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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Joseph Kliebert
Conducted by Kelly Crager
Date 28 August 2009
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

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- 1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting an Oral History interview with Mr.
2 Joseph Kliebert. Today is 28 August 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Kliebert is
3 joining us by telephone from his home in Camden, South Carolina. I'm interviewing Mr.
4 Kliebert today in order to gain his reminiscences of his experiences as he served in
5 Vietnam in 1967 with the 12th Air Commando Squadron. Mr. Kliebert served as 1st
6 sergeant during his tour. The 12th Air Commando Squadron was involved in what was
7 known as "Operation Ranch Hand", the defoliation of jungle areas, and vegetation, in
8 South Vietnam. Mr. Kliebert, to begin this interview, I'd like to get a little background
9 and biographical information from you. Can you tell me when you were born and where?
10 Joseph Kliebert: Okay, I was born the 18th day of October 1929, in the town of
11 Vacherie, Louisiana.
12 KC: Very good, what were your parent's names?
13 JK: My dad's name was Adrian Joseph, and my mother's name was Uranie, and
14 her maiden name was Falgoust.
15 KC: That sounds like a very proper Cajun name.
16 JK: Yeah, I'm French and German.
17 KC: French and German.
18 JK: As a matter of fact, I could not speak English—well, I could speak some
19 English, but not make sentences, until I was seven when I went to school.
20 KC: Is that right? What language were you speaking?

1 JK: French mostly and then some German, because I got the privilege of sitting
2 between the two grandfathers under the big oak tree and they could not converse very
3 well at first, and they were still having trouble with that. Once they got the hang of it,
4 they told me to go play with the other children.

5 KC: They didn't need you around anymore.

6 JK: Yes, sir. So anyway, mine was strictly spoken you know. I don't write
7 French, and I don't write German either by any means. I have the more command of the
8 French language than I did the German.

9 KC: So do you still speak French and German?

10 JK: I speak French, but not German. I don't speak much French now because I
11 only have two sisters left in Louisiana and when I call on the phone, they'll talk to me a
12 few words in French and then they'll switch to English. My mother, as long as she was
13 living (unintelligible) years old she would talk to me in French. So we conversed that
14 way and I kept that up, but otherwise I'm losing out on some of it. But I can still speak it.
15 When I went back down there this time, I'd just lost my wife the 11th of June.

16 KC: Oh, I'm sorry.

17 JK: Of fifty-three and a half years, and she stayed in the hospital forty-two days,
18 then had three strokes and that took her out.

19 KC: Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that.

20 JK: Anyway, she and I had gone this past December to visit there and then she
21 wanted to have that surgery. She had a colostomy and that actually didn't work, and they
22 had to reverse it and when it did, she would up with an infection and an abscess, and one
23 thing led to anther. But anyway, I'm bothering you with something that's not related. But
24 anyway, I visited down again since that and my two sisters, they had a big reunion for me
25 so I got to talk to quite a few people, and some of them did want to speak French, so that
26 helped me some.

27 KC: What did your parents do for a living?

28 JK: My dad was a farmer, and my mother was just a homemaker.

29 KC: Now your father was a farmer, what types of things did he farm there in
30 Louisiana?

1 JK: Okay, he raised sugar cane and we did have some soybeans. Sugarcane was
2 the main crop.

3 KC: What was life like for you growing up on the farm?

4 JK: Sorry?

5 KC: What was life like for you growing up on that farm in rural Louisiana in the
6 1930's?

7 JK: It was, in other words, just a basic part of—and I appreciate that more now
8 than I ever did at first because we only had the bare necessities, but we always had food,
9 and we grew big gardens, and stuff like that. But anyway, it was basically, as far as I'm
10 concerned, if most people would come up that way, I think it would really help to get
11 them to be able to understand what we have in the United States and should be proud of
12 it.

13 KC: Now, you were born in 1929, so as a young child you were growing during
14 the midst of the Great Depression in Louisiana.

15 JK: That's correct. Yes, sir.

16 KC: What was it like in terms of economically, what was it like growing up in
17 that part of the country, a very poor part of the country hit by this depression?

18 JK: Very much so. As a matter of fact, as I say, we had the bare necessities and
19 we appreciated that, but we had love from our parents and grandparents, and it made a
20 big difference. As far as I'm concerned, I wouldn't want it any other way because I can
21 take the hard times or the good times and get along fairly well.

22 KC: During the 1930s in Louisiana, of course the most influential, most visible
23 figure in the 1930s in Louisiana was Governor Long. Do you have any recollections of
24 the governor?

25 JK: Some, mostly you know, what I read and what I was told because by the time
26 that I was old enough to realize—we didn't have radio, we didn't have nothing like that.
27 My granddaddy had a radio, so I did hear some of the things, but as I said, as a young
28 child like that most of the things that I knew is what I've read and what people have told
29 me.

30 KC: What about your parents on this farm politically, what were their political
31 leanings? Do you remember?

1 JK: Well, they were mostly as a matter of fact, democrat because the part was
2 when I got old enough to vote my granddad said, "Now, you need to vote democrat." I
3 said, "No, sir. I want to vote for the people that are qualified to do the job, the people that
4 we can use to better things." And he didn't like that, he said, "No, you vote democrat."
5 "Okay." And I didn't say no more to him, but I like to vote across ticket, really. I still do
6 that if I can. Even here in South Carolina with the primaries you can't do that. Whatever
7 you vote in then, is what you must vote in. So it restricts us some.

8 KC: Now, this allegiance to the democrats in your family, of course in the Deep
9 South was it was traditionally democratic, but also with the Roosevelt administration and
10 the New Deal, also created an awful lot of support. Many rural areas for the democrats.

11 JK: Oh, yes.

12 KC: And of course, Governor Huey Long was also a democrat. Was this voting
13 democratic something that was a long history of this, a long tradition of this in your
14 family?

15 JK: Yes sir, as far as I know I was told that way back even then my granddaddy's
16 folks voted, you know that way, so it's a tradition there. Matter of fact, a lot of that
17 family still does it. When I was down there visiting, they were questioning me about that.
18 I said, "Well, I'm not in a straight, straight democrat. I believe we need both parties."

19 KC: What things did you do growing up? I assume that you worked on the farm
20 with your father?

21 JK: Yes, sir.

22 KC: What other sort of things did you do growing up as a child there in
23 Louisiana?

24 JK: What did I do on the farm?

25 KC: Yes, sir. And for in your pastime, things you did to play, your interests.

26 JK: I'd go fishing, I'd do hunting, and I enjoyed that. As I said, working on the
27 farm kept me busy with chores that I had to do and helping out. At that time, I think my
28 father, his wages—he worked for my granddaddy on the farm. And so he actually earned
29 50 cents an hour.

30 KC: And what about you? Did you make a wage there as well?

1 JK: Mine was not like that. They paid me by what job I did, like a quarter or
2 whatever it was.

3 KC: Sure, and that's an awful lot of money for a young boy back then.

4 JK: It was really, and then when the men worked in the field, or the different hired
5 hands, they would go early in the morning so I would carry breakfast to them, and so I
6 had little sacks or bags and I'd carry that with their food in it, in cans or in little old
7 containers. And then they would pay me like a nickel a week or something like that.

8 KC: Doing what you can like so many people did to get by. Where did you go to
9 school?

10 JK: I went to school at St. James High School, in St. James, Louisiana which is in
11 St. James Parish.

12 KC: How did you take to school? What sort of things did you enjoy?

13 JK: What's that?

14 KC: I'm sorry, how did you take to school? Did you like school, were you a good
15 student?

16 JK: At first, it was real tough on me because I had to learn English and I was
17 having a time with that, and Mrs. Porche who was really French—and she spoke very
18 Parisian French and she told me, she said, “Claude.” My name is Joseph Claude, and I
19 went by “Claude” there, and anyway she said, “Do you understand that if you keep
20 getting me to speak French to you, you will never learn to speak English?” I said, “Yes,
21 ma'am.” She said, “Well, that's the way it's going now. I'm not going to answer you in
22 French and you're going to learn to speak English.” And so it was kind of tough the first
23 year, but then it got better.

24 KC: Were there other students who spoke only French as well?

25 JK: Yes, sir.

26 KC: So you weren't the only one in the school then?

27 JK: No sir, not the only one.

28 KC: Hmm, very interesting. When did you graduate from high school?

29 JK: I didn't graduate from high school. What I did is I got my GED through the
30 military. I went back to school when I got in the Air Force in '48, but I went to the 10th
31 grade.

1 KC: Okay, now how old were you when you left the 10th grade, when you left
2 school?

3 JK: I was seventeen years old.

4 KC: Seventeen years old.

5 JK: And then my dad told me, he said, “Son, you can do one of two things. You
6 can either continue to school and finish.” He said, “I can’t read or write, and you need to
7 understand that you need to have that basic part.” He said, “Now your uncle—I don’t
8 have the money to send you—but he will send you to LSU (Louisiana State University) if
9 you’ll finish high school.” And I said, “Well, I don’t really want to go to anymore
10 school.” Anyway, he said to me, “Okay, you’ve made your choice. You have three
11 choices, you can go to school, continue, and go to college or you can work on the farm,
12 or you can go to war.” I said, “Well.” So I worked awhile and then I said, “Well, I’m
13 going to enlist in the air force.” And that’s what I did.

14 KC: You enlisted in the air force. Now, when did you enlist in the Air Force?

15 JK: Sorry.

16 KC: What year did you enlist in the Air Force?

17 JK: In 1948.

18 KC: In 1948.

19 JK: Let’s see, the 8th of January 1948.

20 KC: So the Air Force was pretty new then having been—

21 JK: Yes, sir. As a matter of fact, we went under the Army Air Corps. It changed a
22 little bit later on, but our uniforms—we continued to wear the olive drab uniforms and
23 everything like that.

24 KC: Why did you choose the Air Force?

25 JK: Well, as I said, the story went like this. The recruiting sergeant when I talked
26 to him, I asked him, I said, “Well, can I leave tomorrow?” And this was in Thibodaux,
27 Louisiana, and he said, “Are you running away from the law?” I said, “No, sir, I’m
28 running away, if anything from my dad.” And he almost fell out of his chair laughing. I
29 said, “No, I really want to get away. I don’t want to work on the farm, and I don’t want to
30 go to college.” I said, “I want to get out of here, I want to go in the Air Force.” And that

1 was my reason. But I chose the Air Force because I'd read something about it, heard
2 something about it, and I figured this is the one service I wanted to go into.

3 KC: Now was it because of the travel or the excitement or adventure?

4 JK: Well, not really at first, but it did have a lot to do with that afterward. But at
5 first it was people that I knew that had been in the Army Air Corps and were coming out
6 of the military. It impressed me with the uniform and also their stories they told me;
7 about where they were and what they did.

8 KC: Well, that's a very good point when you're speaking about the Army Air
9 Corps. Of course, this came out of the 2nd World War.

10 JK: Yes, sir.

11 KC: What do you remember about the 2nd World War?

12 JK: What do I remember about it?

13 KC: Yes, sir.

14 JK: Well, I remember a good bit of it because we had scholastic studies in the
15 school, and we had little quizzes on it. And then also at that time my granddaddy had a
16 radio of course, and we would listen to the news. He listened every hour to the news, and
17 so I would listen to that and then read the papers, that really brought me up to know what
18 was taking place. And one thing that I remember, he'd always say he couldn't—he was
19 French, and he couldn't speak—he spoke English and he could be understood, but
20 whenever he'd talk about General Eisenhower, he called him "Elsiewhere." So that was
21 something that stuck in my mind. And every time I would think of General Eisenhower,
22 I'd say "Elsiewhere." "Elsiewhere has done this with his troops, and this has happened
23 over there." So he would brief me on different things. We'd kind of laugh about it
24 afterwards, but it was always interesting to me. I just enjoyed—I think that's another
25 thing that started me wanting to go into the military. Because I really enjoyed listening to
26 that and I think that's one of the reasons I think I went into the military

27 KC: Did you have any family members who served in the war?

28 JK: Yes, sir. My dad served in World War I, and my oldest brother served in
29 World War II, under Patton, 3rd Army in Europe. And then my youngest brother served in
30 Korea in 1950.

31 KC: So were there the three boys in the family?

1 JK: Yes, sir.

2 KC: Okay.

3 JK: Yes, my dad and two brothers. There was five children. Two brothers,
4 myself—I'm the middle one in the family—and then two sisters.

5 KC: Okay, so there was a tradition of family service.

6 JK: Yes, sir.

7 KC: For your family as well. Okay, okay. So, what did you—you said you read a
8 little bit about the Air Force before you joined. What did you know about the Air Force?

9 JK: Well, not really that much. But I liked planes and whenever they had anything
10 concerning planes, I was really interested in it. And if I could find an article that had
11 concerning bombers and fighters and things like that, I would really dig into it to learn
12 more about it.

13 KC: Was this part of that experience from the 2nd World War as well do you
14 think?

15 JK: Excuse me.

16 KC: I'm sorry, was this—?

17 JK: I have a problem hearing.

18 KC: I probably didn't phrase it very well either. This interest that you had in
19 planes, like you said, bombers and fighters. Was this also part of this World War II
20 experience?

21 JK: Yes, sir.

22 KC: Where you would read about these things, hear about these kinds of things?

23 JK: Yes, sir.

24 KC: Probably very exciting for you.

25 JK: I have pictures of them, that different people would give me, and I had me a
26 little file of that, and I always enjoyed looking at them. As I said, it was an interest of
27 mine from the beginning and I think that's why I leaned towards the Air Force, but what
28 pushed it is, like I told you, that my dad told me, "It's either go to college, or work on the
29 farm, or go to war. One or the other."

30 KC: And the Air Force was the best choice for you at the time.

31 JK: Yes, sir.

1 KC: Okay, now you are joining the Air Force in 1948. Of course, this is the time
2 where we begin to see we're much more publicly, we're much more aware of the
3 growing rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Cold War. How
4 aware were you at the time of what was taking place in the world? Global politics?

5 JK: That is one thing that I have some knowledge of it, but not that much because
6 I didn't think too much of that at that time, looking at it from that point. But after I went
7 in the military, naturally we were briefed and we were given different things, made a lot
8 of difference.

9 KC: Alright, now once you got into the Air Force, was there anything in particular
10 that you wanted to do? Did you want to become a pilot? Did you want to become a
11 mechanic? What track did you want to take in the Air Force?

12 JK: Well, the track I wanted to take in the Air Force, I wanted to be a machinist.

13 KC: Okay.

14 JK: And when I went through my training at Lackland Air Force Base, I went
15 through my complete training, thirteen weeks of basic training. When I got through with
16 that, I was on the list to go machinist school. So then they said, "Well, since you are real
17 good at drilling, we would like to keep you here while you wait to go to school." So they
18 did. They kept me for three weeks, and then three weeks went by, and three weeks later
19 they still didn't have an assignment for me—I mean, didn't have the school and other
20 folks had gone. So I went back in and talked to the captain about it, and the 1st sergeant
21 told me, he said, "If you go in there, you better make sure you understand that he is not
22 doing too well today." I said, "Well, I need to speak to him anyway because I want to
23 make sure. I don't want to be an assistant drill instructor or a TI (Training Instructor) by
24 any means. I want to go to school to get something that I can better myself. If I do not
25 stay in the military, I'll have a trade. So anyway, I went in there and he told me, he said,
26 "Well it's still not on there, but we need you here. But it will be on the bulletin board just
27 as soon as we get yours out there." So I waited another week and the following week it
28 wasn't there. So I went back in and I told him, "Well, if that be the case I'm going to
29 volunteer for anywhere in the world." He said, "Well, if you do, you'll get it." I
30 volunteered and I wind up in Alaska a week later. Nome, Alaska. Marks Air Force Base,
31 Marks Air Base right on the Bering Sea there.

1 KC: Well, let me back up here a little bit. I want to spend some more time on that
2 as well but let me back up and ask you about basic training. Where did you say you went
3 to basic training? Was it Lackland?

4 JK: At Lackland, yes sir.

5 KC: Well, tell me about basic training back then?

6 JK: Basic training was really rigid, but not to the point that—of course being an
7 old farm boy it didn't bother me that much and I learned to march and learned to do the
8 things they wanted me to do in the training part. And so everything went fine, I enjoyed
9 it. I never did regret that.

10 KC: What was your routine in basic training?

11 JK: Sorry?

12 KC: What was your daily routine in basic training?

13 JK: Daily routine was getting up at about four o'clock in the morning and we
14 would get breakfast, and then from there we'd go to the drill field and we'd drill. And
15 when we got through with that then we had different seminars, and classes in different
16 things concerning the Air Force, concerning this—different things, you know.

17 KC: And how long did basic training last?

18 JK: Thirteen weeks.

19 KC: Thirteen weeks. And when you finished, when you graduated from basic,
20 you said that your superiors decided that you had drilled very well.

21 JK: Right.

22 KC: Did they keep you around to serve as an assistant drill instructor?

23 JK: Well, they did for that particular time, but it was a month before I got ready to
24 get out of there. I went home on vacation and then I came back and, you know, waiting to
25 go to school. That's what I wanted to do, but they wanted me to remain as a TI, and I told
26 them, "No, I really didn't want to do that." And that's why I had that conversation with
27 the captain. And he laughed, he said, "Well, if you feel that way." He said, "And you
28 volunteer, you'll get it." And I did, of course.

29 KC: Obviously, you must have done very well in terms of drill, being a drill
30 instructor there.

31 JK: Yes, sir.

1 KC: What was your approach as a drill instructor? How would you approach your
2 job in the new recruits?

3 JK: Well, to approach the job what made me really realize—I was instructed by a
4 staff sergeant (unintelligible), he was from Ohio, Toledo. And he told me that the main
5 thing about training troops, you need to understand and work with them, and to make
6 sure that they understand what you're telling them, and the commands you give them,
7 and whatever you do, make sure that they follow orders. I did that and of course I was the
8 type that really I enjoyed that, but I said I didn't want to be an instructor. I didn't want to
9 stay there.

10 KC: Sure, you felt that it would limit you in the future, as you say.

11 JK: It would, and I felt that from what my dad had told me also, about going to
12 school and bettering myself, I figured, "Well, I've already messed up already, I better not
13 do that again and get into something that I cannot use, saying, 'I would only stay my
14 regular three years in the military and then get out.' If I had a trade, I could go back to
15 that."

16 KC: Okay, now you said that these machinist orders never came through.

17 JK: Never did.

18 KC: That you were hoping for it, and hoping for it, and you were just, I guess,
19 swallowed up by the Air Force.

20 JK: Right.

21 KC: And you said, "I volunteer to go anywhere." And they did send you
22 anywhere. They sent you to Alaska.

23 JK: And I said, "Well, I asked for it and I got it." He even talked to me after that.
24 He said, "See?" I said, "Well." I said, "Sir." I said, "Well, I did not want to stay as an
25 instructor." I said, "I appreciate you saying that you wanted to keep me, but I really don't
26 want to do that. And so I would rather just go on from there." So what I did then, when I
27 went to Nome, Alaska, at Marks Air Base, they wanted me to train as an assistant crew
28 chief on a C-47. So I went and I did that for a while. Then I was supposed to go to Texas,
29 back for school for mechanics. And then when I'd done that for about three months and
30 they decided no, they needed people in other fields and that that's when I went into the
31 personnel administration field.

1 KC: Okay. Well, before we get you to that point, tell me about Marks there in
2 Nome, Alaska. What was your routine there, what were you doing there?

3 JK: The routine there was I worked, in other words, as an assistant crew chief on a
4 C-47, training for that. And then then I would have gone through Sheppard Air Force
5 Base. That's where they would send them. They told me that you'd go there for your final
6 training of that part, and then you'd be qualified. Of course, I didn't follow through with
7 that—well, they didn't let me. There were a lot of people getting out of the military at
8 that time and then they had too many of one—in one specialty, AFSC (Air Force
9 Specialty Code). So they went ahead and changed, moved people around, and that's how
10 I wound up in personnel administration. I worked in the orderly room then, as a clerk
11 starting out in personnel.

12 KC: Okay, now where was this again?

13 JK: Marks.

14 KC: It was at Marks, okay.

15 JK: Marks Airbase in Nome, Alaska.

16 KC: Alright, now what did you think about this transfer to personnel?

17 JK: Well, at first, I didn't want to do that because that was the lowest score that I
18 had. But it was a blessing because by doing that, it helped me to continue to work and
19 really understand that the knowledge I had was not sufficient enough. So then I went
20 back to taking different classes, and I did that through the military.

21 KC: Okay. Now what was your daily routine working in personnel?

22 JK: The daily routine was preparing morning reports and taking care of a lot of
23 other files, and different things like that when I started out.

24 KC: So compared to what life would have been like on the farm in Louisiana,
25 would you say that this was an improvement?

26 JK: Oh, yes sir. I did not want to work on the farm. I don't know why, and I did
27 work at it, and didn't have any problem with it, but I did not want to stay there. I knew
28 that that would be what I would keep doing, you know, all my life if I stayed there.

29 KC: And so far, you've already been around the country and had a paid vacation
30 to Alaska so far. I'm sorry, go ahead.

31 JK: That's okay.

1 KC: Where did you go after Marks?

2 JK: Okay, when I left Marks, that's when I went back to Texas.

3 KC: Okay.

4 JK: No, wait a minute, I'm wrong. I left Marks and came back, and they assigned
5 me to—I went to Postal School then in Virginia. I can't remember—and then I wind up
6 working in the post office instead of being—still staying with the orderly room and
7 personnel and the administration. It's a related field, and it still is related with the
8 personnel administration and postal would go so far. When I became a tech sergeant I had
9 to change over completely, and that's when I went into the personnel administration and
10 then 1st Sergeant.

11 KC: Okay. Well, tell me about this time here in Virginia. You're working in the
12 postal area. What was that like?

13 JK: Well, that was really interesting, and I thought I would like that, and I stayed
14 with it for a few years. As a matter of fact, I was promoted. I went from there then and I
15 went back—let's see, then that's when I went back to Texas.

16 KC: Okay.

17 JK: I went to San Angelo, Texas, at Goodfellow Air Force Base.

18 KC: Okay, now when did you arrive in San Angelo, Goodfellow?

19 JK: Oh, let's see, that would have been '50, in 1950.

20 KC: In 1950?

21 JK: Yes, sir.

22 KC: Okay, now in the summer of 1950, of course, the Korean War begins. North
23 Korea Invades South Korea past the 38th parallel. How did this affect you?

24 JK: Well, it didn't affect me because they did not select me to go there. So I
25 stayed at Goodfellow, and worked in the postal field and was promoted three striper, and
26 then from there to staff sergeant. Then that's when I got my other assignment then—and
27 that was in '52, I got the assignment to Eielson Air Force Base, in Alaska again.

28 KC: Okay, now what do you remember about the Korean War? There you are
29 sergeant in the Air Force. How closely were you following the war?

30 JK: Well, pretty close because I had a brother there, he was at Inchon, my
31 youngest brother.

1 KC: So your brother went in on the landing then?

2 JK: Yes, sir.

3 KC: Okay.

4 JK: And then when I went to Alaska—I mean, from San Angelo I went to Eielson
5 Air Force Base in the Fairbanks area. They called it “Mile 26.”. Anyway, I had an
6 opportunity—they were asking for people to go over there. Of course, I’d be dealing with
7 postal, but the delivery, to get mailed or routed to different areas and so I was hoping that
8 I could get that. Well, I volunteered for it, and they agreed to send me. When I went over
9 there, I told the captain that I reported to that I had a brother there, and I wanted to go see
10 him at Inchon. And he said, “You do?” He said, “You’re not supposed to be here then.”
11 And this was just a temporary thing. We would be going for thirty to sixty days and then
12 they would rotate the people. So they sent me back to Alaska, and I didn’t get to stay in
13 Korea then. I went back to Korea later on in ’60.

14 KC: But you were there in you said 1952?

15 JK: Yes, sir.

16 KC: Very briefly then.

17 JK: Just actually a week and they said, “No.” At that time they didn’t want the
18 families, especially like this. He said, “No, because of this situation you have to go back
19 to Alaska today.” So I went back the following week and they rotated other crews in
20 there. So I stayed at Eielson, and then of course that’s where I was promoted to tech
21 sergeant there.

22 KC: Now, I assume your brother then was part of the US Army?

23 JK: Yes, sir.

24 KC: Okay. I guess looking across the services they didn’t realize that one was
25 Army, one was Air Force and that you would both be there at the same time.

26 JK: Right.

27 KC: Okay. So were you disappointed that you were forced to leave Korea?

28 JK: Oh, very disappointed because I didn’t get to see my brother and I wanted to
29 see him, and I wanted to be there during that time and serve there. Get around and fly the
30 mail here and there. But I didn’t get to do that. My mouth got me in trouble.

31 KC: Yeah, I guess so. So you wind up back in Fairbanks.

1 JK: Yeah, “Mile 26” which is actually 26 miles out of Fairbanks, but it’s Eielson
2 Air Force Base.

3 KC: Okay, okay. And you said you were promoted to tech sergeant there.

4 JK: Yes, sir.

5 KC: Okay, it sounds like for an enlisted man you’re doing pretty well, pretty
6 quickly.

7 JK: It was three years, eleven months—I was a tech sergeant.

8 KC: So are you feeling pretty good about your time in the Air Force at this point?

9 JK: Yes, sir.

10 KC: It sounds like you’re progressing very well. That you’re taking to it, that
11 you’re doing a good job at whatever role they put you in by this point.

12 JK: Well, I tried to do my best, and that was one thing my dad told me when I left.
13 He said, “Now remember, who you are, where you come from, and you do your best.” I
14 said, “Yes, sir.” So I always tried to do that.

15 KC: Well, you’ve gotten past your three years in the Air Force that you talked
16 about. Are you considering making the Air Force a career at this point?

17 JK: At that time, yes sir. I’d made up my mind, I wanted to stay in.

18 KC: What was it about your time that made you want to stay?

19 JK: Well, I liked the Air Force, and I liked the service itself, and by doing like
20 you said, I would be travelling. I would also gain more knowledge as I went into different
21 fields. And the personnel administration—the admin and personnel was actually a field
22 that was wide open as far as you could go from—you could be working in different areas,
23 not just one thing. When I became a tech sergeant, well then when—I moved from
24 Alaska to Donaldson Air Force Base in Greenville, South Carolina. I worked there for
25 about three or four months and they told me that I would have to go work in the
26 personnel field. I could not stay as a tech sergeant. They were overloaded with people,
27 and the rank would make me go into it. So that’s when I went into the IG’s (Inspector
28 General) office.

29 KC: What did you think about this move?

30 JK: Sorry?

31 KC: I’m sorry, what did you think about this move?

1 JK: At first—I knew my field in postal very well and I had to dig again in order to
2 really get back into the grind of the personnel administration, which made a big
3 difference. But then the major that I worked for, he was the IG and he talked to me and
4 he said, “Now listen, don’t let that bother you. You can still take some courses that will
5 help you, and I’m going to show you and I’m going to help you.” And he did. And so we
6 built that office from just he and I in the office when it started out. And of course, we had
7 a “flying safety officer” was in there too, and two secretaries. And I had three men
8 working for me, airmen. It was quite a change, but then I realized that this would be
9 better for me, a wider field. That’s when I got into it completely, and from then on I
10 stayed in that field, but I moved from different areas. From IGs office to 1st sergeant, and
11 back and forth. So I had a duel AFSC, the 1st sergeant, and the personnel administration.

12 KC: Well, once again it sounds like you’ve found something that you could do.

13 JK: Well, yeah sure.

14 KC: And do pretty well by the sounds of it.

15 JK: Well, I have a letter from Colonel Dennis, Robert Dennis who was our
16 commander at the 12th Air Commando, and he wrote a letter to my wife, and of course
17 my EPR (Enlisted Performance Report), showed that if he was to serve as a commander
18 again, if he could have a first sergeant like me, he would really enjoy that. So I was glad I
19 was able to do the job like that.

20 KC: It must make you feel pretty proud I would think.

21 JK: Sir?

22 KC: It must make you feel pretty proud, I would think.

23 JK: Yes sir, it does, and of course he has since died, he was from Washington,
24 Yakima, Washington.

25 KC: Alright now—

26 JK: He reminds me of Jimmy Stewart.

27 KC: Oh, is that right?

28 JK: A type of fellow. He was soft spoken, but he meant what he said when he said
29 it, but he was very kind, and very understanding about the job. And a very good pilot,
30 too.

1 KC: Now, as you're working your way through the Air Force, this is the 1950s, of
2 course the Eisenhower/Truman Administration, we have Korean War, but we also have
3 the heating up of the Cold War in a lot of other ways as well. How aware were you at this
4 time through your career in the Air Force of these Cold War tensions?

5 JK: Well, I realized to a degree, in other words, we were going to have a lot more
6 conflict than we've had in areas, and probably we'd be subject to being shipped into
7 those areas. But I figured, "Well, I've signed on the dotted line and I'm their man."

8 KC: Was there a particular place you would have liked to have gone?

9 JK: Not really—well, I wanted to go to Europe naturally, but I never did go to
10 Europe.

11 KC: You never did make it over?

12 JK: All of my assignments were far East and Alaska. Twice to Alaska, two years.
13 Well, I was supposed to be there a year in Nome, and I stayed there fourteen months.
14 They held me over and couldn't get a replacement. Anyway, then I went from there. Then
15 the other ones were twice through Alaska, the other one was at Eielson, that's two years
16 there. Korea was 1960. I left from Donaldson Air Force Base, and went there and spent
17 thirteen months there, and then when to the Air University at Maxwell Air Force Base;
18 and stayed there four years, and I then was ready for retirement. I volunteered to come to
19 Shaw Air Force Base, and that's when I got caught. They wouldn't accept my retirement.
20 So I had eight months left to go, and I had to extend and go to Vietnam. Of course, they
21 promoted me to master sergeant.

22 KC: Right, sure. Alright, that's a bit of a jump there. Let me ask you about a few
23 of the things that maybe you remember about these different events in the world. One, of
24 course is in 1961 with the Bay of Pigs invasion.

25 JK: Right.

26 KC: What do you remember about that?

27 JK: Well, that was—let's see, you say '60—

28 KC: Yes, in 1961.

29 JK: '61?

30 KC: Mm-hmm.

1 JK: Okay, April of '61 is when I came back from Korea and I went to the Air
2 University at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. I helped out in the
3 command post there. In other words, some you know, but my regular job was assigned as
4 working with allied officers. I was the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge) of
5 that area of the school, and we trained—I think at that time sixty different countries that
6 would come and sent troops there to be trained, for further pilot training, and then that
7 afterwards. But they had to come through language school. We had a language school
8 there and that's what I worked in to be. But as far as getting—I was not subject to go
9 anywhere with the Bay of Pigs.

10 KC: Now, you worked there at the language school. What was your job?

11 JK: Well, my job was actually in that particular—I was the NCOIC, the sergeant
12 in charge of the ones that work in it. The airmen to get all the things, the recorders, and
13 this and that. I was over all of that, but I did not work in the language part and that's
14 where I failed again. Dr. Moore, he was the man in charge of all the labs and he spoke
15 French beautifully. He was married to a French girl. Anyway, and he wanted me to study,
16 you know, he'd say, "Why don't you use some of these tapes?" We had one of the best
17 tape labs and I wouldn't do that. He got aggravated with me about that.

18 KC: Why did you decide not to do it?

19 JK: Well, I don't know. It was just that I didn't at that time. I had a little daughter
20 that was three years old, and I'd gotten married in '55.

21 KC: Okay.

22 JK: So I didn't want to do things that I'd have to put more time in to do. And I
23 should have, but I didn't.

24 KC: Now, you'd gotten married in 1955.

25 JK: Yes, sir.

26 KC: But in what? 1960 you were in Korea. Is that right?

27 JK: Right.

28 KC: Okay, the year you spent there. What was it like leaving your wife and
29 family?

30 JK: Well, at first, I guess because my little daughter was only sixteen months old
31 and so it made a big difference as a father and as a husband. But I told them again, I said,

1 “What I have to do is when I sign on the dotted line, I’m committed to this and this is
2 what I have to do.” So I went and after that it was alright. I missed them some, you know,
3 but other than that it was okay.

4 KC: And what were you doing that year you were in Korea?

5 JK: The year I was in Korea I was assigned to division intelligence.

6 KC: Okay.

7 JK: And that’s what I worked in there.

8 KC: Was it the personnel branch of intelligence?

9 JK: Still personnel. I was the sergeant in charge of—the NCOIC of the division
10 intelligence. I got involved in a good bit of that because we had to maintain target folders,
11 and a bunch of other stuff that I had never fooled with before.

12 KC: Well, let’s jump back into your time at Maxwell here, there at the language
13 school. How long were you there?

14 JK: Sorry?

15 KC: How long were you at Maxwell, at the language school?

16 JK: I was at Maxwell from April of ’61 until ’65. Let’s see, it would have been
17 August of ’65 I left there.

18 KC: So you were there for a good long while then?

19 JK: Yes, over four years. Once you were in a command over four years, at that
20 time they had a regulation that you could apply to go to the base of your choice,
21 especially if you were approaching retirement. And that’s why I moved to Shaw Air
22 Force Base because I had already checked that out with the DuPont Plant here in
23 Camden, and I had lined up to get a job there.

24 KC: Okay. Now, while you were at Maxwell again a year later, 1962 of course is
25 the Cuban Missile Crisis.

26 JK: Right.

27 KC: What do you remember about that?

28 JK: I remember some of it because we were, you know, some of the people were
29 involved with it from there, but I was not. I remained in that school, the Allied Officer’s
30 Division School. I, you know, have some different vague memories of it, of what actually
31 took place.

1 KC: What do you remember, from your perspective?

2 JK: Well, just the way that things were handled. We had already divided a country
3 in Korea, and I figured, “Well, here we go.” We were getting involved in too many things
4 I thought. In other words, even though we needed to get involved, but when we do, we
5 should go full force, just like we did World War II. That was my perspective of war, or
6 anything of that type. Now, I don’t mean that we should go to war each time with little
7 conflict. I think the way things were going there, which was in our own hemisphere, it
8 was really a dangerous situation.

9 KC: You said that you wanted the US to go in full force, with a total commitment.
10 Were you satisfied then with the settlement of Korea, the Korean War?

11 JK: Not really, not really. I’ve always spoke out about that, and I still do. Of
12 course, then we went ahead and divided Vietnam and got run out of there. So that was
13 another thing that set a bad taste to me, but I didn’t think they could do that.

14 KC: What about the handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis? There you were at
15 Maxwell.

16 JK: Right.

17 KC: What do you think about the way the Air Force and the government with the
18 Kennedy Administration handled the Cuban Missile Crisis?

19 JK: Well, finally I think they did the best that they could, and I think it worked
20 out better because they accomplished what they set to do, to move Russia out and move
21 their equipment out of there.

22 KC: Alright, now you’re going to stay at Maxwell until 1965.

23 JK: Right.

24 KC: And you mentioned that you were looking around for maybe a future career
25 once you got out of the Air Force.

26 JK: Right.

27 KC: And you were looking—it was a DuPont you say?

28 JK: Yeah, DuPont.

29 KC: And you were looking at the DuPont Corporation that had a plant in
30 Camden?

31 JK: Camden, South Carolina.

1 KC: Okay. So it seems to me that your choice to go in the Air Force and to do
2 these various different things, working in personnel, postal administrative positions, it
3 seems that these choices have worked out pretty well for you so far.

4 JK: Yes sir, it had. It was the best thing that could have happened to me, really.

5 KC: So you're looking at DuPont. Did you know someone who worked at
6 DuPont?

7 JK: No, I didn't know anyone there at the time. When I moved from Maxwell to
8 here, to Camden, to Shaw Air Force Base, I still had my mobile home, the trailer we lived
9 in—we bought it when we got married. The reason I'm giving you this—then we decided
10 then we'd look for a house here in Camden. So we did and found one, and we bought it.
11 And two weeks later is when I thought sure I was going to get my retirement orders, I
12 didn't. I got a reading to go to Vietnam. So I didn't get to get my job then, but they told
13 me—I'd already sent my resume in and had everything set up and they said, "You'll have
14 your job when you get back, if you want it." I said, "I do."

15 KC: Wow, that must have felt pretty good.

16 JK: Sorry.

17 KC: That must have felt pretty good.

18 JK: Yes, sir.

19 KC: Now this is 1965, so you'd been married for ten years.

20 JK: Right.

21 KC: Moved around a little bit, but not all that much after you got married, I guess.

22 JK: No, we didn't move. I was fortunate as far as that part.

23 KC: So you find yourself in Camden, South Carolina, you have a job lined up,
24 you've got a family. Did you have just the one girl at this time or did you have other
25 children?

26 JK: Just one child. We still have this one child. She just retired from the Air Force
27 as a lieutenant colonel.

28 KC: Oh, wow! That's terrific.

29 JK: Her husband is too. They're up in Dayton, Ohio. I was just visiting with
30 them last week.

31 KC: That's fantastic.

1 JK: Yes, sir.

2 KC: So you've got this one child, you've got a wife, you've got a job waiting for
3 you in Camden. You've just bought a house and you get orders for Vietnam.

4 JK: Right.

5 KC: And this is 1965.

6 JK: Yup.

7 KC: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like it must have been
8 a blow to you.

9 JK: It was at first. And again, I told my wife, I said, "Well, honey." I said, "The
10 thing is I signed on the dotted line, and my service is not over, and I'm just gonna have to
11 go over there and put in an extra year, that's it." And so I did and she said, "Well, if we
12 want the house from the people that we just signed for—" We bought it directly from the
13 couple. And she said, "Why don't we ask them to take it back?" I said, "No, we're going
14 to need a house." She said, "Well, what if something happens to you when you're over
15 there?" I said, "Well, you're not going to live in a cave, you need a house. And if you
16 don't want to live there, sell it, find you a young man and get away from here." She said,
17 "You're something." I said, "No, this is life." But I said, "I'm planning on coming back,
18 now don't you run off now." So anyway, what it was, when we transferred from
19 Montgomery, the whole thing was this. I was interested concerning my daughter's
20 interests. I wanted to move her as least as I could, as far as her education.

21 KC: Sure.

22 JK: So we moved her, and moved her to Sumter—she had to go to Sumter
23 County. She was registered there when we moved. So then I registered here in Kershaw
24 County in Camden, and then I had to turn around and my mother in law was going to
25 come stay here. She lived in Kershaw which was nineteen miles away. She was going to
26 come live here during that one year that I was gone. Well, then a week before I got ready
27 to leave, she said, "I just can't do it dear Kliebert." I said, "That's alright Momma, don't
28 worry about it. Pack up your stuff and you can go over there. We're going to keep the
29 power on in this house and everything. Put the phone on "vacation". You can come back
30 here if you want to later on, and if you decide to do that, you'll be fine." And then it
31 worked out, I had to move my daughter where they moved her. They transferred her to

1 Lancaster County, which was in Kershaw. And so she went to school there for that year,
2 and then had to transfer her back here when I came back. And so that was quite a change
3 for her, so that's why I was concerned.

4 KC: What was your family's reaction when you got the orders for Vietnam?

5 JK: Well, my wife was devastated. She said, "I just knew that things would not
6 work out." I said, "They will work out anyway." I said, "It doesn't make any difference."
7 I said, "They've given me the orders and that's where I have to go, and I can't retire so I
8 have to go." I said, "I'll serve my time and come back." And I did and it worked out. I
9 earned a Bronze Star there.

10 KC: Now, you moved to Camden in 1965, right?

11 JK: Yes, sir.

12 KC: Okay and you got your orders in 1965 for Vietnam? You are going to stay in
13 for an extra year. Alright, now what did you do from the time you got your orders before
14 you left for Vietnam?

15 JK: I got there in August and it was actually December before I got to leave. I
16 worked in the director of materials office, as the NCOIC there.

17 KC: Okay, now this would have taken you to December of 1965.

18 JK: Yes, sir.

19 KC: So you would have shipped out to the West Coast and to Vietnam then
20 probably early 1966 then?

21 JK: I went the last of—I got that wrong, wait a minute. I didn't leave here until
22 December of '66.

23 KC: Okay, so it was 1966.

24 JK: Right.

25 KC: Okay, okay. Well, I guess that makes more sense with the time limit, that
26 follows.

27 JK: Okay.

28 KC: What did you know about what was going on in Vietnam? Had you been
29 following American policy? Had you been following the war as it was taking place?

30 JK: Very much so.

31 KC: Okay, what did you know about it?

1 JK: Well, the way things were going, it was going to be a long, drawn out affair
2 because I read—also the French had actually told the Americans that, “If you go in there,
3 it’s going to be a long, drawn out affair.” Because they were getting out of it. When I was
4 in Korea, a matter of fact—let me go back a little bit, they asked me did I want to go over
5 as an advisor. I told them no, and since I had a little bit of—I said, “No, I really don’t
6 want to do that.” They said, “Well, we’d move your family then if—you could move
7 them to Korea.” I said, “No, I don’t want to do that.” And then they would of course
8 extend my time there and I said, “No, I don’t want to do that.” I’m going home. And so I
9 left to come out of Korea. But that would have been as an advisor then.

10 KC: So you turned down that opportunity?

11 JK: Sorry?

12 KC: So you turned down that opportunity early on?

13 JK: Yes, I didn’t want that.

14 KC: Sure.

15 JK: I didn’t want them to have to go to Korea anyway, and she would have to go
16 to school there. Plus, things were unstable anyway at that time. It’s unstable and still is
17 now.

18 KC: Alright, the US had been involved in Vietnam for quite sometime.

19 JK: Oh yes.

20 KC: But we don’t have officially troops on the ground—although we did have
21 troops on the ground—until early in 1965.

22 JK: Right.

23 KC: You said that you were watching the war pretty closely and you had this very
24 strong feeling, this understanding that it was going to be, as you said, a long drawn out
25 affair.

26 JK: Right.

27 KC: Had you been following it militarily? Had you been following what the
28 American Military Command in Vietnam was doing, and the running battles, and things
29 like this?

30 JK: Some of it, yes sir.

31 KC: What were your impressions of the way we were handling it then?

1 JK: Well, I thought that they were handling it correctly, but the problem was is
2 that the military should be making the decisions, instead of politically. It should not be
3 another political thing like it was in others. Korea and (unintelligible). That's where we
4 run into problems. Of course, being a military man, I believe that—and knowing that
5 politics, we need politics, but we don't need politics to be dictating to a general that's on
6 the ground, calling the shots and then saying, "No, you can't do that." And that was my
7 beef about that. I didn't appreciate that, I didn't like that, and that continued to happen
8 while I was over there.

9 KC: What did you think about the American presence there? What was the United
10 States trying to accomplish, as you understood it then?

11 JK: Well, I thought at first what they were trying to accomplish was to stabilize
12 the country, and then move out of it. But it didn't look like that after that. It was just a
13 continuous thing, as we've done before. Go from one country to the other and just stir it
14 up—well, do what we were supposed to be doing, but then politics gets in it and just
15 sends it the other way as far as I'm concerned. I don't think politics—the political part
16 should be to provide what's needed for these commanders on the ground. And then that's
17 it. Now the president—yes, should make decisions, that's not what I mean. And other
18 people, they work with him, but they should not dictate certain things that are against the
19 wishes of that particular commander that knows what battle is, and what should be done.

20 KC: Alright. Now, you've been following the war somewhat closely, you have a
21 good idea of what's going on there. You're someone who was aware of World War II,
22 and aware of the Korean War, and you see the Vietnam War developing, 1964, 1965
23 especially, 1966, and now you're going over there. You said that your wife was
24 devastated. You certainly did not look forward to this, you were hoping to disappear into
25 civilian life and have another career after that.

26 JK: That's right.

27 KC: But regardless, you're going to go to Vietnam. What was it like leaving your
28 family in South Carolina, there in December of 1966?

29 JK: Well now, that was real harder than going to Korea.

30 KC: Why?

1 JK: Well, I don't know. I had all my plans that I was going to retire from the
2 military, I had my home already here, and then I would go to work to DuPont, which was
3 only six miles away. That just upset the whole applecart.

4 KC: In December of '66 you leave, you go to the West Coast I assume.

5 JK: Yes, sir.

6 KC: For your trip to Vietnam. Where did you fly out of, do you remember?

7 JK: Out of Travis Air Force Base.

8 KC: Out of Travis Air Force Base. Now, as you made your way to California,
9 while you were in California for this short time.

10 JK: I went from here to visit my mother and my family in Louisiana.

11 KC: Okay, I was going to ask you that.

12 JK: Right, I went to visit them for three days, and then I left there by train and
13 went to California.

14 KC: So you took a train to California there?

15 JK: Yes, sir.

16 KC: Okay. How aware were you at this time, in late 1966, of the anti-war
17 feelings, anti-war sentiments in the United States?

18 JK: Well, at that particular time there's only some of the vague things that I
19 remember. Some of them, they left the country and went to Canada and stuff like that.
20 That kind of upset me to a degree because here they're American, their young people,
21 yes, they don't want to go to war, but they want to live in a country like this. But other
22 than that, I don't think there was as much of that as when I came back from Vietnam.

23 KC: Yes, certainly, certainly the case. Describe for me the trip to Vietnam from
24 Travis Air Force Base.

25 JK: Well, that was a very good flight. It was—they'd arrange flights that we'd fly
26 in, they were commercial flights. I didn't go in a military craft, went on a regular airline
27 and went into Tan Son Nhut, which originally, I was being assigned to the IG's Office
28 there. I was going to stay in Saigon, in a hotel, which I did for a week. That would have
29 been a good assignment, but then one of the personnel people that he and I had worked
30 for many years in different areas. He was the chief master sergeant, and he was in charge
31 of personnel. He contacted me and he asked me, he said, "Would you like to go back into

1 the 1st sergeant's field?" I said, "Well, not really. I'm assigned here now with the IG and I
2 will remain with the personnel administration and I'll do that." And then he'd give me
3 some particulars about it. What would take place, and this and that, that we'd be flying
4 here and there through inspections. I said, "Well, I don't know if I want to do that.
5 Whatever, tell me some more about it." Anyway, so that's when he got a hold of—the
6 colonel had already got a hold of him, Colonel Dennis. He needed a 1st sergeant up at
7 Bien Hoa, which was the 12th Air Commando Squadron. They were just getting it started
8 real good. So he needed a 1st sergeant, and that's how—he interviewed six of us and he
9 finally come down and asked me would I be the 1st sergeant, and I agreed, and he said,
10 "Now, you know you'll be living in a tent for awhile until we can get these louvered huts
11 built." And I said, "Yes, sir. That's fine." I said, "I come here, I know I'm—even in
12 Saigon, we're still in a combat area." And so he said, "Well, it'll be a lot different living."
13 I said, "Yes sir, I understand that." I said, "If you need me, I'm willing to go if you want
14 me." And so he checked my record out and everything and so that's how I wound up
15 going to Bien Hoa as a 1st Sergeant.

16 KC: Okay, let me back up here a little bit and ask you what it was like for a young
17 man—I guess you weren't all that young now. You'd been in for almost twenty years.

18 JK: Right.

19 KC: What was it like for you, as someone who was raised in rural Louisiana, to be
20 dropped down in the middle of Tan Son Nhut, Saigon? What was Saigon like?

21 JK: Well, in other words Saigon at that time, really during a time like that people
22 were riding their scooters and motorcycles and thing—taxi cabs, which I was impressed
23 with. I mean, actually the way they drove and the way they carried on you know. But it
24 reminded me some of New Orleans. Of course, I know it was a combat area, but still at
25 that time I hadn't realized any part of that as far as bombings, or anything like that. I
26 thought, "Well, here we go again." But anyway, I didn't get to stay there. I went to the
27 area where we really had problems in February of '67.

28 KC: So in February of '67, you joined the 12th?

29 JK: No, I joined them in December, two weeks after I got there.

30 KC: Okay, okay I'm sorry. Yes, yes sir.

1 JK: No, it would have been January. January, I went there. Because I was with the
2 IG's Office for a week, just getting settled. I hadn't even made any inspections yet.

3 KC: So you find yourself in Bien Hoa very early on in your tour?

4 JK: Right.

5 KC: You were with the 12th Air Commando Squadron. What did you know about
6 the 12th Air Commando Squadron?

7 JK: I didn't know anything about it other than when I visited where they trained
8 over in Florida, next to Eglin, the other base. I can't even recall it. But anyway, they
9 trained the air commandos there. I'd read some parts about it, but other than that I didn't
10 know anything about that operation.

11 KC: Okay, what is your role here going to be with the 12th?

12 JK: As a 1st sergeant.

13 KC: As a 1st sergeant, alright. And you're still going to be working in personnel?

14 JK: Sorry?

15 KC: And you're still going to be working in personnel?

16 JK: No, I would be the 1st sergeant there then.

17 KC: I'm sorry.

18 JK: I came in as a 1st sergeant.

19 KC: Okay, very good, very good. Alright, now what are your duties going to be as
20 1st sergeant is what I meant to ask?

21 JK: Duties is the responsibility of the troops. In other words, all the enlisted for
22 their discipline, for their welfare, for their housing, and everything that they need. That's
23 the duty of a 1st sergeant.

24 KC: Sure.

25 JK: And that, when we started, we only had three airplanes, three C-123s. Well,
26 that's all they had at the time when I went there. That's all they had, and there was twelve
27 men including me. That was some officers and a few enlisted that were aircraft
28 mechanics and things. Okay, then we built the squadron up, kept adding, and then we
29 started getting more planes, and more troops, and we'd wind up with a hundred and
30 seventy people and twenty-nine aircrafts by the time I left there.

31 KC: So you were there at a very important time, as they're building this up?

1 JK: Yes, sir. Well, that's why Colonel Dennis was searching for someone who
2 had had experience in different things. This Chief Master Sergeant Eugene said, "Well, if
3 you want a man, that man there has been exposed to a lot of things." And that's how I
4 wind up being there.

5 KC: Now, of course the 12th Air Commando Squadron was involved in Operation
6 Ranch Hand.

7 JK: Yes, sir.

8 KC: Spraying defoliants throughout the warzone. What did you know about this,
9 anything?

10 JK: At that time, no. I learned everything after I got there.

11 KC: Okay.

12 JK: I knew nothing about that operation completely. I knew of some of it, but then
13 wound up at briefings and different things and got my feet wet as you might say, with the
14 commander. And then we worked it out, and we had like three or four planes at Da Nang,
15 we had detachments from the Squadron, so I had three there, no four there. At Cam Ranh
16 Bay we had three and then we had four detachments. One was still at Tan Son Nhut, that
17 was only three planes there, but the rest of the squadron was at Bien Hoa and we rotated
18 those crews back and forth. So I had the job that I had. I flew more then than I did when I
19 was on flying staff. Because about four times a week I'd be flying somewhere.

20 KC: Right, I was going to ask you that. If you were flying around taking care of
21 these duties at these various different places. So you saw quite a variety of different
22 things in different places then.

23 JK: Yes, sir.

24 KC: Alright. Now tell me how—

25 JK: The other one was Cam Ranh Bay, I got it.

26 KC: Okay, okay. Tell me how things changed from place to place as you flew
27 around from Cam Ranh Bay and Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut, and Da Nang. Tell me about
28 how the war changed or what the perspective of the war was in these different places.

29 JK: Well, at times it looked like we were winning, and things were getting better,
30 and other times everything just fell through. We'd wind up with gaining some ground,
31 and then losing some. Even with our perspective of what we did because we didn't only

1 spray—we sprayed Agent Orange which was Dioxin, and we had mixed that with
2 different chemicals to do different things. We did crops too, we did rice crops, and that
3 was a more difficult one because you were flying at about fifty feet above. At that time,
4 they had a setting where you had to fly—they wanted us to fly a straight stripping,
5 instead of checkerboard. Well, that's when we ran into trouble, and we wound up with
6 Captain Coogly and his crew, and he was shot right through the head. They couldn't
7 shoot him from the bottom because—well they could, but we had armor piercing where
8 the cabin was and also where the flight mechanic was in the back. But the rest of the
9 aircraft was just the skin of the aircraft, that's it. Then they shot them. They would set up
10 in other words by using stripping. You'd fly one way and fly right back and do the rice
11 crops. When you do that, they'd set up somewhere and then they'd shoot them, and that's
12 what happened. So we had to change that policy and go to checker board.

13 KC: Okay. Now when you say you're doing the rice crop, what do you mean by
14 that?

15 JK: Well, what it was, the Viet Cong—the South Vietnamese were raising the rice
16 for themselves and to sustain themselves, and also to sell. So the Viet Cong would come
17 in and they were living in tunnels and things, so they would come in and take over these
18 fields when they were ready to harvest. Just about the time they were ready to harvest, the
19 South Vietnamese would let them have it or they would kill them and take it. So we
20 would have to—whenever that took place, we would have to spray to destroy it, so they
21 could not harvest it.

22 KC: Okay, how did you—and you may not know this, but how did you know
23 when a field was taken over by the Viet Cong, and that it was there for—in need of being
24 sprayed, being destroyed?

25 JK: We had Green Berets on the ground, in different intelligence outfits that
26 would give the information to our headquarters, the wing, what was taking place and
27 that's how we knew where our targets would be.

28 KC: Okay, so intel was providing it to you at the 12th and then you guys would act
29 on it from there?

30 JK: Yes, sir.

31 KC: Okay.

1 JK: It had to be done then, you know. That's the type of things we were doing.

2 KC: Now you were doing a lot of flying around back and forth. Were you doing
3 this in small planes, were you riding along in cargo planes from one base to the other?

4 JK: It was all cargo planes, C-123s.

5 KC: All C-123s?

6 JK: As a matter of fact, at first when I started doing it, they asked me if I would
7 mind if they would do a few spraying runs while we were going to the other place. I said,
8 "I don't mind." And we did that for a while and then the commander and I flew a few
9 times together and they learned about that from the wing, and they said, "Nope, you can't
10 do that. The two of you can't fly together to start with. And the other thing is you will not
11 be flying on a mission anymore over fields. When you go, you'll be going straight to that
12 base to that detachment, to do whatever you need to do and then come back. You're not
13 going to being doing spraying." So they stopped that.

14 KC: Okay, but you did fly a few spray missions though?

15 JK: I flew about five of them.

16 KC: Five of them?

17 JK: Yes, sir.

18 KC: Okay, well take me through a typical spray mission.

19 JK: Well, first of all they would load the aircraft. We had a tank in there and they
20 would fill that up with those drums, and get the crew's ready, and then we would get
21 ready to go. From there they would have a particular—they had been given the orders
22 which place to go, which place to spray, what kind needed to be sprayed. And then we
23 would do that and move on to the next one.

24 KC: Okay, now would you generally do one particular area at a time, or would
25 you have enough to do one place and then move onto the next, or did you have to come
26 back for refuel?

27 JK: It depends on the extent of the spraying. If it was defoliant used for trees and
28 brush, it was a little bit different if it was for crops, there'd be the rice and that was a little
29 bit faster and easier. So sometimes they could do two places, two fields.

30 KC: And you said the plane that you generally flew on was shot up pretty good
31 then?

1 JK: Sorry?

2 KC: I think you mentioned before that the plane that you flew on was shot up
3 pretty good.

4 JK: Oh yes.

5 KC: Was this all Viet Cong?

6 JK: Well, we're not sure about that. We think it was because that C-123 there,
7 whenever it would be flying, we'd be going into Da Nang. That's where we took most of
8 the hits because you'd have to come down over the river to be able to line up with the
9 runway, and there was no way you could keep the altitude away, and they would set up
10 with gun boats. Well, we had Navy there trying to control that too for us with gunboats,
11 to try to eradicate them, but we still wound up getting shot at anyway.

12 KC: What was it like, what was the feeling of being shot at like that at such a low
13 level?

14 JK: The feeling was real bad. One time I had about twenty thousand dollars in a
15 chest. It was like an ammo box; it was really and it was MPC (Military Payment
16 Certificate) anyway. That's what we used there.

17 KC: Right.

18 JK: Military Pay Certificate, and they would go up to denominations of ten. But
19 anyway, I had that, and I was going to pay some troops. I was sitting there, and I had my
20 rifle sitting on my shoulder there and I had my .38 pistol, flak jacket and everything, and
21 I was talking to one of my crews across the way. He was sitting on the other side of the
22 plane in the webbing, the seats.

23 KC: Mm-hmm.

24 JK: And by that time we finished, of course I moved back and when I moved
25 back, I sat back in my webbing and the bullet came right through between me and the box
26 and went through the ceiling.

27 KC: Oh wow.

28 JK: So I really was fortunate that this did take place because I'll tell you, it would
29 have hit me right under the chin, you know. I was leaning over, and I realized then how
30 serious it was. I said, "Well, I've had some narrow escapes before, but this one here's
31 getting closer."

1 KC: Oh man.

2 JK: But other than that, I never was hit. Well, I did have some—when they hit
3 us—this is another thing, I’ll wait to tell you that. We had an invasion there on the base.
4 They moved in with rockets, Russian rockets, and also mortars and different other fire.
5 The Air Police could not contain them, and we had difficulty there. We lost about twenty
6 aircrafts; these were fighters. Mainly they was in revetment, but they were hitting them.
7 And they learned later that the guy—the Vietnamese that worked in the barbershop, he
8 cut my hair by the way, and he was one of the informants that was giving them exactly
9 where the places were, and where to hit them.

10 KC: Wow.

11 JK: They later captured him of course and the South Vietnamese cut his head off.
12 It was a crucial point, and I have another tale to tell you about that too, coming back from
13 Da Nang one time.

14 KC: Okay, well why don’t we take a break here for today Mr. Kliebert.

15 JK: Alright.

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Interview with Joseph Kliebert
Session [2] of [2]
Date 31 August 2009

1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager continuing an Oral History interview with Mr.
2 Joseph Kliebert. Today is 31 August 2009, I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Kliebert is
3 joining me by phone from his home in Camden, South Carolina. Mr. Kliebert, when we
4 left off last time you were about ready to describe this attack on your base there with the
5 12th. It was a rocket attack, and you had some interesting things to say about that. So if
6 you would, can you please give me a description of the entire day, how it started. Take
7 me through this whole incident please.

8 JK: Alright. We were awakened about—it was early morning hours around, I
9 guess five o'clock in the morning, and we started getting hit. They called them Russian
10 Rockets, I don't know, but they made craters up to twelve feet in diameter.

11 KC: Wow.

12 JK: And deep enough that I could stand in them and you could only see the top
13 part of my shoulders. We had several hits like that of course, that I saw afterwards. In
14 other words, it started about five, five thirty in the morning and we headed for the
15 bunkers. That went on for probably a couple hours and there were—I think it was at least
16 twenty-three airplanes—these were fighters, the F-100s, and other type planes. Our
17 planes were not hit, the 123s. But they did hit those in revetments, so it was called in by
18 someone which worked on the base they later found out. In other words, he was a
19 Vietnamese. But anyway, we wind up with—I think it was around twenty people that
20 were killed. We had—right next to the first sergeant barracks where we were, we had
21 eight Air Policemen killed there.

22 KC: Wow.

23 JK: One of the rockets hit directly on the building, which was next to us. Anyway,
24 it was quite something. They started out with mortars, the way I understand, and then
25 from there they overrun the Air Policemen. The one's that'd come in doing these
26 different things, but they were working mostly from outside the base, the perimeter of the
27 base. And then of course the AC-47s, which we had Gatling guns on them, they finally

1 were able to get up and get out of there and go ahead and fire on them and get rid of
2 them. But that's what took place and that was February of '67.

3 KC: Okay, February of 1967.

4 JK: Yes, sir.

5 KC: Alright, now you mention that they started off with mortars. Is that correct?

6 JK: That's correct.

7 KC: So they were close enough to hit you with mortars before they started to call
8 in the big stuff.

9 JK: That's right.

10 KC: Okay. Now, while this is going on, five-thirty in the morning when it begins,
11 tell me what you in particular are doing. You're 1st sergeant, you've got responsibilities
12 as a 1st sergeant. What were you doing?

13 JK: The first thing I did was—to get started, to get my men because we were not
14 housed all together there where the first sergeant barracks was. I had to go probably, I'd
15 say a quarter—no, not that much. We were spread out on the base, and I had four
16 barracks—well, four hut type louvered type huts, with screen on them. I had to go to
17 where those men were to alert them, to make sure they were in the bunkers. And then I
18 had to come back and get some more, and then we helped with the Air Policemen that
19 were killed there. Some of them were injured and they died later, but there was eight of
20 them. We helped with that, and then go into the bunkers ourselves.

21 KC: So what are you doing while this attack is taking place, other than the things
22 you just mentioned. When you're in the bunker, you said that this attack lasted for about
23 two hours.

24 JK: Right.

25 KC: Are you just sitting in the bunker waiting for it to end?

26 JK: Yes, we did after that. Once we got this cleared up, and then we went into the
27 bunkers, and we stayed until they give us the all clear to come back out.

28 KC: Okay. Now, did you say that there were Viet Cong that made it inside the
29 perimeter of the camp, of the base?

30 JK: It wasn't the Viet Cong. What it was, they were the ones that—well, I don't
31 know how to say that. They probably were, but they were killed by the Air Police finally,

1 and then with other people involved on the base. What it was, what made it worse, we
2 could have rifles and then we had our weapons, the M-I carbine, .30 caliber, and we had
3 that, and they were stored in the hangar which was a half a mile away from us. The
4 ammunition—we had the weapons, but we couldn't have the ammunition at the time.

5 KC: Now, why is that?

6 JK: I don't know. This was a rule. You see, we were on a base that we were a
7 tenant unit, and they would not allow that because they said people drank and raised
8 cane, and they didn't want them to have that. I finally got that— well, not just me, the
9 commander and I got together on that and another commander and 1st sergeant—that we
10 were in a war zone and we needed to have everything. The ones who would not behave,
11 we would have to take care of that. In other words, if they did drink and have a problem
12 then we had means that we had established to control that with people internally in those
13 huts and also then with us as the commander and the 1st sergeants.

14 KC: So from that point on you had weapons and the ammunition available.

15 JK: Yes sir, later on, but not at that time. See, we didn't have that at that time.
16 That's what brought that to a head. I'd mentioned when I first got to the base and I was—
17 the wing commander there said, "No, the reason they didn't want to do that was we had
18 too many people that were getting drunk and carrying on and they didn't want to have all
19 this together."

20 KC: What was it like for you to be under attack like this, without the means to
21 defend yourself?

22 JK: Well, it was really a helpless situation. That's frustrated me to a degree, but I
23 was still able to go ahead and carry out my duties, but it really was a bad moment, I'll tell
24 you that.

25 KC: When you are in your bunker and you're being hit by these considerable
26 sized, these very, very large rockets, what is going through your mind when you're sitting
27 there for two hours, knowing that you can do nothing about it?

28 JK: Well, I figured by the time the ones who could not get to the bunkers, if there
29 were any, as far as I knew, most of them were there after I checked them. But some of
30 these 1st sergeants could not check theirs because they were in a different area from
31 where they were, so we were told to get to the bunkers, and that's what we did. But it

1 made it very difficult in other words you were wondering, “Are they okay? Have I done
2 all I can do, that I need to do?” We were told, “No, you go to the bunkers and you stay
3 there.” And that’s what we did.

4 KC: What is it like to be under attack by rockets? It’s just a matter of whether
5 it’s—I guess it would just be luck or fate, whether or not one would hit you, one would
6 land in or near your bunker.

7 JK: That’s correct. See, one had already—which was very evident that they could
8 do it, because they had hit the hut next to us, the 1st sergeant’s hut and that was another
9 thing that I questioned too. Why have all the 1st sergeants in one hut because that’s the
10 people who are leaders and anyway, they changed it after that. That was another thing
11 that took a change. We were housed in different areas, with the units.

12 KC: What goes through your mind in one of these attacks? What do you think
13 about while this is going on?

14 JK: Well, I was thinking first of the safety of everyone, but then I was thinking of
15 myself also. In other words, “Here I am, and there’s nothing I can do except just sit here
16 in the darkness of the—”

17 KC: Of the bunker?

18 JK: Bunker, I’m sorry.

19 KC: It’s alright.

20 JK: I lost it there. Anyway, things run through your mind that you really
21 sometimes can’t rationalize really what next.

22 KC: Such as what?

23 JK: Well, if they continue the attack, and they could not suppress them with the
24 other folks that were there we could be, in other words, all killed, or we could be captured
25 was another thing.

26 KC: What would have been your thoughts about being captured?

27 JK: Well, that part—having known what some of the prisoners, POWs (Prisoner
28 of War) went through, I mean before this, in other situations, in other wars. It actually
29 works on you that, you feel that—okay, we have nothing to defend ourselves. We didn’t
30 have any weapons, and we were then just sitting ducks as far as I’m concerned.

31 KC: Were you a religious man at that time?

1 JK: Yes, and I've always have been, since I was about twenty years old.

2 KC: Did you find yourself praying in this circumstance?

3 JK: I did.

4 KC: I'm sorry, you say you did?

5 JK: I did. Yes, sir. That's one of the things I did that helped me to get through

6 some of that and then go back to my duties, once this was over. I didn't just pray for

7 myself; I asked some of them that was around me in the bunker, did they mind if I prayed

8 out loud and I did.

9 KC: Okay, so you even asked those others with you, okay. Did you find that they

10 greeted that warmly? Were they open to that?

11 JK: Well, at that time they really did. Now, some of them made some changes

12 after that.

13 KC: How so?

14 JK: They didn't go to the services, but later on they started going, on Sundays

15 especially.

16 KC: It sort of put the fear into them as you might say.

17 JK: Yes, sir.

18 KC: Now you mentioned that they were after the fighter planes that were there. Is

19 that right?

20 JK: Yes, sir. Mostly because this is the ones that the hit, we had C-47s there, we

21 had the C-123s which was the ones we did the—but none of those were hit in that area.

22 Maybe it's because they didn't get—they were trying to get the fighters because they

23 figured that would be their best target to start with because if they could get them, they

24 could not get up and get after them. The rest of the planes were cargo and transports, and

25 stuff like that. Our Providers were for spraying, so we didn't have anything that could do

26 anything to them except, fly out of there. That would be the only thing.

27 KC: Well yes, that makes absolute sense. So they targeted the fighters, so they

28 must have had some pretty reliable intelligence then.

29 JK: I'm sure they did, and these were the people that worked—these were South

30 Vietnamese, well supposedly. They were South Vietnamese because they worked on the

31 base. Now, these did not work for the government. They worked helping out in the BX

1 (Base Exchange), the post exchange. The other ones were—the one that was really
2 directing this, that they really got, and we knew about, was the one who was a barber, and
3 he actually cut my hair.

4 KC: Is that right? You knew him then?

5 JK: Anyway, when they did find out it was him, the South Vietnamese police with
6 the Air Police—but the Air Police didn't have anything to do with that, but they just cut
7 his head off. I didn't see that now, but I learned about it later.

8 KC: Now, was this the South Vietnamese National Police or the military police of
9 the—?

10 JK: South Vietnamese troops.

11 KC: Okay, okay. And you didn't witness this, but you'd heard about it later?

12 JK: No, I did not witness that. I just heard about that later, what had actually taken
13 place.

14 KC: What was your reaction to that? Here's a guy who's been cutting your hair.
15 What was that like?

16 JK: Well, I thought about that. I said, "You know, you really don't know who is
17 your enemy in a situation like we were in Vietnam." And of course, many other wars
18 we've had here lately. It made it very difficult after that to say, "Well, you don't know
19 who's who."

20 KC: Did security on the base tighten up after this, as a result?

21 JK: Very much so.

22 KC: How so? Explain to me to how it tightened up.

23 JK: Well, they increased the amount of Air Policemen they had for the perimeter
24 of the base. And then they also reinforced that with some Army troops, which was at I
25 Corps close to us, and they had different types of patrols.

26 KC: So they would go outside the perimeter, they'd patrol the immediate area
27 around the base then?

28 JK: Yeah, that's it.

29 KC: Okay, now was anything like this—did anything like this ever happen again?

30 JK: No, sir. The whole time I was there we never had another attack on the base.
31 That's the only time.

1 KC: How did this attack change you, the way you perceived your security there?
2 The way you perceived how safe you were?

3 JK: Well, I felt we were very vulnerable, and even with the additional security
4 with the type of attack that had occurred, it would be difficult to control that. However,
5 there were many other things that I didn't know that they had done. We talked about it
6 later in meeting. There was more security than we thought we had afterwards. They had
7 the gunships, which were the C-47s, that they had set up for that and they were in
8 different—like somewhere at Tan Son Nhut, somewhere there and other places so they
9 could move in and help out wherever they needed them in such a case as this. But then
10 they also had helicopters that would patrol. It changed things and like I said, we never
11 was attacked anymore of that type.

12 KC: You said that eight Air Policemen were killed, is that correct?

13 JK: Yes, sir.

14 KC: Now, were these the only American casualties?

15 JK: No. I think it was eighteen people total that actually—some of them were
16 injured pretty bad and then died later, but it was eighteen total people that were killed.

17 KC: Did you know any of them personally?

18 JK: No sir, I knew them like—by knowing them, you know, like the Air
19 Policemen I knew because they were close to us there. I knew some of them because they
20 had come over with me overseas at the time. But not to the degree that I would—what
21 I'm trying to say is, I knew them because we were traveling together, and that was about
22 it. After that I lost touch with quite a few of them because some of them went to other
23 areas.

24 KC: Sure. What was it like for you to have these men—your acquaintances with
25 them, not friends certainly, but you knew who they were if you were to see them. What
26 was it like to lose them in the midst of this?

27 JK: Well, it brings it close to home when that happens. You have some real
28 concerns about that and a life no matter, as you said, whether you were a friend, they
29 were our forces, and they are American, or they were Americans and they were fighting
30 men just like I was. Therefore, it makes a big difference because if you lose one like that,

1 it's like losing a part of your family. Even though, as I said, you don't know them
2 personally, completely, but it does touch you.

3 KC: Okay, when the smoke clears, when you've got the all clear from your
4 superiors that the attack is over, that it's been put down with the planes that have gotten
5 up, and chased off whoever was firing these rockets. What is the aftermath? What do you
6 do in the aftermath of this attack?

7 JK: Well, when they give us a clear to come out of the bunkers, all of the 1st
8 sergeants were told to go to their units and make sure that everything—they needed an
9 account of how people had survived that from where they were in their bunkers, and what
10 happened, and that's what we proceeded to do then. And then go back to getting things
11 back in line, to do our regular duties.

12 KC: How had the attack disrupted your regular duties?

13 JK: Well, it disrupted it pretty much because we were disorganized, I would say,
14 for three or four hours after they give the "all clear", to get things back in line where we
15 could do the operations we were required to do. Even though that, as I say, our planes
16 were not hit in that area where the hangar was.

17 KC: Were you and your men involved in anything like picking up the debris,
18 filling in these holes, anything like that?

19 JK: No sir, no. This was done by the engineers.

20 KC: Okay.

21 JK: The civil engineers, and the other folks who were actually taking care of the
22 base and providing whatever we need. We didn't get into that.

23 KC: Okay, so there were engineers who were permanently stationed there then?

24 JK: Yes, sir.

25 KC: Okay, and they took care of all of that.

26 JK: The civil engineering unit. Well, that's what they were called, civil engineers,
27 but it's actually installation engineering squadrons.

28 KC: Was there anything in particular that you took from this to give to your men?
29 Any lessons to teach them or change the way that you operated, the way you approached
30 your job?

1 JK: Yes. Colonel Dennis and I got together, and we said we really needed to have
2 a meeting. Well, we had to have two meetings because for some doing their duties
3 involved other areas, other than flying, and going spraying, and come back. So we had
4 two different sessions with them, explaining to them how serious it was to be in a combat
5 area, and how important it was to make them understand that you were here. But because
6 liquor is easier to get to drink, you need to understand, you can have a few drinks, but the
7 point is you need to be very concerned about not getting inebriated to where you can't
8 function. We need each man to do his part and we wanted to make sure they understood
9 that. Otherwise, we would have to make changes in trying to limit their access to it.

10 KC: Sure. Was there anything in terms of the way you went about your job on a
11 daily basis? The change as a result of this?

12 JK: Well, actually being visible, the commander and I, being visible to the men
13 and the way we conducted ourselves I think had something to do. I had some of them to
14 tell me that. I said, "Well, I appreciate that." But I said, "This is the way that we need to
15 all do that. We're here for a reason. We're not here to just 'life as normal.' We're in a
16 combat area. Even though that we are not in combat like the ground troops and the
17 others." But still, after that happened, it made everyone realize that we were vulnerable
18 and could get hit.

19 KC: Did you find that your men in particular or the people on the base in general,
20 did you find that there was a more heightened sense of this kind of vulnerability, and that
21 they were more careful?

22 JK: We had a few still that, "Whatever is going to happen is going to happen, and
23 I'm going to go ahead and have my drink." The ones in my unit, I told them, "If you do
24 that, you'll be dealing with me. I'll tell you because we're not going to allow that, we
25 don't want that, and I know you were sent over here just like I was. I didn't ask to come
26 here, but we have a job to do. We signed on the dotted line and we are responsible for
27 what we do."

28 KC: Now you mentioned the use of alcohol here. What about the use of drugs?

29 JK: Well, in my unit we were fortunate. We did not have but one incident, and we
30 corrected that and sent him to Tachikawa, Japan, and he was cleared, and he came back
31 to the unit and he changed his ways.

1 KC: Well, can you take me through that a little bit? You don't have to give me
2 any names of course, but take me through what this individual was doing, and how it
3 affected the unit, and how the unit took care of this.

4 JK: Well, we still didn't get it clear exactly who he got the drugs from, but drugs
5 were—at first, I didn't realize that. The commander had told me about it, and he said,
6 “Yeah, there is drugs here in the country and we're having difficulty with that in the
7 military.” But as I said, we had that one incident and it was picked up soon enough that it
8 didn't get to the point—and then the briefing that we made with other folks with the type
9 of work we were doing, they needed to be as fit as could be for duty. As I said, we only
10 had that one incident.

11 KC: What type of drugs was this individual using?

12 JK: Well, marijuana was one of them, but then there were some others that I can't
13 remember exactly, that they had gotten from somewhere. This was a briefing from the
14 wing commander, in other words, at the time after that about the different things that
15 were taking place with other units and other folks. I don't know if they had heroin or not,
16 but I know marijuana was one of them.

17 KC: Now, how did you or your unit, find out that this individual was using
18 marijuana?

19 JK: Well, he was one of the mechanics. He was not on flying status, and he came
20 to work one morning, and his supervisor noticed that he wasn't acting like he normally
21 did. And so he started to question him about it. He said, “Oh no, he wasn't using drugs.”
22 Naturally, he denied it. And then after that they set up, or we set up people looking out
23 for each other and then an informant actually said yes, he did see him do that. Of course,
24 later on when we confronted him with that and got into the legal part of it, he admitted it
25 and then the doctors checked him out, and they sent him to Japan, and he was able to
26 come back to the unit and function as a normal individual.

27 KC: So when you found this out, you had someone say, “Yes, I witnessed him
28 doing this.” Then, did you personally confront him? Or did your company commander
29 confront him? How did that work?

30 JK: The commander and I both confronted him and his supervisor, the three of us.
31 To make sure that he understood where we were coming from, and how serious a

1 situation that was. And he even stated, “Well, the others drink.” And this and that. I said,
2 “It doesn’t make any difference whether they drink or what they do. The ones that drink
3 too much, we’ve already talked to them. And you using drugs, you cannot perform.
4 You’re performing maintenance on aircrafts that these people fly, and we can’t have
5 that.”

6 KC: Certainly, coming in affected by the drugs on duty, which is something that
7 wouldn’t have been allowed of course, drinking on duty. Now, was this individual
8 brought up on any charges?

9 JK: Well, at first, we went to legal with that. We were going to give him an
10 Article 15. And then as I said, the commander, Colonel Dennis was really—he remind
11 me of Jimmy Stewart. Very soft spoken, very fine individual, and I enjoyed serving with
12 him, but he said to me, he said, “Sergeant Kliebert.” He said, “I don’t think that we ought
13 to go through with that. We should tell him we’re going to do some type of punishment,
14 but it won’t be that for right now, if we can take care of this in the way that we should.”
15 And so we did not. We held it in that order, telling him that we would, but then we held
16 back on that. Once he had the treatment, and came back and proved himself, then we
17 didn’t want to put that on his record.

18 KC: Sure. So he was—

19 JK: I think he was really—well, I don’t think, he was a good individual, but he
20 was a young fella, and he just got mixed up with the wrong crowd.

21 KC: So you gave him this option, “You either go to Japan, Tachikawa, clean
22 yourself up, straighten yourself out, come back, and we can essentially forget about this.”

23 JK: Either that or we’d have to go with charges and get him out of the Air Force.

24 KC: Well, it was a very generous approach I think for Colonel Dennis to take.

25 JK: Well as I say, Colonel Dennis, I don’t take the credit for that because I was
26 going to be a little bit more harsh as 1st sergeant, but he and I talked then on the side and
27 he said, “No.” he said, “I really think, Sergeant Kliebert, we should give him a chance.
28 He’s been a good individual, a good young fella. We need to give him direction.” And I
29 said, “Yes, sir. You’re right.” And that’s why we went that way. So I don’t want to take
30 the credit for that.

31 KC: Now, this attack on the base was in February of 1967, right?

1 JK: Yes, sir.

2 KC: Okay. Now when was this incident with the individual and the drugs?

3 JK: This would have been when we discovered that. I think it would have been in

4 June.

5 KC: Okay.

6 JK: Because I was just getting ready to go on R&R (Rest and Recuperation) to

7 Hawaii to meet my family. A one-week R&R.

8 KC: So you did get to Hawaii then?

9 JK: Yes, sir.

10 KC: Well, tell me about that. Tell me about your R&R to Hawaii, to see your

11 family.

12 JK: Well, the R&R to Hawaii was really—I really enjoyed that and appreciated

13 that, and it rejuvenated me to go back to duty there. Of course, my wife felt the

14 difference. She said, “Here I am coming back this way to the United States, and you

15 going back over there.” I said, “Honey, that’s just part of the program.” And I said,

16 “Everything is going to work out.” And my daughter that came with her, too. She was

17 nine years old on that particular week, it was the 21st—I said June, it was in May. I went

18 May the 21st of 1967.

19 KC: How did you get to Hawaii?

20 JK: We flew with regular commercial airlines that were chartered through the

21 military for that purpose.

22 KC: Now you make it to Hawaii, you’re going to see your wife. I guess this has

23 been about six months, about halfway through your tour.

24 JK: How’s that?

25 KC: I said it’s about six months, I guess. You’re about halfway through your tour

26 when you get this week’s leave to Hawaii, to see your family. What was it like meeting

27 them there? What was it like seeing them?

28 JK: At first, it was like a dream. After that, I was really so happy about that and

29 they were too, but then as we parted again, it was a sad moment. But as I said, I was able

30 to handle that better than they could. Of course, my daughter didn’t realize what the

1 situation was completely. But of course, as I say, her and her mother had to weep a little
2 bit before they left, but other than that we did fine.

3 KC: What did the three of you do on your leave?

4 JK: Sorry?

5 KC: What did the three of you do while you were on leave?

6 JK: Well, we went to the Pearl Harbor Memorial. We rented a car and then we
7 drove in different parts. Went to the pineapple fields, went to different other things.
8 Stayed on the big island, we did not go anywhere else after that except to the beach,
9 different areas, went out to eat at different restaurants.

10 KC: Did your family think that you had changed in those six months that you
11 were gone?

12 JK: Not really, because my wife said, "It really has not affected even with the
13 situation with February." I said, "Well, it does to a degree." But I said, "So far, I've been
14 blessed and not affected by it to the point that it would show."

15 KC: You said that it was difficult to leave your family, obviously.

16 JK: Well, it was, really. As I said, being the type of person that I am, and I was
17 able to carry that through that way. I usually keep a stiff upper a lip. Anyway, it worked
18 out, but I was sad. There's no two ways about it, because they were headed back to the
19 US and I was headed back to Vietnam.

20 KC: I've heard a number of servicemen say that when they took a week's leave,
21 whether it was to Hawaii to meet family or wherever else it may have been.

22 JK: Yeah, to Hong Kong.

23 KC: Hong Kong or Australia.

24 JK: Australia. We had different areas you could go in.

25 KC: I've heard many people say that it was more difficult to go back to Vietnam
26 after they had been on R&R, but that was not the case for you.

27 JK: Not the case with me. As I said, I've been a positive person most of my life,
28 once I got to be an adult, and that was instilled by my father and mother. My dad was
29 really strong on that. He said, "You have to just stand tall, no matter what." And so I've
30 always remembered that. And even though that I knew I was going back in an area of that
31 type, I realized that I had six months behind me—well, five months actually. By the time

1 I got back it would have been six months. Anyway, I have half of my tour done, so the
2 other half, I'll have to work on it.

3 KC: Did you keep very close track of how many days you had left?

4 JK: Not really. See, I had some people that would do that. They called it a
5 "FIGMO" chart and FIGMO (Fuck it, I Got My Orders) meant that they were going
6 home. Some of them would get to the point—and that's the reason I didn't keep that. I
7 knew, just remembering that it was this month or that month, and that I'd be going home
8 in a few months as far as counting the days. But some of them had charts made up and
9 that's what they called it, and they'd mark it off every day. I told them, I said, "What
10 you're doing, you're setting you up for a real problem." As they would get close to the
11 end of their time, you would see the difference in them. The anxiety would build up to
12 the point that even on some of their jobs you would see the difference. They wouldn't
13 have the complete concentration as they did before they started. So I think it was
14 something. I encouraged them not to do that. I said, "You know you'll be going home in
15 such and such a month, and then that's it. You should work towards that goal." But as far
16 as just counting the days, I never did do that.

17 KC: You could look at this from a different perspective, you were obviously
18 much older.

19 JK: Well, that's true too.

20 KC: Than these young men.

21 JK: Right.

22 KC: What did you think about these young men you saw? The young men that
23 you worked with, knowing that you're dealing with eighteen, nineteen, twenty year old
24 men and there you are at your age at the time. How did the war look? Or could you see
25 the war through their eyes to any degree?

26 JK: Well, that was one of the requirements of being a leader and a sergeant, a 1st
27 sergeant. To be able to relate to people of all ages. I had some older than I was, that out
28 ranked me as far as rank, but I was still their 1st sergeant. The point is that I always tried
29 to work with that, and as I said, I had a real good leader. Colonel Dennis, Robert Dennis
30 was one of the best commanders I've served with. He was the man, as I say, that he could
31 talk to anyone, and when he got through, he could get the message to them. I learned a lot

1 from him, even at that point of speaking to people, as you say, of different ages.
2 Especially, the younger airmen.

3 KC: You're serving in 1967, in Vietnam. By 1967 the war had become very
4 unpopular, I think it's safe to say, in the United States. What sort of attitudes did these
5 young airmen show to you about their attitude toward the war?

6 JK: Well, they felt that it was a "lost cause", and we shouldn't be there. Not all of
7 them, but a few of them. They were not staying in the military. Some had planned to stay,
8 and they said as soon as their enlistment was up and they got back home, that's it.
9 They're getting out. It's going to be the same thing; they knew what had happened in
10 Korea and divided the country. Of course, this is exactly what happened after we left
11 there. This would have been three years later I think it was—two years.

12 KC: What did you think about their attitude?

13 JK: Well, I tried to explain to them that we had a job to do and, "I know how you
14 feel about it and I have some myself, feelings of different things that I don't agree with
15 the way the political part is being handled. But we are actually armed forces individuals,
16 and we need to serve and do what we needed to do for our country, no matter what."
17 Then, whenever they're through here, they wanted to get out, and I said, "That's your
18 prerogative, you do that if you don't want to serve." I want to serve, and I want—of
19 course I'm going to retire when I get back anyway, a year later.

20 KC: What did you know about what was going on in the United States, while you
21 were in Vietnam? Were you getting any word back from your family or from the media,
22 about the growing anti-war sentiment in the United States?

23 JK: Some, we would get some of that.

24 KC: How would you get it?

25 JK: Sorry?

26 KC: How would you get this information?

27 JK: Well, through the *Stars and Stripes*, the paper we had in that area. We'd get
28 some from news. We had the radio, and then of course my family commented something
29 about it, but not that much. I said, "Really, it should be suppressed as much as it could
30 from us because really it wasn't a good thing for the troops there, and especially for the
31 young ones."

1 KC: The effect that it would have on the morale and things like that.

2 JK: And it did in some cases because some had gone and met families, like I did
3 with R&R. And when they did that and returned, they felt a lot different about it because
4 they say, “We’re not appreciated anyway and we’re sent over here, and we’re trying to do
5 what we need to do, and we’re not being supported.” You’d have to really have meetings
6 and try to speak to them and give them some information. Positive information instead of
7 all this negative stuff.

8 KC: What kind of things would you say to them at these meetings?

9 JK: Well, it was always trying to encourage them to remember that “Job One” is
10 what we’re doing here, now. And then, you can think about these other things and maybe
11 people don’t like us being here, some in this country, and in our own country. But the
12 point is, that the one’s that feel that way, they will have to answer for that someday. In
13 other words, no matter what, and it would be better if we just not let that work to make us
14 negative.

15 KC: Did you have to do this very often?

16 JK: Well, we had commanders call every month, you know, once a month we had
17 that, and then we had other little meetings in different groups for different situations.
18 Once a month we had a real “Commander’s Call,” it was called. They’d have that in the
19 base theater. We’d have as many of the troops that we could have there. The ones that did
20 not make that one, we’d have briefings for them later.

21 KC: Okay.

22 JK: The ones that were flying at the time or whatever.

23 KC: When you get back from your R&R in Hawaii, you have about six months
24 left on your tour. What was the last remaining six months like for you?

25 JK: Well, I can’t tell you that I didn’t have some anxiety myself, I’m human—
26 knowing that I would be coming back home. But even when I got back, I had a job to do,
27 I had a responsibility for a bunch of lives, and that kept me busy enough that I stayed on
28 track on that. As I say, I had a commander that, as I said, the best I’ve ever served under.
29 And I’ve served under some good people. I mean, most all the time, but this man was
30 exceptional.

1 KC: Was there anything in the last half of your tour that stands out to you? Were
2 there any incidents, any particular people that you ran across? Was there anything that
3 stands out to you for your last six months there?

4 JK: Not really, that I could—

5 KC: So you're staying busy working with the men and time is going by. As you
6 get close, I know you said you didn't keep a calendar for the reasons that you've said, but
7 you had to be aware of when your time was coming up.

8 JK: Oh yes, yes, I was. I mean, that's what I said, but I did not keep—they kept a
9 chart, and then they would cross off each day. It'd be like ninety-nine days, and ninety-
10 eight days, and ninety-seven days, and I didn't do that. I did not want to see that. Well,
11 not that it would really bother me, I didn't need to know that because I knew I would be
12 returning home, in other words, in December anyway. Because I had missed Christmas
13 going, so they had actually agreed in that area. The ones who had missed Christmas, they
14 would try to get them home for that particular Christmas, which I had missed my
15 wedding anniversary, and also Christmas. I was married Christmas Eve of '55.

16 KC: Oh, really?

17 JK: Yes.

18 KC: Okay, so you owed your wife then, didn't you?

19 JK: Sorry?

20 KC: I said you really owed your wife one then, didn't you?

21 JK: That's right.

22 KC: Alright, so we're winding down, Christmas time is coming around, your time
23 to leave Vietnam is coming around. Take me through the process by which you left
24 Vietnam in December of 1967?

25 JK: The day that I left?

26 KC: Just take me through the process. Sure, the day that you left, what was it like
27 for you?

28 JK: Well, the week before I left, I had a new 1st sergeant that had come in to
29 replace me. And so I said a week—it was a couple of weeks that he was there. We went
30 over the different things, so I was busy showing him the different areas that he needed
31 attention in, or what was being done here and there. So I was still busy even up until the

1 last three days. I wanted to stay engaged with him, to be able to help him and he
2 appreciated that. He was the type of individual that wanted to get into that. So it actually
3 helped me to transition into getting out, but still engaged.

4 KC: So did you feel comfortable turning your troops, turning your airmen, over to
5 this particular 1st sergeant?

6 JK: Yes, sir.

7 KC: He was senior to me about five years, and he was also the senior in rank. He
8 was a senior master sergeant.

9 JK: Oh wow.

10 KC: Was there any—

11 JK: He was a seasoned individual. He wasn't just thrown into that job.

12 KC: So it wasn't like you had to train him, he was already familiar with what he
13 had to do?

14 JK: Oh, yes sir.

15 KC: Okay. So I guess that would have made it a little easier for you, I would
16 think.

17 JK: It did, it really did. Some 1st sergeants I talked to, they were having very
18 different difficulty because the person that was going to replace him had other ideas
19 about how he was going to change this, and change that. He didn't know anything about
20 the operation. That would make it difficult for the individuals that were there, which
21 changes—a lot of the time that changes a unit naturally, especially a 1st sergeant.

22 KC: Was it difficult?

23 JK: If they have a real good commander like we had, naturally that would control
24 that to a degree because he would control the 1st sergeant. Sometimes that would go
25 haywire. I've been in units like that myself.

26 KC: Was it difficult for you to leave your men, when you left?

27 JK: To a degree it was because there's some I'd got so close to that they weren't
28 just people in my squadron. They become real good friends, and I kept up with them and
29 I still do with some. As a matter of fact, I met some and I'm supposed to meet some more
30 October the 8th, 9th, and 10th. I think it is. We're going to be down at Hurlburt Field down

1 in Florida. This unit, the 12th Air Commando, meets every year there at that time in
2 October.

3 KC: Oh, terrific.

4 JK: So we hope to be able to get together there. Well, I hope to get together again.

5 KC: Alright, now here it is, your day to leave Vietnam. What day was it in
6 December? Do you remember?

7 JK: Let's see, the day I left, I think it was the 21st day of December.

8 KC: Okay, December 21st, 1967.

9 JK: Yes, sir.

10 KC: Describe for me leaving Vietnam.

11 JK: Just as we got ready to get on board the plane, I was thinking of the men that I
12 was leaving there. And then I was thinking I was going to meet my wife and my
13 daughter. Well, that really, you know it was happiness one way and being—a feeling of
14 regret of having to leave these people there. All in all, I was happy to be going home. It
15 was just like something starting as a dream really, when I finally got on the plane.

16 KC: What was the atmosphere like on the plane?

17 JK: Well, it was very joyful. Most of them on there were so happy that you could
18 hear the different talk that we were going, and how happy they were that they left
19 Vietnam, and things were fine, and they were going home. Others said they were having
20 difficulties with family and this and that and the other. So they didn't know they were
21 going home, but they didn't know how it would work. I talked to some of them while
22 they were sitting closer to me, saying that. I said, "Well just remember this, that if you
23 will honor the Lord and you will understand and ask him to help you deal with these
24 situations when you get home, it'll work a lot better for you." Of course, some were
25 having problems as I said, I'm sure of being in that area without their families. And some
26 of them, of course, didn't show it, like I didn't. But again, it did bother me some,
27 naturally.

28 KC: Alright, when you come in to—I assume you came into California?

29 JK: Yes, sir.

30 KC: Where did you fly into?

31 JK: Travis Air Force.

1 KC: Into Travis, okay. What was your reception like in California?

2 JK: It was just unbelievable that the way that the people that greeted that flight
3 when we came in, and I understood then because I asked that question, were they doing
4 that for all the flights? And they said, “Yes, this is the way we handle this. We welcome
5 the people back because of the things that are happening here concerning that war.” And
6 so it was very joyful, and in other words, it was a real welcome back in the United States.

7 KC: Okay, it’s typically not the answer you get of course for so many people
8 when they come back.

9 JK: Well, I think some may not have had that I don’t know. But the particular
10 flight, as I said, I was told they did that for every flight. I don’t know that for a fact. But
11 as far as the flight that I came on, they were just as receptive to us as if we were
12 dignitaries returning from a won war, in other words.

13 KC: Alright, you make it into California, and then I assume that your family was
14 back in South Carolina or did they fly to California to meet you?

15 JK: No sir, they stayed in South Carolina.

16 KC: Okay, so from here do you catch flights to South Carolina?

17 JK: Sorry?

18 KC: Did you catch flights from Travis to South Carolina then?

19 JK: Yes, sir. I flew from there to Columbia, South Carolina. Let’s see, we
20 stopped, I think in Dallas. No, we did not. We stopped somewhere refueling, that’s all it
21 was.

22 KC: What was it like to see your wife and daughter again?

23 JK: That was really—it was more joyful then, than it was in Hawaii, really.
24 Because I knew that I would be back home with them to stay and that made a big
25 difference. I was being stationed at Shaw Air Force Base, which is only 28 miles from
26 my house to where my office was.

27 KC: How much time did you have left in the Air Force?

28 JK: I had a year, because I had to extend a year to be able to forecast, otherwise
29 they told me what they would do. I could stay in Vietnam the extra month and then retire
30 early, and I said, “No. I’m not foolish, I’m going to extend a year and go back home
31 now.”

1 KC: Okay. So you had a year there at Shaw then?

2 JK: Yes, sir.

3 KC: Okay, and what are you doing in this final year?

4 JK: The final year I was the assistant base sergeant major.

5 KC: Now how did you get this position?

6 JK: Sorry?

7 KC: How did you get this position?

8 JK: Well, when I signed in there, they already had set up people for different

9 areas. And because of my background, they didn't need a 1st sergeant there. Well, I need

10 to back up. I was really being assigned first to Eglin Air Force Base and because a friend

11 of mine who flew fighter cover for us, a major, helped me to get that chance because he

12 worked for personnel people. And he got that changed so I could come to Shaw because I

13 had my house here and I was going to work for DuPont. Then, I didn't know what kind of

14 job I would get, in other words as far as being a 1st sergeant or whether it'd be back in

15 personnel administration, which it wound up being. Basically, I did a whole lot of things

16 that I did as a 1st sergeant at that particular position because the sergeant major himself

17 turned over the men that were working for us to me, to control them and to work with

18 them.

19 KC: Right. So your time as a 1st sergeant kind of paid off for your last assignment

20 then?

21 JK: All the times that I've dealt with people, from the time I became a 1st

22 sergeant, it really helped me as a NCOIC, non-commissioned officer in charge of a group

23 like at the school at Maxwell, and other places. It always was a plus by being able to do

24 that, to deal with people, to handle people.

25 KC: While you were there at Shaw, did you pay any attention to the war? Did you

26 follow the war at all?

27 JK: Yes, I did. That's one thing I did because I'm still concerned about the unit

28 and the different people that was over there. At times, as I said, I was more affected in a

29 way of thinking of what was taking place politically, and what was happening in the

30 country. Of course, I was getting naturally bombarded with all the news here and

1 information also through the base because we still had people over there that would rotate
2 back from Shaw Air Force Base to that area.

3 KC: Shortly after you got back to the States in late January, February of 1968 of
4 course, the big Tet Offensive of that year takes place.

5 JK: Right.

6 KC: What did you think about that?

7 JK: Well, that brought back memories of what happened on February of '67. And
8 I was thinking, "This is really worse than what we had." It was just—the way I
9 understood it, from what I was listening to, the news and different things that I would get
10 bits and pieces, it was just not the way we should take care of things.

11 KC: In what ways?

12 JK: Well, as I said, I get involved with politics again. The politics, to me, and war
13 do not mix. We need the political people, that is a fact. And we need both parties, but we
14 need to understand that the generals and the military people there in that area know more
15 about what's going on. Yes, the general there is responsible to our commander in chief,
16 but as far as all these people making comments about different things, and this should be
17 done this way and that way nationally. Of course, it's more so now than ever. The news
18 media, I think should be barred like it used to be way back in World War II. Things were
19 classified and you did not discuss them. And now, things are being discussed that should
20 not even be brought out. People should not have that information. I think that really hurts
21 when they do that and it hurts the particular area we are working in, the countries.

22 KC: What did you think about the anti-war sentiment in the United States once
23 you came back?

24 JK: Well, at first it bothered me a little and then I realized that people are going to
25 be people. I make mistakes and other people do the same. As I said, one thing I thought
26 they should do with that part especially, to make sure that the American people
27 understood what we stand for and what we need to do.

28 KC: And you think that it was unclear to the American public about this?

29 JK: Sorry?

30 KC: Do you think that it was unclear to the American public about who we were,
31 and what we were trying to accomplish?

1 JK: I really believe that, because a lot of people just perceive certain things and
2 then they act on that. And they hear this from this one here and say, “Oh yeah, this is
3 what’s taking place. They’re not doing this and not doing that, or they’re doing this.” So
4 really, and as I said, a lot of the news that was reported at times was not exactly the way
5 it was received.

6 KC: Can you give me an example of that?

7 JK: Well, one of the examples, when we were hit in ’67, my wife learned about
8 that through the news media, and they had actually given it to the point they had almost
9 destroyed Bien Hoa Air Base. It was hit pretty bad, and we lost that many aircraft. They
10 hadn’t given how many people had died, that were killed. But they had given about the
11 aircraft. I think that is, as I said, they need to be given something about the war, but as far
12 as reporting it each piece by piece, I don’t think the American public should have that.
13 Also, when they do that, other people get a hold of it that don’t need that—the enemy.

14 KC: Well, you serve out your year, so I guess it would be late 1968 or early 1969
15 you are out of the Air Force. Is that correct?

16 JK: Right. Actually, they retired me the last day. My retirement date was the 1st of
17 January of ’69.

18 KC: Okay.

19 JK: I actually lacked the six days of having twenty-one years.

20 KC: But you’d had enough?

21 JK: Sorry?

22 KC: But you had had enough?

23 JK: Well, not really. Like I said, the reason I decided to get out—when I told you
24 earlier, but I mean my daughter had been moved from this school to that school. We
25 moved from the Air University to Shaw, which was Montgomery, Alabama to here. And
26 then I had to transfer to here when we sold the house, then I had transferred to Kershaw
27 because my mother-in-law wouldn’t come stay with them here, so my wife went to
28 Kershaw which is nineteen miles away. Anyway, we had to transfer the daughter to that
29 area, Lancaster County then back to Kershaw County, when I came back. I did not want
30 to disrupt her anymore and I decided it’s best that I retire. I would have probably stayed
31 twenty-four to twenty-six years, but I said, “No. I have to make a decision and they are

1 important to me, and I need to make that decision.” I had a job already lined up, so I said,
2 “This is what I want to do.”

3 KC: Okay. Once you were out of the Air Force, did you continue to follow the
4 war?

5 JK: To a degree, and the reason I didn’t as much it bothered my wife a whole lot.
6 The news especially, but I would read different things, I’d hear from other folks. But as
7 far as watching it constantly on TV, I didn’t do that. I’d watch it some if she wasn’t here,
8 or she was doing something else, but not that great of an amount.

9 KC: What were your feelings in April of 1975, when Saigon fell to the
10 communists? Do you remember?

11 JK: Well, that was to me, was a low blow. I thought of all the young lives that we
12 lost over there, and then we lost. The money we spent, tax dollars, and then do something
13 like that, which was strictly political, and it was just wrong.

14 KC: A number of veterans I talk to use the word “betrayal”. That the United
15 States had—the US government had betrayed the South Vietnamese and that the United
16 States government had betrayed its own servicemen who served in this conflict. Do you
17 feel that sense at all?

18 JK: Well, to a degree I might say, but I don’t like to use that word like that. I just
19 feel that they let us down, but I don’t like to use it like that. I didn’t feel that way. I just
20 felt that it’s not right what they’ve done. We should have decided to let the people on the
21 ground make the decision and go for it, and go after Hanoi and just tell them, “It’s either
22 put up, shut up, or this is what you’re going to get.” And just like we did with Japan and
23 Germany, and this is the way that it should have been handled. But that’s of course, my
24 perception of it.

25 KC: Alright, when you look back on your time in Vietnam, how would you say
26 that your experience there affected you the most in your life?

27 JK: Well, it made me realize more about life itself. By what we enjoy in this
28 United States and had been enjoying for years. Of course, as it’s being eroded, as we go
29 along through the years, and that makes a big difference in the way I look at it.

30 KC: What kind of lessons did you learn about yourself, as a result of your
31 experiences there?

1 JK: Well, it helped me to grow and understand that there is nothing that's a
2 utopia, or just everything is okay completely and perfect, and it isn't. We have to work
3 together and that's why we're called the United States. I've talked to a couple of our state
4 senators here, when we had the American Legion meeting here about a couple of months
5 ago. In other words, if we keep doing what we're doing now and it's not working, we
6 need to change that. We need to be united. As I said, a lot of them want to say, "Which
7 party?" And I say, "No, it's not just the parties, we need both of them. The Democratic
8 Party and the Republican Party." Both parties are good, it's just that we need to change
9 some of the attitudes—not just the attitudes, but the attitudes and the way they're being
10 trustworthy of what they say, and what they do.

11 KC: Well, Mr. Kliebert is there anything else you would like to add to this
12 interview?

13 JK: No, sir. Except that I appreciate you taking the time to do that, and all of you
14 people that are doing that. I really do commend you for that.

15 KC: Well, thank you very much. It is certainly my pleasure to do so.

16 JK: Yes, sir.

17 KC: Well, thank you again.

18 JK: Okay.

19

20 (End of interview)