it.

TW: For those kind of attacks did you have to call in infantry guys to come in?

AK: No. We had security police. Air Force has security police, and they would patrol the out perimeter of the base and stuff. That's something – who knows how many miles it was blown in from?

TW: True.

AK: No, no we would... We had revetments by all our barracks where we could go in. They had like 2 foot thick walls that were all sand so that shrapnel wouldn't come through, stuff like that. We had one right in our shop area one time, it was probably like six feet round and two feet deep where it hit. You wouldn't want to be right around it.

TW: Did you ever lose anyone from those?

AK: No, not from mortar attacks. We just had one pilot, he got hit in the air, then he crashed and died. That's him right here. Him with his little five year old boy. His little five year old boy accepted all his dad's medals the day we came home. Boy, that was tough to watch.

TW: Yes, I bet.

AK: Yes. This one here got killed in a ground accident. But this little guy here, that little guy there is this little fellow right there, and he became, that's him right there, the little guy. His dad and his uncle both got killed in Vietnam, and he flew tankers at the start of the Persian Gulf War. But he lived through it. He still made the Air Force his career, even though it cost his dad's life. So this little guy is him.

TW: That's pretty tough to live through that and still decide that you want to do that with your life.

AK: Yes. There were 2 boys in the family, and the other boy didn't. But this one did. He went on to make the Air Force his career. He said it was a strange thing. My dad was 29 years old and a first lieutenant when he was killed, his brother Eldon Brown was killed as a Marine pilot at the age of 29, was also a first lieutenant, and when I leave for Desert Storm, I'm 29 years old and a first lieutenant. [Laughs]

TW: But he made it back okay.

AK: He made it back, yes. I got a kick out of that. It said, "I was the first case E135 to take off out of the United States, or the United Arab Emirates, and I'm thinking this

is not a good deal.” [Laughs.] But that was pretty tough to watch, though, that little guy.

TW: Do you remember how far, how long it was before you’d be coming home, that that happened?

AK: Let’s see, when did that...The first death, Warren Brown was killed Sunday [Looking at clippings]... You know, it should say in here...It just says that he was the first one, he was shot down by hostile ground fire. I can’t quite remember. I can’t quite remember what month of the year it even was anymore. I can’t remember. I’m sure it’s somewhere in one of these. My mother-in-law made this scrapbook for me while I was gone.

TW: Ah.

AK: The whole thing fell, it was in a box upstairs on the farm, and when we moved to town, it was all scotch taped and all that scotch tape had come loose. I went through the whole thing and found everything and I put it in this one a couple years ago.

TW: Is this all from the *Sioux City Journal* then?

AK: Yes, and the *Des Moines Register*. This was our commander there, Colonel Young. I’d say he aged maybe 20 years that year we were gone.

TW: Really?

AK: Yes. It was tough, it was tough for him.

TW: Did you ever get any visits from higher-up command, anyone? Westmoreland¹³ ever stop by?

AK: No, I never seen him. Christmas Day Bob Hope¹⁴ was there.

TW: Really? Wow.

AK: Yes, I saw Bob Hope. He came on Christmas Day. But I was showing you those awards, this is the kind of stuff that came out, because of the unit you know. This would be a group loading bombs. That would be a torque wrench. You’d be tightening something with about a four-foot torque wrench.

TW: Do you have any idea how much tonnage of bombs you dropped over?

¹³ A United States Army general, William Westmoreland commanded American forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968. He was then appointed U.S. Army Chief of Staff. (Votaw)

¹⁴ An American comedian, Bob Hope entertained troops during World War II and the Vietnam War. (Wood)

AK: Yes, that's all in here somewhere. I remember it was 6700 combat missions, but boy I don't know exactly any more about that, but I'm sure that's, somewhere that could be. Well, here [Reading from scrapbook] ... "The hundredth..." Let's see, "Serving in the war zone logged the most combat _____ [inaudible; 30:45] of any of them" – 5679, that was by March 1. And we stayed yet until May. There was like 486 enemy troops killed by air, 733 enemy fortifications, 950 bunkers destroyed, 165 secondary explosions, 269 secondary... oh, fires, secondary fires. It was a lot of activity all the time. They had like 20 millimeter guns, then bombs under their wings. This would be like your shells going in.

TW: They had to carry a lot of stuff on there for. . .

AK: A lot of stuff. If you got a couple 500 pound bombs, you've got a lot of weight. It was a, I don't know. I tell you, it's a different experience. It's a life-changing experience. It's something you think about every day. When they're out there bombing, there's women and children involved. To have a war, just picture around here, if we were in a war around here. It's awful, it really is, what people have to go through.

TW: Did you count the days while you were gone that you were going to come back?

AK: [Laughs.] You do towards last, and that's what I keep thinking about today, those guys in Iraq — well, men and women now, of course — they got their notice yesterday 90 more days. That'd seem like a lifetime. You start counting down those last 3 months. You think, "Boy, we've got so many more days," and then to get 90 more days stuck on, that'd be tough. It's tough on morale. It would be. But you know, it's a little different. Of course, we had all enlisted too, so we couldn't complain either. And where these too are all enlisted people. They aren't drafted anymore. You decide you're going to make it a career, so you got to put up with it. It's different. It is different. We were all enlistees too. We never, there was really no complaining amongst our guys either.

TW: What was the general feel of your guys on the war in general? Were they . . .

AK: I'd say when we went, we thought we were doing our duty. But not by the time we came home. Kent State¹⁵ happened while we were gone. Bobby Kennedy¹⁶ got shot. Martin Luther King¹⁷ got shot. I mean, the country was in a horrible state. I guess I cut this out a while back. This was in a Legion magazine. It's an interview

¹⁵ During a Vietnam War protest at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, the Ohio National Guard fired upon the crowd, killing four students. This occurred after Mr. Kleinwolterink's service in Vietnam. (Richards)

¹⁶ Presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was shot by Sirhan Sirhan on June 4, 1968, after winning the California Democratic primary. (Coffey "Kennedy, Robert Francis")

¹⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. A leader in the American civil rights movement. Dr. King was also opposed to the war in Vietnam. (Coffey "King, Martin Luther, Jr.")

with James V. Carroll. He's an assistant editor at the *American Legion* magazine. I liked what he said in the end here. It said [Reading from magazine article], "You have said you have a place in your heart reserved for America's military veterans, especially Vietnam War veterans and why." He answers, "I remember the Vietnam War and I remember the mood of the country. And when our military came home, the drugged-out hippies who hadn't had a bath in three weeks spit on these guys and treated them like dirt. That was wrong. They deserve just as much glory and just as much honor as anybody who's ever fought a war for this country. They did not start that war. And whether you agreed with it or disagreed with it, our troops were handcuffed by politics." And that is so true. That's really what it was. That's the bottom line right there. "As the war dragged on and on, Americans began to realize there was not going to be a clear-cut victory, and they got impatient. He just said I want the Vietnam War veterans to know that I supported them back then and I support them now." That was true. That really was true. People were upset, they were, and we could really tell that by May of '69 when we came home.

TW: Did you really, how much of the news did you keep up on while you were there? Did you hear about the protests and stuff like that while you were over there?

AK: Way late. After the fact by quite a bit, you know. We'd hear some of that. A lot of it came in letters from home. We didn't get a newspaper there or anything. [Laughs.] We didn't get the *Sioux City Journal*.

TW: Was there any of that when you came back to Sioux City? Were there people there to protest and stuff like that?

AK: Yes. Yes, there was. People were upset. And really, some of the things there was a reason to be upset. I just recall that one instance in 1968. When we went in May, they started the Paris Peace Talks¹⁸. And we thought if they start the Paris Peace Talks, then this thing turns out pretty good, maybe we'll be home early at best. It took them that whole year in Paris to decide what shape table to sit around. [Taylor laughs.] And they decided to sit around an oval-shaped table. And in that year 257 young boys went home, were killed, a week. I mean, isn't that something for your country to do that to you though? It's tough to sort that all out while you're there and you see what's going on. And I mean, didn't we learn a lesson? Like today, we got to get this thing ended. It's over 4 years already again. And where are we? I don't know if we're gaining yet.

TW: It's one of those things, I'm a history major, we're supposed to – I'm going to teach too –

AK: All right.

¹⁸ Paris Peace Talks began in May 1968 and lasted almost five years. (Isaacs)

TW: But my major's history, and we're supposed to, one of the reasons we have history for, is so we can study it so we can learn from it and change things. But it seems over and over we make the same mistakes.

AK: That's exactly right. I don't know, our leaders, I just don't know anymore, some of them where they're really coming from. You just finally got to make a stand and go for it. I don't think we should leave there yet. Do you?

TW: No.

AK: No, I don't either. I think we should finish it. We didn't get a chance to. In the end, we had to run out of here, which I don't think was quite right.

TW: That's one of those things where it seems like people weren't ready for the long haul that it was going to take.

AK: No.

TW: So what was it like when you got back?

AK: Awesome. Oh man, that's a good feeling to be back. Unbelievable. Even the ride home already, in the plane, you're on cloud nine. You're finally coming home. I always like Tulip Festival¹⁹ here in Orange City, and my sister was on the Tulip Court, and we had originally left there on Friday. When we got down to Wake Island, they said you can't leave unless this F-100²⁰ gets tankers so that he can get to Hawaii. We thought oh no, here we sit. But we finally did get out of there and got home on Wednesday. Got to see the Tulip Festival. It's just a tremendous feeling. You're just on such a high. But it's, like I said a while ago, it's a life-changing experience. You wouldn't look forward to doing it again. I really respect some of these young people in Iraq. They're going back for their 3rd time. I don't know how we would have acted at that time, if we would have had to go back for another year. Let's say a year home then back again, rotate back. Boy, that'd be tough. That'd really be tough. Like I said before, that's their job now, that's their career. I guess they got to be prepared for that.

TW: Was that a possibility for you guys, that you'd have to be called back or not?

AK: No. It could've maybe...I think right now, isn't there a law that you can't be recalled for 5 years? If you had a 6 year obligation, you'd be out. I think there is. But I think they're changing that so they can keep sending more.

TW: Was life different when you got back then?

¹⁹ The Tulip Festival is an annual celebration in Orange City, Iowa, recognizing the town's Dutch heritage. (Welkom)

²⁰ The North American F-100 Super Sabre was a fighter plane with supersonic speed. (Boyne)

AK: Oh, I don't know, probably not so much different. You'd be surprised at how quick you fall back into the mainstream of life. I don't know really what was different, other than like my cousin had passed away and my aunt, and you never see them again. Other than that, you pretty much... That is a concern when you're over there all the time. If your parents or your spouse would pass away, you could go home on emergency leave. But boy that's just not something you wanted to hear. You did not want to see the Red Cross or somebody come and say you have to go home on emergency leave. That's just not something you wanted to do. And I was fortunate that I didn't have to. There's quite a few that did, oh yes. And then to go home, have the funeral and everything, and then come back. That's tough. That's really tough. I was really fortunate on that part.

TW: Was there a big welcome home then for you guys when you got back?

AK: No. There was one in Sioux City, but the ones that were in Vietnam mightn't be in the parade because of the protests. We stood along the street and watched it.

TW: Wow.

AK: It was getting that bad, though. At that time, there was young Army guys that went through O'Hare in Chicago with their dress greens on, they actually shot Clorox on them with water guns, ruined their Class A uniforms. It got pretty tough there. Right after Kent State, it got bad. People really got pretty vocal about the whole deal. No, we never...never had anything.

TW: Were there protestors waiting for you when you got back?

AK: No. I was on an in-route support team, and there was probably like 25 guys on my plane, so we got in probably like 4 in the morning, so it was dark. We landed and left. Pretty quick, you know. And I can't say either...these are pictures here the day we got released from active duty and I can't remember there was anybody outside there at the time either. I remember there was a few guys standing outside the gate poking fun of us when we left. I remember that. When we actually walked up to the C-141s to leave, you know. This is the way we lined up to get on the 141s [showing photo].

TW: What did you actually get to take with you over there? Like personal effects, what did you...not very much?

AK: Probably shaving kit. [Laughs.] And some clothes, you took some of your clothes. You took your fatigues. We took one Class A uniform along. That was about it. We didn't take much.

TW: So did you have someone waiting for you when you got back then? Or did you have to get a ride back here to Orange City?

AK: No, my wife came, and the folks. My folks and my wife and my brothers and sisters. I had a nice little welcoming committee. Oh yes, they came. But that was different, really different riding home. You come from something like that to everything so calm and peaceful in just a few hours. And I think that was a problem, why there is a lot of problems with some of the Vietnam guys that were in the infantry and stuff. They went from the battlefield to Main Street in 24 to 48 hours, with no time in between there for them to do some counseling. Some of those had it really bad. They really did. They really had a tough time of it. When you sleep for 30 days without ever taking your shoes off, no bath, no nothing, and you sit out there in a rice paddy somewhere, it's tough. That place is full of foliage, you know. There's booby traps and there's everything out there. A lot of those people, I feel sorry for them. They had it tough. They really did.

TW: Was it as hot as it was when you got there all the time?

AK: Always hot, until the monsoons. Then it was always wet. Then you're wet all the time. Always wet. It would rain like 4 or 5 inches in just – boom – a couple minutes.

TW: Did you ever hear anything about Jane Fonda²¹ while you were over there?

AK: Oh yes. Right. She wasn't the most popular person.

TW: I'm sure not.

AK: Bob Hope was a lot more popular, I'll tell you that. That was a great... See, we had a 24-hour truce over Christmas, so we went there on Christmas afternoon. I think it was like 4:00 in the afternoon we had everything off the ground again that could go. Right back at it, you know.

TW: That was a short...

AK: Short little break. Back in action. It's really something.

TW: Have you ever thought about going back to visit?

AK: No, not really. I know some guys are thinking about. Some guys from our outfit are really thinking about it. I talked to one the other day that is.

TW: Really?

AK: Yes he's going back. I don't know. I went to a travelogue the other night, we did, at Dordt College. They showed Vietnam today, and a lot of it was still the same as

²¹ An American actor, Jane Fonda was vocal about her opposition to the Vietnam War. While she spoke out against the war in America throughout the late 1960s, she did not visit Vietnam until 1972. She traveled to Hanoi and broadcasted anti-war statements over Radio Hanoi. (Welsh)

forty years ago, like the little fishing villages and stuff. But they showed all the resorts and stuff on the South China Sea. What a beautiful place. Man a living.

TW: It's pretty hard, at least when you were there it would have been hard to imagine that it would've been like that.

AK: That it would ever be a resort area. No, that's right. But it is now, today. What I was really surprised to hear the other night, the guy who was the narrator, he'd actually went to Vietnam. He actually has 3 adopted boys from Vietnam.

TW: Really?

AK: Yes. He said that the younger people now that are in the government there, they don't want communism. He thinks it's going to work its way out.

TW: It's going to be like Russia and stuff, that over time . . .

AK: Yes. He said they can see... He feels that once these older guys are out of office, it'll go non-communist.

TW: Then what we fighting for in 1968, it'll be . . .

AK: Why'd we lose? Is that why we lost 58,000 men and women? Have you ever been to Washington, D.C.?

TW: Yes, I have.

AK: Seen the Wall²²?

TW: Yes.

AK: It's quite a place, isn't it?

TW: It is.

AK: I saw it too.

TW: My elementary school principal, his brother died in Vietnam, so we went to his name and stuff on the Wall and found it, so it was interesting.

AK: I found the two, too, from our outfit on the . . .

TW: Quite the time.

²² The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. is commonly referred to as The Wall. (The Wall)

AK: Yes. It really was. There was a really good article too in the Legion magazine. My brother's a school teacher, by the way. He farms and he teaches school, he substitutes. My brother, he teaches this when he teaches school. It's about an F-100 outfit in Vietnam. There are some different things in here that I did. If you read the article, like helping them... Let me find it before I try to explain it. [Looks through article.] It's about starting airplanes. See, we flew our F-100s all to Guam first before we left for home... Oh here. It says – I can hardly read this myself yet today – it says, “I relived that final day as I stared at the black onyx wall.” He was in Washington, D.C., this pilot, because he lost his two buddies there. And he said, “The dawn came up like thunder after 268 combat missions in 368 days in the valley of the shadow.” And I can remember the sun coming up that morning in Guam, too. Then he said, “The ground trembled as 33 F-100s roared off the runway across the beach and out over the South China Sea, climbing and rising into the rising sun.” And I helped get ours started. I seen our 20, the ones we had left, I watched them leave. I helped them get them started that morning. Those kind of things, you never forget. Then he said, “On the eastern horizon, a line of towering deep purple clouds stood shoulder to shoulder before a brilliant orange sky that slowly turned powder blue from top down.” And this guy was a Christian. “From somewhere on that stage about the whining of spinning turbine blades I could hear a choir singing Handel's *Hallelujah Chorus*.” Golly. And then it says, “The Lord God omnipotent reigneth and He was bringing me home while Lance and Lynn and Vince still remain as part of the dust of southeast Asia until the end of time.” That's really something. But this was really a good article on that. He said, “People would tell him that we lost that lousy war. And I always gave them the same story I used since the Nixon administration. ‘We were winning when I left.’” [Laughs.] That's about all you could say, you know.

TW: Yes. We've looked at, in this Vietnam class, we've looked at all the different things, and militarily we were winning in a lot of areas.

AK: Oh yes.

TW: I'm sure it's pretty difficult for a lot of these veterans, for you guys when you come back to deal with that.

AK: And it's in different stories. They say we never lost a battle, but we lost the war.

TW: Yes.

AK: That's about the way it went, too.

TW: Do you remember how you, did you watch it on TV, did you see the news reports and stuff, when Saigon fell²³ and everything?

²³ The city Saigon was the capital of South Vietnam. The city was overtaken by the North Vietnamese in April 1975. (Gendzel “Saigon”)

AK: Oh man, yes.

TW: How did you feel?

AK: I got up during the night and watched the POWs²⁴ come home and all that stuff. Oh man. I couldn't believe how those last ones finally had to leave there. It was terrible. They ran for their life just to get out of there, which was really bad. I'd get up during the night, and I watched all the POWs come home. That was fun to watch too. It's great to watch that. But we even had, the Secretary of Defense, that McNamara²⁵, he even went against us then. He says right in here [referring back to Legion article], "I didn't tell them that the Secretary of Defense they fought for back then has now declared that he was not a believer in the cause for which he assigned them and all their destiny." Like I read earlier out of that other article, it was just so political. We had the manpower there and stuff to end that thing. We could have easily ended it. Another thing I remembered so about Guam, that's where the B-52s were stationed. They were either stationed there or in Thailand. They didn't leave them in Vietnam overnight because of their value. Anyway, so when we were there, we were actually working on the runway or the tarmac on our planes, and they started leaving for missions. And they always left 7 at a time. So they had 56 engines running at one time on the ground. And just when one would be airborne, number two would...until they were all 7 in the air. The sky was as black as a thunderstorm. They were heading out. They had like 400,000 pounds of bombs on each one. You'd hear them too when we were there. It'd just sound like a thunderstorm when they'd come over and just open – I can still see those bomb doors coming open and just seeing the bombs start coming down. It just rained bombs.

TW: Those probably weren't too accurate either, all the time.

AK: No. There again, you know, who did it take with them. That's the worst part. I'd have to say, though, that's probably the toughest part when you think about it a lot. Why and who got killed because of what you were doing. Like when you have a family of your own and you see your little kids growing up...I guess I have to say there are memories you'll never forget.

TW: Did your beliefs play any role in how you felt over there?

AK: Like Christian beliefs, you mean?

TW: Yes.

²⁴ Prisoners of war.

²⁵ The Secretary of Defense from 1961 through 1968, Robert McNamara championed the war effort at the beginning, yet lost belief in the cause and confidence in America's ability to win as the war progressed. (VanDeMark)

AK: Yes, oh yes. Your morals and stuff? Oh yes, definitely. And that was another thing coming out of this area. At first we couldn't even go to church because we were all 12 on, 12 off, 7 days a week. As we got caught up, then we had a little chapel service. It'd be like all guys from around here, we'd be at the chapel service. Definitely, oh definitely. The way you were brought up and your beliefs really make a difference on something like that, I think. Yes.

TW: Arlyn, thank you very much for doing this interview with us.

AK: I don't know if I did you any good here.

TW: Oh, it was very good. I thank you very much.

AK: You're welcome.

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