

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH KENNETH GURBISZ

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Jesse Braddell: This begins an interview with Mr. Kenneth Gurbisz in Holmdel, New Jersey, on March 4, 2011, with Jesse Braddell ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: ... And Sandra Stewart Holyoak. Thank you very much for talking with us today.

Kenneth Gurbisz: You're welcome.

SH: Could you tell me where and when you were born?

KG: I was born in Bayonne, New Jersey, July 8, 1948.

SH: Okay. To begin, we want to talk about your family, a little family background. You can go back as far as you want, to your grandparents, and so on.

KB: Okay.

SH: Let us start with your father. Tell us his name.

KG: My father's name is Julius Gurbisz. He never finished grammar school. He was a Depression baby and he left school at twelve years old to help support the family. My mom's maiden name is Poplawski, Frances Poplawski. She completed high school and she was also from Bayonne, New Jersey. My grandparents, I've no recollection of my father's parents; they were dead before I was born. My mother's parents were alive up until the '70s, late '70s, and all four emigrated from Poland in the early 1900s, probably right before World War I.

SH: Did any of them talk about their immigration stories? Was that part of the collective memory?

KG: No, I'll tell you the truth, they really never talked about why. I know my mother's parents left Poland because of religious persecution by the Russians and to escape the Russian occupation of Poland, but not very much. They never spoke English very well. My grandfather worked for what is now Exxon and his job was to push wax around the refinery all day and my grandmother never worked. She was a stay-at-home mom, which, in those days, was normal.

SH: Were they very involved in the Church or in the Polish community?

KG: Oh, yes. My grandfather used to walk from Staten Island over to Bayonne to help build Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Bayonne.

SH: Really?

KG: Back in the early days, right, and that was the first Polish parish in Bayonne. As a matter-of-fact, that's where I went to school--I went to grammar school--Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

SH: Really?

KG: [Yes].

SH: Did you understand and speak the Polish language?

KG: Polish is the language they tried to teach me for eight years, but, given the fact that I'm tone deaf to language, they just totally failed. As soon as I started learning a few of the words, my parents stopped speaking Polish in the house. They used to talk in Polish when they didn't want me to know something, us kids to know something. Yes, I never really [learned]. I'm not a linguist by any means. [laughter] I'm an engineer--I'm more linear.

SH: Was the family involved in Polish organizations?

KG: No. My parents were low middle-class, upper poor class, if you want to say that. So, my mom went back to work as soon as my younger brother and sister were old enough to go to school, and so, they were involved. My dad was always working. My dad was always working overtime. He had a second job as a bartender to make extra money for the family. So, yes, they were busy; not until after my mother retired and she became active in the church.

SH: You talked about them trying to teach you. Did you go to a Polish language school?

KG: No, it was the school. Back in the day, they actually had nuns in all the classrooms. They were all Polish nuns.

SH: Really?

KG: Yes, they spoke the language and we had a language class every week, every day, rather, and that's how they tried to teach you to speak Polish.

SH: Did they incorporate any of the Polish history?

KG: Yes, somewhat. I don't remember a lot of it, because I'm getting old and senile, [laughter] but, yes, they did teach us Polish history. Of course, being a parochial school, there was a religious portion of the day, too, but, yes, I mean, we knew about some of our background in Poland. Poland, it's like in any other country in Europe--they have a long, long history compared to us.

JB: You mentioned that your father was in World War II.

KG: Right.

JB: Was he open to discussing his experiences during that time?

KG: Yes. My dad actually did not talk about it too much, but my dad never saw combat. He was in the Pacific, spent a lot of time in Hawaii. The way he would describe it, they would always get ready to invade an island and the Marines decided they were going to do it first. So,

they sailed back to Hawaii. They were the first division to land in the mainland of Japan after the bombing of Hiroshima. They landed at Nagasaki, yes.

JB: Was he drafted?

KG: He enlisted.

JB: He enlisted.

KG: Yes, he enlisted. He was actually deferred, because he was a railroad worker and he was old. He's older by our standards in Vietnam, but he was in his mid-twenties when he enlisted. Back then, there's a stigma if you weren't in the military as a young man.

SH: Was the area where your father grew up the same place that you grew up?

KG: Yes. My father grew up five blocks from where we wound up living. In fact, we lived in the same house he lived in when we were small children, my older brother and I, and then, my parents bought their own house. I remember, I must have been in eighth grade or something like that.

SH: Was this a diverse neighborhood or was it mostly Polish?

KG: No, actually, it was pretty diverse. Well, there were Italians, there were Jewish people in the neighborhood, there was Irish--almost typically Europeans. It was typically, I guess you would say, a white neighborhood and there were always a lot of boys my age around. I had an older brother who's a year older. So, there was, I would say, a dozen boys on that one street, all the same age.

SH: What was a fun thing to do?

KG: Get in trouble. [laughter] Just like any other city dwellers, you'd go down and hang on the corner and look for trouble. Yes, that's about it. Well, when we're young kids, I mean, we used to play ball all the time. We were never inside. I used to play ball in the street, diamond ball, stickball. Every Fourth of July, we had a father-son stickball game in the middle of the street, which has a lot of fond memories, but, again, we were just typical kids. Once we got to be teenagers, you get to be wise guys.

SH: You talked about your father having two jobs and that one of them was being a bartender. Did you ever get to go hang out there?

KG: At the bar? Sure. [laughter] Oh, yes, the bar was on 17th Street and we lived [nearby] and we used to go down there. It was funny, because we had a little conversation and one of the employees here [at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and Vietnam Era Educational Center] said she liked steamers and I, well, flashed back to my youth, because steamers, back then, were clams. They used to have a big pot, they would steam the clam with it. On the

bottom was the clam juice and you used to go drink clam juice, hot clam juice, and that was nice. She meant frozen vegetables, [laughter] but generation gap there, right.

SH: Were there family vacations?

KG: Not so much, no. No, we didn't. There was no money for vacations. My father, if he had any extra money, he would put it into the house, and we did have relatives in Massachusetts. So, as kids, particularly my older brother and I, we would go up for two or three weeks and spend it on the farm in Massachusetts, and they would come down for a couple weeks and spend it in the city. So, that was our vacations as children.

SH: Was Bayonne basically where you stayed? Did you go into New York City?

KG: We'd go shopping in Newark. I used to hop on a bus and go shopping in Newark or you would go into New York City. As teenagers, we would go over and see shows, and not shows, but concerts in Jersey City and Newark and New York. You could go, for free, to Central Park and see rock and roll bands, go to the Armory for a dollar. You could see three or four bands or singing groups at the same time, yes.

SH: When you went into New York, did you also attend any sporting events?

KG: You know what? I remember, I have been to all the major baseball stadiums in New York. I've been to Ebbets Field, Polo Grounds, before they tore those down, Shea Stadium, Yankee Stadium. My dad was an avid baseball fan and I don't know how he got the tickets, but we'd get on the train and we'd go over to see a baseball game, maybe two, three times during the summer. It'd be different teams. So, it was kind of [nice], up until '59, when the Giants and the Dodgers moved out, but, yes, we would do a lot of baseball. [Editor's Note: The New York Giants and the Brooklyn Dodgers moved to the West Coast (San Francisco and Los Angeles, respectively) after the 1957 baseball season.] My father wasn't too much of a football fan. Now, later on, when we played a little football, my dad got into football, but anybody played the Yankees, he would root for. [laughter] He was not a big Yankee fan. He used to always say, "Money's going to ruin this game," and, I don't know, he maybe may have had the right idea.

SH: He had the foresight.

KG: Yes.

JB: You are a Mets fan.

KG: I'm a Mets fan, yes.

SH: Not a Yankees fan.

KG: Not a Yankees [fan]. Well, I was a Yankees fan growing up and that's part of the reason--I think Dad was tweaking me a little bit about the Yankees all the time. When the Mets first started, we started watching the Mets because they were comical. We always said, "How are

they going to lose tonight?" Then, oh, I just became a fan, and then, when George Steinbrenner first took over the Yankees [in 1973], he kind of turned me off. So, I went over to the Mets' side.

SH: Before you went into high school, what really held your interest?

KG: Being a baseball player, you mean? [laughter] Everybody wanted to be a baseball player, of course. I had my Gil McDougald glove and my Mickey Mantle bat--no, it wasn't Mickey Mantle, it was a Moose Skowron bat. We used to go down and play baseball. We had a baseball field right down the street from us and we were always [playing] pickup games, and then, we got some organized sports going, but, yes, it was good. I enjoyed it. I mean, there's a lot of fun. Bayonne was a great place to grow up. I mean, there wasn't a lot of problems and it's a safe city. As far as [the] city, there's only three ways in and out of Bayonne, so, anything ever happened, they just closed the three streets, because of it was a peninsula and the Bayonne Bridge, and you're in Bayonne--that's it. You're not going to go anywhere. Yes, so, no, it was a great place to grow up. As far as going to high school, I just kind of, like, leaned towards engineering, and so, when I went to Bayonne High School, I went to the technical program, was a pre-engineering program, which means I didn't have to take a language. We established that was a big criteria after my experience with Polish, [laughter] and the other thing is, of course, you didn't have any electives, either. You couldn't take any electives, because we started a half-hour before the regular high school. Instead of the electives, we took things like welding, we took electronics, we took electrical shop and drafting, just so you knew, as you were going through to become an engineer, what it was like--what were you actually designing, what you're actually working on. So, it was an interesting four years.

SH: Did you choose this high school, rather than a parochial high school, because of the engineering program?

KG: No, everybody went to Bayonne High School. There's no money to send you to parochial high school, so, you just went to [Bayonne High School]. Everybody automatically assumed you're going to Bayonne High School. It's a big high school. It's 3,600 students. Back in the '60s, it's a very large high school.

SH: Was it the only high school in Bayonne?

KG: Only public high school, yes, but there was Marist High School, which is an all boys' school, and Holy Family, which is an all girls' school, all right.

JB: Why engineering? Were you always interested in math and science?

KG: I don't know. My dad was a carpenter and I was always just interested in stuff. I was never a good student--I really wasn't. I was just kind of, like, hanging in there. I used to get bored easily and I had to train myself to study. Once I started, I got out of the service, went to college, I really had to train myself, because I am very easily distracted. You probably saw that here, when you were here, [laughter] because we're talking about one thing and I'm on the next topic. [Editor's Note: Jesse Braddell had worked at the Memorial as an intern prior to the interview.] I do have a learning disability, which I found out when I was fifty, but I still made it through. I

have this ability to retain stuff, and they call it internalizing. So, even though I didn't do well of my grades all through school, when it came to exams, I just remembered it all. It was really kind of interesting, but, so, yes, I made it through high school and without very many problems.

SH: What do you remember as being the big events of your high school years?

KG: Big events of my high school years, as far as personal, because I remember John Kennedy's assassination. [Editor's Note: President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Friday, November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas.] Anybody who was alive back then, you knew exactly where you were. Pretty much, it's the same as 9/11 [the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks] right now and it's interesting, because, now, we're having high school tours come through here [the Memorial] and some of the freshmen don't remember 9/11--and it's [as] fresh in our minds as John Kennedy's [assassination]. I remember all these movements taking place. I graduated high school in 1966--we actually had one of my classmates that dropped out of school because he was doing marijuana and he wanted to make money to pay for the marijuana. In a city like Bayonne, I mean, 1966, drugs weren't [prevalent]. He was like the first one we knew about drugs and it was kind of surprising, and you could see the change in him. All of a sudden, senior year or junior year, I think it was junior year, his hair started getting longer and greasier and the personal hygiene was going. He's very inattentive and he finally dropped out. He turned eighteen. He started driving for a liquor store to make money and that, I remember, was a shock, having somebody on [drugs]. Later on, now, unfortunately, I tell the students that come here that we were probably the ones that started the drug revolution in the country and it's probably one of our worst legacies to future generations. It was a lot of fun--I remember high school being a lot of fun. I remember, I didn't go to dances very much, I didn't do anything organized, but, like I said, I had a circle of friends and we were always just hanging out and fooling around, working. We all had jobs.

SH: I was going to ask, did you have afterschool jobs?

KG: Yes, almost all of us, and, let's face it, like I said, the money wasn't there, so, everybody had to chip in a little bit.

JB: Where did you work?

KG: I actually worked at Acme, Acme Markets, on the city line in Bayonne, where I met my wife. [laughter] Actually, we were working [together], yes, believe it or not, childhood sweethearts.

SH: You said you have an older brother.

KG: I have a brother that's, yes, thirteen months older than I am, yes.

SH: Then, you have younger siblings.

KG: I have a younger sister and a younger brother. I'm like the middle child. You have the oldest, he's cool because he's the oldest. Then, you have your first daughter and she's cool.

Then, you have the baby, right? I'm the typical second middle child--I'm just kind of there.
[laughter] That's the way my life went.

SH: You always knew who Mother's favorite was.

KG: Oh, absolutely, yes, there's no doubt. [laughter]

JB: Do you want to move forward into the college? Was college something you always wanted to do or did your parents push for it?

KG: My parents were very big on education. You've got to remember, as I said now, and, again, I didn't know my father's parents, but my mother's parents were very big on education. They had three daughters and they insisted that they finished high school and, back in the '30s, or I think it was even earlier than that, I guess, yes, the '20s, that was a big deal. Education was always stressed in our family. So, when I was graduating high school, I was actually accepted to Newark College of Engineering, at that time, and I remember the conversation with my dad. He said to me, "Well, here's the deal. I have four children. I'm glad you made college, but there's no money to send you to college." So, what I did is, I got a job at Hunt-Wesson Foods, during the day, and I started going to night school. So, I started NJIT, well, Newark College of Engineering, at that time, at night. [Editor's Note: The Newark College of Engineering became the New Jersey Institute of Technology in 1975.] That was, like, '67, I think it was, January '67.

SH: Was your older brother in college?

KG: My older brother, about a semester after I started, he went, started going nights, too, yes.

SH: Was he at the same school?

KG: Yes, it turns out he did. We both went to Newark College of Engineering for a while. He dropped out and he finished up in Kean College. He also went in the Air Force shortly after that.

SH: When you graduated high school, had you already registered for the draft?

KG: No, I was seventeen.

SH: My math is terrible.

KG: I was seventeen. Yes, as a matter-of-fact, it was kind of the joke in the family, because my dad said, "Well, you should go out and get a full-time job," when I graduated from high school, and I looked at him, I said, "Dad, I'm seventeen. I can't. [laughter] Nobody's going to hire me. I'm underage." So, he goes, "Aw, shut up," [laughter] but, yes, so, I had to wait until July to register for the draft, and then, I was kind of cognizant. In high school, I remember, as a matter-of-fact, I remember the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, right. [Editor's Note: On August 2, 1964, the USS *Maddox* (DD-731) reported being fired at by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. On August 4, 1964, it was mistakenly reported that the *Maddox* and its reinforcement, the USS *Turner Joy* (DD-951), were again attacked. Congress passed the "Tonkin Gulf Resolution," officially the

"Asia Resolution," on August 7, 1964, authorizing the President to take retaliatory action against North Vietnam.] I remember that very vividly. I remember [the] President getting on television and telling us about the buildup. When I saw the movie *We Were Soldiers* [the 2002 film] and President Johnson got on television and he started talking about, "I asked General Westmoreland what more he needs," and he was going to send the First Cavalry Division, I remembered my mom crying and saying, "Another war--my boys are going to go to war now," and I remember that very vividly. It's amazing how that's just [vivid], because I think, as you go down a road in your life, you realize that that did change my life. That had a definite effect on my life as we went through, although I didn't realize it at the time, yes, and we all thought the war was going to be over before I graduated high school anyway. [laughter] Who knew?

SH: When you were in high school, you were aware of what was going on.

KG: Yes.

SH: Very much.

KG: Yes, yes. My parents were always watching the news. There's always newspapers in our house. My dad used to come home from work every night and he would sit down with his newspaper for a half-hour before dinner and read his newspaper. So, yes, we were up on the current events then. I remember, like, the Civil Rights Movement, I remember seeing, watching, the speech in Washington, right, Reverend ...

SH: Martin Luther King.

KG: Martin Luther King; jeez, I am getting old. I can visualize it, but I remember seeing that speech and it's an inspiring speech. It was really something that made you stop and think, but I also remember the other side of it, the Black Panthers on the street corners with shotguns, right. I remember the riots in Newark.

JB: You went to school in Newark in 1967. Were classes cancelled during that time?

KG: Yes, classes were cancelled. I was actually taking a calculus test, the night the riots broke out. So, I was in Newark at that time and you could hear the gunshots and they closed the school. They told us, "Go home," I mean, after we finished the test. Well, I was driving home and a policeman stopped me. He says, "What are you doing?" I says, "Nothing. I'm driving." He goes, "Don't stop. Don't stop for red lights, don't stop for anything, just go home. Get out of Newark," and when we went back to school, I don't know, say two, three days later, maybe the next week later. You could see the bullet holes in the cafeteria where the shots were fired. So, again, at that particular time, you could see the unrest, you could feel the unrest bubbling, but, until that night, you didn't realize how dramatic it was. ... When we sit here and we tell students now, you talk about riots in Newark, and then, they look at you like, "Not in our country," but, yes, they happened, yes.

SH: What did your family advise you to do? What did you and your friends do? Did you have a plan as to how you would react?

KG: To?

SH: If you had gotten in the middle of something like this.

KG: No, there was no plan. We went day-by-day, I guess you would say, and, you've got to remember, where we lived, it was nice, it was peaceful. It's, "That's big city stuff [that] the Newarks, the Jersey Citys, have to worry about, the Detroits have to worry about," but, in Bayonne, it was just, like, a nice town. So, it didn't really affect us directly at home.

SH: You talked about the Black Panthers being a visible part of this.

KG: Right.

SH: What do you remember about that?

KG: Basically, I just remember the pictures, or the news, of them standing on a street corner and I remember them saying they want to kill policemen. I remember, I said, "Well, that's a terrible thing to think, terrible thing to do," but it was almost like there's this radical group of people trying to kill people and, being as young as we were, I don't think we fully understood that. I mean, I think we understand terrorism better at our age now. We understand what drives people, but, when you're fifteen, sixteen, eighteen years old, no, it's just not something that you really delved deeply into. You're aware of your surroundings. You know what's going on, but, yes, I don't think you're politically astute at that age.

SH: That is what I was trying to get you to talk about.

KG: Yes.

SH: We can look back in hindsight.

KG: Right.

SH: You talked about seeing and being impressed with the Martin Luther King speech.

KG: Yes.

SH: Yet, there is this other ...

KG: Understand, too, like, when you watched Martin Luther King and you listened to his speech and you're impressed by it, you're living in an atmosphere that really doesn't see that. I didn't see that until I was in the Army and I went to basic training, right. Bayonne is a very diverse town and you went to school with all colors, creeds and religions. You're all just kind of, like, a big melting pot, and then, I remember people telling Polack jokes and people telling black jokes, back and forth, too. It was almost like kidding more than it was serious, but it wasn't until, like I

said, I went to my basic training that I really understood what prejudice was and what hatred was.

SH: In high school, were you involved with athletic teams?

KG: No, I was working.

JB: Just working.

KG: Yes.

SH: Okay, because I thought maybe you played ball or something.

KG: No.

JB: You mentioned that your brother joined the Air Force in 1967.

KG: Right.

JB: Was he drafted or did he enlist?

KG: He enlisted.

JB: You mentioned he dropped out.

SH: You did say he went back and finished up.

KG: Yes, he did. He finished. He got his degree, yes.

JB: Was he giving you details about his experiences in the military?

KG: Yes. Actually, it's kind of ironic, because, like I said, he went in the Air Force and he went to Lackland Air Force Base, I think in Texas, for his training. We should go a little more in sequence, but, yes, he gave us feedback from what he did and he did make some specific statements to me, that we'll talk about when we get to basic training. [laughter] Yes, it's one of those--it's definitely a laugh. [laughter]

SH: When you went back after the riots and you saw the bullet holes in the cafeteria, was there any announcement from the administration to the students?

KG: I really don't recall. I don't really remember. You've got to remember, I was a night student, so, what went on during the day, I wasn't necessarily aware of.

SH: That is true, but you just went right back to ...

KG: Yes, we just went right back to regular classes.

SH: Were you in Newark when the National Guard presence was there?

KG: No, no.

SH: That came after you left.

KG: Right.

JB: They did not establish checkpoints or anything like that.

KG: No, that was not done yet, yes, but they did eventually. My understanding is, they sent the National Guardsmen in with blanks, blank bullets.

SH: How long did that last?

KG: I want to say three days. For some reason, three days sticks in my mind, and I might be wrong. We'd have to check the history books.

SH: Prior to that, there had been other riots around the country. You said you were aware.

KG: Yes, but it was, like, it's happening, I want to say [in] Detroit. It's happening there and it's like it's almost like a foreign land. It's just kind of, like, happening. "I don't understand what they're doing, but what's got everybody upset, that upset?" because, in a way, we were sheltered.

JB: Do you want to move into getting into the military now?

KG: Sure.

JB: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

KG: Yes.

JB: Drafted?

KG: [laughter] No, see, okay, now, I'm going to school at night, right, and I want to say it was my third semester. My third semester, it was a spring semester, we started in January and I was taking twelve credits. So, I had my student deferment, and then, I dropped a history course. My plan was, well, I was kind of, like, overloaded, because I think I was taking chemistry and it was, like, five hours in one night, or something like that, four hours, whatever. It was a long week, and so, I said, "Well, I'll drop this history course and I'll take twelve credits next semester and I'll be fine." Well, two weeks after that--they had a hotline to the draft board [laughter]--and, as soon as I dropped the three credits, within two weeks, I had my notice to go for my draft physical, and then, about three weeks after that, I was notified I was being inducted. I went to the draft board and I asked the draft board if they can wait until May, so [that] I could finish the semester, at least get credit for the other nine credits I was taking, and they agreed. So, in the

interim, my dad says to me, "Listen, don't go in the Army. If you go in the Army, they're going to make you an infantryman and you don't want to be an infantryman. No," he says, "that's the worst thing you can be in the world," and you couldn't enlist in the Navy or the Air Force. They had, like, a six months to a year waiting list, because everybody else was doing the same thing, yes. So, the Army recruiter calls me up and said, "How would [you] like to fly helicopters?" and I said, "Cool." I went to the flight test, which is a written test of general knowledge and abilities, and I passed it. Then, they said, "Well, okay, we'll make you a helicopter pilot and I said, "All right." So, the problem was that if you're drafted, the draft board refused to delay my induction until June so I could start flight school, and so I talked to the recruiter and what they did is, they said I can enlist a day before my draft day, which I did. I went down there and I enlisted and I came home and, the next day, I flew out to Fort Polk, Louisiana.

SH: The next day.

KG: The next day, yes. They handed me my plane ticket. It was up to me to get to the airport. They didn't really care [how]. So, I went home and, the next morning, one of my aunts picked me up and took me to the airport and, that afternoon, the FBI showed up at my house, looking for me, because I had missed my draft date.

SH: That quickly.

KG: That quickly--it was that day. When my mother told me, I couldn't believe it, yes. Anyway, so, now, I'm in Fort Polk, Louisiana. It was quite an array of different backgrounds, social backgrounds, there. The company had blacks, we had Seminole Indians, we had Cajuns, we had rednecks, three or four of us Northerners--and they all hated each other. It was, like, oh, they were always, constantly, having fights, and it was just open hatred against each other. We're always doing some extra calisthenics because somebody got in a fight, somebody got in an argument or something. So, then, the light went off--the light went off about why it's so bad and why, the way people are treated down South, it was, or, at least in this part of the South that I saw, it was. It all made sense. It all came back to me.

SH: What did you see when you went off base that was so eye-opening?

KG: No, it was right on base. It was every day. There were fights and what not, and we didn't go off base that much with basic training. I think we got one weekend pass the whole eight weeks and we went to a motel and drank beer. [laughter] Well, we did also stop at a [restaurant]. One of the Cajun kids, with a Cajun background, took us to a restaurant that was like a house. Then, you sat on the back with a picnic table, but the food was out of this world. So, that was interesting, but it was just the way people didn't get along. The way people treated each other was really shocking.

SH: When you were in basic training, were you getting letters from home?

KG: Oh, yes, my wife, then my girlfriend, used to write me and my parents used to write me. My mother wrote me, but Dad wasn't a big writer. I'm not a big writer, either.

SH: The advice from your brother?

KG: Yes, the advice from my brother. [laughter] Of course, like I said, he went to Air Force training and he goes, "Don't worry about it." He says, "You're going down South for training. It's good," he goes, "because, if it gets too hot, what they do is, they stop training." He goes, "They have this thing called the red ball and they put the red ball up." It's like a ball, but almost like a Chinese lantern, but it's bright red. "You stop training and what they do is, they take you into an air conditioned building and they talk about training. They talk about what you're supposed to be training in, at that time." So, I don't know, I was sitting there and [I said], "Okay." So, we go down to Fort Polk, Louisiana, and we're running and, next thing you know, you look up, the red ball's up. So, I said to the guy next to me, I said, "This is good. We're going to stop training now and they're going to take us [in] an air conditioned room and talk to us about training." So, the drill sergeant looks. He goes, "Okay, un-blouse your boots, pull your shirts out of your pants, roll up your sleeves and let's start running again." [laughter] I said, "Okay, here we are." This was really good.

SH: A little different connotation.

KG: A little different, yes. [laughter] Then, I realized there is a difference between training in the Air Force and the Army.

SH: That is a great story, though.

KG: Yes.

JB: You were talking about how you were aware of the Vietnam War.

KG: Right.

JB: How did you feel when the draft board called you up and you knew that you were going?

KG: It didn't bother me and, you've got to remember my background, Polish Catholic, we're taught to hate Communism, to hate the Russians for occupying Poland and, [as] children of World War II veterans, it's an honor to serve your country. It's not a duty, it's an honor. You should want to go and serve your country. So, in my own mind, it was almost a relief. "Yes, okay, I'm going to go do my duty and I'm going to do what I have to do," and, now, the fact that I get to fly is just, like, a bonus. That's extra points for me, because it's something, like, everybody wants to do, right. Everybody who is young, figures they want to do something exciting and flying a helicopter is exciting--didn't realize how dangerous it was at the time, but it was very exciting. [laughter]

SH: Your brother was in the Air Force, but you were going to fly.

KG: Yes, yes, and he was actually a technician on missiles. That's what he wound up doing. So, yes, it was kind of funny. When I came home from Vietnam, he was actually stationed here,

at McGuire Air Force Base, at the end, and I went down to visit his [base] and they were really interested in stories about Vietnam and whatnot.

JG: Was he deployed to Vietnam?

KG: No.

JG: He stayed stateside.

KG: Yes.

SH: When you signed up to fly helicopters, did that increase your enlistment?

KG: Yes, yes. Typically, when you're drafted, it's two years. Training to be a helicopter pilot is three years, plus your training, and it's roughly, between basic and flight school, eleven months of training. So, it's almost four years.

SH: You knew that up front.

KG: I knew that up front, right, right.

SH: Did you understand that you would be a warrant officer? Is that correct?

KG: Yes.

SH: You were going to fly.

KG: Yes, I knew that and that program is still in effect today. A lot of people don't realize that, that you could still just go join the Army and be a pilot without a college education. The Army is the only one that actually has that program.

JB: Did you have to attend warrant officer school or was that part of flight school?

KG: No, it was all in one. Yes, you would actually fly in the morning or the afternoon and, the other half of the day, you were in classrooms. So, it was either about learning about helicopters or it was officer training, and they harassed you for nine months there, just to make sure.
[laughter]

SH: In basic training, was everyone in that program getting ready for the flight program?

KG: No, no, it was a very small percentage, actually. I'm not sure why they started sending the potential helicopter pilots to Fort Polk, other than its similarity in weather to Vietnam, but they also had your advanced infantry training there, called Tigerland. That's where they trained infantrymen to get ready to go to Vietnam, and so, it was pretty much all there and it was hot, humid. For a kid from Bayonne, you get there and they have three-foot pictures of snakes that

can bite you, so [that] you can identify the right snake to get the right anti-venom. That's a little scary.

SH: I will bet.

KG: That's out of my element, but, yes, it was hot. I left in May and it was, like, fifty something here and it was, like, ninety-five, with ninety-five percent humidity. So, it took a little adjustment to the weather, and then, the drill sergeants there were just trained by the Marines' drill sergeants, drill instructors. So, they were mean. [laughter] They were.

SH: Fort Polk had been a World War II base as well.

KG: Yes, right.

SH: How were the facilities?

KG: The facilities were World War II facilities; that's what they were. As a matter-of-fact, when I wound up in Alabama, my dad had built the barracks I stayed in in Alabama. Yes, during Vietnam, they were using a lot of World War II facilities that were built, because, I guess, there were so many troops in World War II that they had all these buildings, coal-fired heat. [laughter]

SH: Describe what the base looked like.

KG: Big and ugly. Basically, I guess, if you look at any World War II pictures, there's, like, two-story barracks, yellow in color, right, all one big, open room. There were company areas, with marching fields in the middle, where you can practice marching and whatnot, and then you would take trucks, these cattle cars, they used to call them, anywhere we had to do target shooting or anything like that, learn how to shoot. It had an airfield, like most Army bases at the time, but it was all retro. It was all World War II vintage, everything.

SH: Was the fighting that broke out usually in the barracks?

KG: That was usually in the barracks or the dayroom. We had a dayroom, with a pool table and whatnot, and they'd start discussing something, and then, get into a fight. Pretty much, I would say once a week or twice a week, you would have something breaking out. If you were lucky, the guys would break it up and nobody would know about it. If one of the sergeants found out, you were doing calisthenics, because you "had too much energy," yes.

SH: Were you part of a group that got involved in this?

KG: No, we were the smart Yankees. [laughter] We just stayed out. I'll tell you the truth, there were so few of us from the North down there, like, there might be two of us in the barracks, but it was almost like we were observers to the whole thing. Nobody bothered us. Nobody particularly liked us, because we're Yankees, but, yes, nobody bothered us.

SH: Were the drill instructors from the South as well?

KG: You know what? I actually went to high school with one of them. It was unbelievable, yes--not one of mine, unfortunately [laughter]--but, yes, I found out, like my third or fourth day in the company, that he was there. He helped me through; not helped me through, but just gave you little pieces of advice here and there, "Don't screw around with that drill sergeant. He's really nasty," or something like that.

SH: How was the food?

KG: Food's terrible. [laughter] Yes, like I said, before every meal, what you would have to do is, you know the monkey bars, when you're a kid? You have to go through the monkey bars, you would have to do a low crawl, you would have to crawl through the sandpit a hundred yards. So, then, by that time, you were sweaty, you were full of sand, and then, they'd let you go eat. The food was nothing to write home about. It was what you needed to sustain yourself, typical.

SH: Did guys still get assigned KP?

KG: I had KP once. Yes, I did, and it was, you worked all day, that's all. I had to laugh at--the cook was making pancakes. He says, "What kind of pancakes we want today?" and I looked at him. So, he goes, "Oh, we'll have pineapple pancakes today." What they did, instead of adding water, they would take the sauce from the pineapples they were going to serve for lunch and pour it into the pancake batter and make pineapple pancakes. That's the one thing I remember about [KP]. Between scrubbing pots and pineapple pancakes, that's what I remember about KP. [laughter]

JB: Back to your drill sergeants; were they combat vets from Vietnam?

KG: Yes, they were all combat vets, yes.

JG: Would they tell you stories about it?

KG: You know what? Not so much our drill sergeants, but we had instructors, like, we had this one Hispanic instructor that was teaching the bayonet and he would tell you [stories]. He would talk to you about it, and one thing he kept telling us, he goes, "If you need this big bayonet, you're in deep shit." [laughter] That's all he kept saying to us. He says, "Why use a bayonet when you can shoot him?" and he'd start telling stories [about] when he did have to use bayonets one time. There was another one that was a lieutenant. Yes, he had just come back from Vietnam. He talked about it, what it was like.

SH: How did they describe it? Were they politicized at all?

KG: Oh, absolutely not. It's actually more survival lessons. It was more of what you needed to know, the fact that, "We're teaching you basics, but, when you get out in the bush, you've really got to know what it's about and who to trust, who not to trust, how to find out who you can trust," that kind of stuff, the lifesaving type lessons.

JB: Let you know that it is real.

KG: Yes, oh, yes, definitely that it's real, yes.

JB: Were you being trained on the M-16 or were you using older weapons?

KG: M-14s, yes. We trained on the M-14 and I got one of the few M-14s with a fiberglass stock, which means my rifle was, like, about two pounds lighter than everybody else's, which was nice and it's just luck of the draw. They had about three of them in the company and I got one and, yes, we had the M-14 and that's the only thing we trained on. When I went to flight school, they trained us on a thirty-eight [caliber pistol] and the M-16.

SH: Since you were bound for this warrant officer program, were you trained any differently?

KG: No, no, it's the same basic training. Everybody's treated equally miserably, yes.

SH: Did anybody wash out of basic training?

KG: You don't wash out of basic training. They recycle you. They just keep [recycling you]. Especially if you're a draftee, they're just going to [keep you in]. In fact, we had one guy who was on his fourth time on basic training, and his problem wasn't that he was washing out or he was failing something. His problem was that he kept running away. He kept going AWOL, going home to his wife or his girlfriend, whatever it was at the time. Then, it added another burden to the company, because, every night, you had a fire watch. So, somebody on the upstairs had to walk the floor, making sure there's no fire, somebody on the first floor had to do the same thing. Well, now, we have this guy who's been AWOL a few times and you had two people to watch him, to make sure he didn't try to run away again. Well, that's less sleep people are getting. So, he was not treated very well by the company, and then, eventually, the story goes is, he tried to jump out the window and run away again. So, he wasn't our problem. He got recycled to somebody else again, yes, but, yes, if you failed part of basic, the idea is not to fail part of basic, because, then, you've got to go through it again and it's not a fun event.

JB: Was flying down to basic training your first time up in the sky?

KG: Yes, first time in an airplane was flying down to basic training. They flew me into New Orleans, and then, from New Orleans, they had this C-47 or DC-3, famous in World War II, Trans-Texas Airlines, better known as "Treetop Airlines." It was amazing--just getting into this thing, I was wondering if we were going to take off or not--but we made it to Fort Polk.

SH: [laughter] Your first experience flying, yikes.

JB: After you graduated, were you able to go back home?

KG: No. We graduated whatever day it was, I don't remember it, but they immediately put us on a bus for Texas. There was actually more. I would say the bus was almost full, but only about half of us were helicopter pilots and the other guys were going to somewhere else in

Texas, but they were stopping at Fort Wolters, Texas, and they were going to take another bus to wherever they were going. Yes, it was a very long bus ride, from what I remember.

JB: That is where you were going to do flight school.

KG: The first half of flight school.

JB: First half.

KG: Yes.

JB: Can you describe that? Was it classroom based?

KG: The first four weeks are classroom based. First four weeks is very intense about Army regulations, officer training, pre-flight school, about airplanes and flying and navigation and things like that. Then, you actually get to fly, start flying helicopters, and there's two student pilots to every instructor pilot. That was done by civilians. They had hired civilian pilots and, yes, the first four weeks of flying were with civilians and the helicopters [were, from] the beginning of [the television drama] *M*A*S*H*, the bubble, big bubble. It's a Bell OH-13 is what I learned on, because I was over six-foot. They had three different helicopters, depending on how tall you were, [that] you flew, and so, that was a very reliable helicopter and I did fairly well. I soloed within eleven hours, which is pretty average, and everybody does, like, ten to fifteen. It's very interesting, a little scary, "Jeez, I'm flying along, I can barely drive a car and they put me in this helicopter."

SH: That was my next question. Had you started driving a car?

KG: Yes, I did. I had a car, yes, but it was just, like, "Oh, my God, what are you, crazy?" [laughter] It's funny, because, like, the first time, an instructor pilot gets out, and they all do the same act, like they're disgusted with you, "I'm tired of flying with you. Go fly yourself," and you get to the end of the runway and you turn around, to make sure you're clear to take off, and you go, "Oh, Jesus, [laughter] don't let me screw this up," yes. It's like anything else, the more you practice it, the better you get at it, the more confidence you get.

JB: Is there any event, a scary moment, that you significantly remember from training?

KG: Yes, I got lost. [laughter] I absolutely got totally lost. What you have to understand; I'm making excuses. I'm rationalizing this whole story. [laughter] What happened is, actually, the winds had shifted and the helicopters, like I told you, they're Korean War vintage helicopters and all you have is a magnetic compass. That's how you do your navigation. I got blown a little off course and I'd lost radio contact. I couldn't hear anybody, I couldn't talk to anybody, whatever it was, the atmospherics. So, I couldn't find my way back. I was running low on fuel. So, I put it down--it just so happened I put it down in the middle of oil rigs--and I sat there and I walked out to a gas station and we called. They came and put gasoline in it, [laughter] but two instructor pilots actually flew it back, because, here it was, at night, and it's a Friday night during football season in Texas, and you don't screw around [with that]. That's bad news.

So, what actually happened was, I had to buy the two pilots that flew my helicopter out, one, a bottle of Chivas Regal and, one, a bottle of Wild Turkey Bourbon, [laughter] for getting lost. That was a month's salary, and then, this was on Friday night, like I said, well, Monday was, the Major, Gavins, I'll never forget him, decided he was going to wash me out, that he was going to wash me out of flight school. That day, my instructor pilot even said, "You don't even have to take off. You fail." [laughter] So, you get three failures, so, they threw you out. So, the next day, he failed me again and, the third day, I took a check flight with a colonel and he finally said, "Son, they're messing with you. Don't worry, you're going to stay in the program." So, I went all through there and I didn't fail out and I went on to finish flight school, but it was scary. You say, "Oh, jeez," and, yes, they weren't big on making mistakes and that was the key to the first half of the flight school. As it turns out, Major Gavins was at my graduation and, [you have] got to understand, I have my mother [and] father there, my future wife there, my brother's there. Major Gavins comes up and I give him a salute and he goes, "Gurbisz, still see you're lost, huh?" [laughter] I said, "Bastard."

SH: That must have been very frightening, to think you might fail out. Why did they fail you the second time?

KG: To teach you a lesson.

SH: You really do not think you did anything wrong.

KG: Oh, no, I know I did something. I didn't do anything wrong on the flights that I was on, but he put out the word that, "Two failures, then, you take your check flight." He was going to send me out and I can't say I was the best pilot in the world, I wasn't the worst, either, by any means, but, yes, it was kind of, like, his way of getting even for me ruining his Friday night football game. [laughter]

SH: That is where the Friday night football came in.

KG: Yes, exactly.

SH: I did not understand. Did you get that?

JB: Yes, I know high school football in Texas is huge.

KG: Big, yes.

SH: I know that, but I did not realize that that was why he was in so much trouble. If you had set it down in that stadium ...

KG: Yes, that's right, yes, right. [laughter]

SH: Now, I understand, thank you.

KG: There was also a story about a guy who set it down next to a gas station and gassed it up with regular. I know, I'm positive, it happened, because you can't fly an hour-and-a-half on the forty-five-minute gas tank. [laughter]

JB: I do not really know much about helicopters, but what do the controls look like? Do you have a joystick?

KG: Okay. The cyclic is between your legs and that moves the rotor blade left or right or front or back. I know you can't see this as I'm talking, but, all right, and then, you have your collective here, which changes the pitch of the blade, and that gives you power. That's what brings you up to a hover, and, on the cyclic, you also have the fuel control and, like, with the older helicopters, it's not automatic. So, you have to master how to increase fuel, which is increasing work, and the other thing is, on the older helicopter, there's, like, a second delay in everything you do. So, you have to learn how to anticipate that delay and, the joke is, that's why they let you hover the first time in Texas--you need the whole state. [laughter] Some of it's opposite of what you would normally do, and it takes a lot of dexterity to do it. The other thing, I didn't tell you about the pedals; that's your tail rotor. So, as you're increasing power, you have to put more pedal in, to compensate [for] the torque from the engine.

SH: That must have been really nice for your parents, your girlfriend and your brother to be there.

KG: Yes.

SH: For graduation. Did your father have any comments about the similarities that he had experienced in his service?

KG: Other than building the barracks, no; other than not liking Alabama, no. [laughter] It was kind of rural around where [we were]. You can imagine, with all the helicopters, but he was proud. He was proud that [I made it].

SH: He must have been, to come all the way to Texas.

KG: Yes. He hated flying. Well, he actually came to Alabama, because first half is in Texas. Then, you moved to Fort Rucker, Alabama.

SH: I thought this was all taking place in Texas.

KG: Well, everything I told you up to this phase took place in Texas. Then, we went to Alabama, once we graduated, and we finished. We did instrument flying in Alabama, to start; same helicopter, which was good for us, a newer model, automatic controls, so, you can concentrate on the instrument flying. They actually had parts of the state set up as in the same geographic locations as Vietnam or the same headings that you would need to take in Vietnam, using your controls. So, the beacons--that's what you fly to is a beacon--as I say, if you said, "I'm flying from Saigon to Pleiku," it would be the same bearings you would use in Vietnam, because you're used to it, which I thought was ingenious, yes.

SH: We often ask, was the training you had applicable to where you were in the war?

KG: Yes, they had that down pat. I mean, there's no doubt where we're going when they finished flight school, right, and then, the next phase, in Alabama, was transition into the Huey, the UH-1 helicopters, and I think that was two weeks. I'm pretty sure it was two weeks, and then, the last two weeks was tactical training, where we flew formations and practiced, the way you would fly in Vietnam, basically.

JB: What were those tactics, treetop flying?

KG: Yes, treetop flying. Formation flying was big. We never did much formation flying--did any formation flying, as far as that goes--until then. Landing zones-- it's an art as well as a science to bring a group of helicopters in a landing zone or LZ, because the last guy, if you don't time it right and you don't get your speed right, the guy at the end of the formation is holding his helicopter straight up, trying to slow it down, so [that] he doesn't slam into the helicopter in front. So, yes, and making turns requires training, like anything else, and it was kind of, like, a fun time, too, because you're towards the end and you're practicing practical stuff, rather than a lot of theory and a lot of stuff you had to do.

SH: Did you fly every day?

KG: Pretty much. Alabama was tough in the winter, because they get a lot of rain and they get a lot of overcast, and so, we missed a lot of days. We flew some weekends, to make up the time. You were going to graduate on April 20th. No, I don't remember, I guess April 22nd, I think, I graduated from flight school, but, that day, you were going to graduate no matter what, even if you have to fly all day the day before, and some guys did that. If they were sick or something one day and they had all this time to make up, they were flying every weekend.

JB: How many hours did you have to accumulate?

KG: Two hundred. Before you graduated, you need two hundred, yes. I think it was 209, 210.

SH: Was there any choice in which type of helicopter you flew?

KG: No. This is the Army. [laughter]

SH: I had to ask.

KG: Yes. No, everybody flew a Huey. That's it.

SH: Were there other helicopters that you wanted to try to fly?

KG: Actually, well, of course, the [Bell AH-1] Cobra. That was the hot machine at the time. It's, like, seventy knots faster than a Huey, but we only had one guy go to Cobra school. That's

because he just came back from Vietnam. So, out of two hundred of us, 199 went right to Vietnam. He got four weeks more training.

JB: Were you still considered a raw recruit at this time or were you wearing your warrant officer's bar?

KG: You don't wear your officer bars until you graduate and, what happens is, it's a two-day event. The first day, they swear you in as warrant officers, and then, that evening, they have a military ball, and then, the next day, you get your wings, yes.

JB: Did your future wife, Helen, come down for that ball?

KG: Yes, she did. She was down there with my parents and my brother. My mother pinned my bars on one day and she pinned my wings on the next day, yes. That's nice.

SH: Diplomatically correct.

KG: All I know is, my brother made a ton of money that day. There's a military custom, when you become an officer, that the first person that salutes you, you have to give him a silver dollar, and he was one of the few enlisted men there. [laughter] I said to him, "Steve, just start saluting people," and, soon, he had a pocket full of silver dollars when he finished with them. Ironically, fast forward, my friend, John, I went through flight school with, right before Christmas, he swore his daughter into the Navy. She's a Navy nurse now, and his nephew, who is a warrant officer on active duty, saluted her and she didn't quite know what to do, so I explained the tradition. John had the silver dollar for her, so [that] she could give it to her cousin. So, she gave hers to her cousin.

SH: Good story. In Alabama, when your father came down, what was he telling you, besides that he had built the barracks?

KG: No, it's just that they formed their division, I think, in Alabama and, back then, the military was segregated and they started bringing the different regiments in. His comment was that the black regiment arrived, he goes, "These guys can march." He said, "We were like, no matter what we did, we couldn't march as well." They were very well-trained, compared to the guys coming down from New Jersey, and that he remembers the division being formed and training constantly. You were either training or building the barracks, and then, they got on a train and leaving for California, for I don't know how many days, and then, getting on a ship and going to Hawaii, yes.

SH: Do you remember which division he was in?

KG: Yes, 98th Division.

SH: When you were flying the Huey, were these new aircraft that you were flying?

KG: Oh, in Alabama?

SH: In Alabama.

KG: No, they were old. They were older models. As a matter-of-fact, the D model was what we finished training on for tactics, which was the newest ones, but, when I got to Vietnam, I was flying the H models, because they were the newest. I had to take a test ride. One thing [the] Army could do is train. They can train you and train you and train you, and so just before I could fly it myself, I had to go for [a flight] with a test pilot and get checked out on the H model.

SH: In your second phase of training in Alabama, you said they were experienced pilots training you.

KG: Right.

SH: Are there things that you now remember that were lifesaving that they told you, or things that were totally wrong?

KG: No, just the opposite. I mean, these guys were, like, totally trying to get you ready and they would teach you things how the Army would teach you and tell you, "When you get to Vietnam, this is what you're going to do." So, they were excellent. It's like every day was like riding with a professor, just because some of them had, like, fifteen hundred hours and one of them, in Texas, he had three tours. He was on his third tour when he died, but he had done two tours already. They were a wealth of knowledge, and then, I had another one and that was my next problem with flying. We had one that was really nervous. He literally shot up, and so, it was his first class of teaching and we couldn't do anything right and he was, like, not failing us, but giving us very marginal [marks]. He had three students with him. Then, finally, again, my next flight with a colonel--this colonel gave us all test flights, to see if we were as bad as he says we were, and he came back and he said, "Just don't say anything," he goes, "but this guy's really had a tough time. He's been wounded several times." He says, "He's just not an instructor pilot." So, we got a new instructor pilot, like, the next day, and that's the other [side of it]. You can see what the other half does when it really wrecks you, when you're nervous and jerky all the time, and that's what this guy was. So, he became a platform instructor, which is fine, but, for the most part, the new guy was phenomenal. He was with the cav and he's just a world of knowledge, "Here's how you do this. Here's how you do that." He goes, "You can do so much stuff with this helicopter. You're going to be amazed when you get over there." [laughter] He goes, "We can't do it here in the States, but wait until you get over there. You can do whatever you want," [laughter] yes, and a Huey was a phenomenal helicopter, so forgiving, yes.

SH: What is the crew like on a Huey? How many?

KG: Well, the typical crew is four. You have a pilot, a copilot, or aircraft commander and pilot. The person in charge is either the pilot or aircraft commander and, after so much experience and proving that, you know what you're doing, they make you an aircraft commander. So, then, the copilot becomes a pilot. That's the only difference, and you have a door gunner and you have a crew chief. The crew chief, that's basically his helicopter--you're just borrowing it for the day. They take care of it, they fix it, and they change the oil. They do this, they do that, and

everything they needed for the helicopter, the crew chief, and the door gunner helps him. So, yes, it's typically a crew of four.

SH: It is basically two officers and two enlisted men.

KG: Right, and the other odd point that you make is that, like, if I was an aircraft commander and a warrant officer, if I have a captain flying with me, I'm in charge, right, and then, when you get on the ground, he's in charge, but that's just the way the Army sets things up. Most experienced, most knowledgeable is the aircraft commander.

SH: Did that ever cause a problem?

KG: No, it really typically doesn't. I've never heard of a problem. Depending on personalities, once every so often, there's bruised egos, because we had a captain that wasn't necessarily the best pilot and he would get annoyed. He was annoyed when I made aircraft commander and he didn't, but that's life--suck it up. [laughter]

SH: You were on an equal footing, basically, for promotion to aircraft commander.

KG: Right, yes. The rank has nothing to do with that, really, at least, I mean, in my experience. It's who's the most qualified.

JB: Were your helicopters armed? Did you have any weapons?

KG: We had two M60 machine-guns, thirty-caliber machine-guns.

JB: You trained in the States on those.

KG: No, not in the States, not with live weapons.

SH: Were you told by these experienced people who were training you in Alabama, as you get to the end, things like, "Make sure your aircraft has this on it?" Do you call them aircraft?

KG: Yes, aircraft's fine. It just varied. Everybody calls it a Huey, "Make sure the Huey has this or your Huey has that."

SH: We hear stories about the World War II guys in particular doing extra things to their tanks and other equipment.

KG: Yes.

SH: I am thinking about infantrymen putting extra shells in their belts.

KG: No, it's not too much. You get over there and they told you, "You have an armored seat. That's your protection, right. Just make sure you don't stick out." I'm six-foot. I was six-one at

the time. You'd think I was a midget, I'm sorry, a small person, when I got on the airplane, because I was just down low.

JB: Yes, just to touch upon night training, was there night vision back then?

KG: No, no night vision; come on. [laughter]

SH: We have to ask.

KG: Yes. No, the night vision we had when I got to Vietnam, there's no goggles, like you guys have now, and you were just sitting in a room with red lights for a half-hour, so [that] your eyes adjusted to the dark. That's how you did it in night flying, and then--what?

JB: Very primitive.

KG: Very. Well, the problem is, you have to be careful at night when you're formation flying, because, again, like I said, you don't have any night goggles. What you're basically doing is, you're flying, you're looking at the instruments in that helicopter in front of you. That's to get your right position, and it's very easy to get vertigo and just drift into him. So, that's why you're watching as you're flying. The person flying the helicopter's watching his position and the other guy's watching that you don't drift in or out of the formation--yes, pretty primitive by today's standards, yes. [laughter]

SH: What was a formation? How many aircraft?

KG: Oh, it could be two, two or more. Yes, it depends, on the night and what was going on, yes. Basically, I remember not more than three in training, not more than three, because, then, it gets really dangerous--they call a group of helicopters a gaggle for a reason. They're always jumping around. You're never in a good position.

JB: Do you want to move on to getting your orders for Vietnam? Did you know you were going to go to Vietnam right after flight school?

KG: Oh, yes, everybody knew. As a matter-of-fact, we had our orders, I think, about a month before we actually graduated. It was a big deal--or we thought it was a big deal at the time, that they came out and they called your name and they gave you orders. They told you where you were going, like, First Cavalry Division was big, because, "Oh, you know, the First Cavalry Division," and then, they got to me and they said, "Unassigned," John and I said, "Unassigned?" There were, like, I guess about ten percent of us that were unassigned and they do that just in case. What if something happens between now and when you get over there and a certain unit needs more pilots than they originally thought? So, we were sent. As it turns out, I was lucky at that draw, because myself and one of my friends, John Dougherty, went to a maintenance unit. We went to the 34th Group, to the 14th Transportation Battalion, and we got there and we went to our interviews with the Colonel, Colonel Sam Walker; I remember his name. John stayed in Nha Trang, in a battalion headquarters, and I was, as Sam Walker said, "I'm going to make a hero out of you, hoss," and he sent me up to Pleiku, into the Central Highlands. I walked out of

the room and I saw the Sergeant Major. I says, "Sergeant Major, what's the Colonel talking about, 'He's going to make a hero out of me?'" He goes, "You're going to the 604th?" and he said, "Yes, sir." He goes, "Rocket Alley, son, Rocket Alley," [laughter] so, nice. So, then, you're living with that, and John and I compared notes afterwards and the only difference in our interview is, he told him he was going to be a career soldier and I didn't. That's all he said. [laughter] So, John stayed in Nha Trang, in the battalion headquarters, and I went up to the Central Highlands.

SH: When you graduated from your training in Alabama, did you get a leave?

KG: Twenty days. You got twenty days, but they give you ten travel days, too. From coast to coast, it was ten days, and that's in case you want to drive across. Military has everything calculated out, but we got ten days and I flew out to San Francisco and we went out of Oakland and we were there for four days. We're actually in Oakland, in San Francisco, for four days, and it was kind of [nice]. They give you a room, two officers to a room, for a dollar a day and we had to check in ten o'clock every morning, to see if we had a flight the next day, and, after that, you're free for the day. So, we did that for four days. Yes, I guess there were about maybe a dozen of us in the graduating class that were there already, and they spaced it out, depending on [where you lived]. We all got the same twenty days, but, if you lived closer to San Francisco, you got there earlier than the East Coast guys, and my roommate never showed up. I never found out what happened to him. He just didn't show up for his troop movement.

JB: How was San Francisco at the time? Were there antiwar demonstrations?

KG: No. We were told we couldn't go to Haight-Ashbury. [Editor's Note: San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district became known as a center for both the antiwar and counterculture movements in the 1960s.] "Don't go anywhere near there and you'll be all right," and what do you think we're doing? We're going to bars. That's what we're doing, and that's the extent of our sightseeing for the stay-- I mean, went out down to Fisherman's Wharf for crabs, but after that, we're all about the bars. [laughter]

SH: What about the antiwar movement at that point? What were you hearing and what did you think personally?

KG: I thought that they were wrong, and, back then, going over, it didn't seem as dramatic as when I came home. Again, it was like it was there, you kind of saw it on TV and whatnot, but it didn't have a direct effect on us. They weren't demonstrating outside the bases. We went in and out. I mean, we rented cars and we were in and out all day. We actually didn't see it there and that's why they told us, "As long as you stay away from Haight-Ashbury, you'll be all right."

SH: Can you date the time you were in San Francisco for us?

KG: The date, it'd be May, be May 14, 1969, yes. That's when I arrived and we shipped out May 19th, because we had a day or two on arrival there, I remember, but, yes, it was a relatively quiet time. I mean, we didn't wear our uniforms downtown, although, looking at us, I'm sure you knew we were soldiers.

SH: The haircut.

KG: The haircut might have been a dead giveaway at that time, too, right, but, yes, everybody kind of just said, like, "Okay, you guys are going over, it's fine." Nobody really made a big deal either way. Of course, the enlisted men, I don't think, were allowed off the base and, in a way, I felt bad for them, because we went through there for our shots or something like that and it was, like, there was an office divider, fifty double bunks, another office divider, another fifty. So, it's like a giant warehouse, but just housing people. They had to hang around there all day. That gets boring, too.

SH: Did you consider getting married before you went over?

KG: We'd talked about it a little bit, but she was going to college and her dad was big on her finishing school and we decided not to, maybe not be the best thing to do.

SH: At that point, had any of your friends or people that you knew been killed in Vietnam?

KG: A couple out of high school. I remember the names. I mean, none of my classmates or anything like that, and it wasn't until that period, when we were going over, because, you've got to remember, they weren't drafting you right at eighteen anymore. It was closer to nineteen, yes, like eighteen years and ten months, or something like that. That's when you get drafted and, basically, everybody with an early July birthday was at the Bayonne draft board that day. It was almost like you hear [of] people being killed, and maybe knew one of them, but not directly, until we started going over.

SH: How did people in the neighborhood treat you when you came back on that twenty-day leave?

KG: No, it was just quiet. It was almost like, "Yes, he's home for twenty days and he's going to go." There were a lot of my friends that were in service then, like I told you, my brother was, and there were at least three other guys that were in. They were in and out, so, they were used to seeing us come home for a few days, and then, disappearing again.

SH: You talked about the FBI coming when you did not show up for the draft.

KG: Right.

SH: Were there any security clearances that you had to have to fly?

KG: We had a top secret, one of those. As a matter-of-fact, at my graduation, now that we're talking about it, the FBI came over. One of my former roommates--I had a lot of luck with roommates, now that I'm thinking about it [laughter]--I guess had joined an antiwar demonstration somewhere and they had gotten wind of it. They were just asking me about him, and we weren't roommates for that long. A lot of times, what happens is, you're all getting together, we're going from Fort Walters to Fort Rucker, you arrive in different times and they put

the group together. So, you may be in a barracks not training for a week until everybody arrives, and so, I was in a room with a guy named--his name was Fore. It doesn't make any difference. Well, anyway, we were together for that week, and then, when we went to our permanent barracks, we got changed, to the other guy that didn't show up for the troop movement. So, I only knew the guy for a week, but they had to talk to me that day. They just couldn't wait, I was just sworn in as a warrant officer. We're still in the theater, the guy comes up and taps me on the shoulder, the FBI agent hits me on the shoulder, "We've got to speak." I said, "Yes," and so, that afternoon, I met him at the hotel, he and his partner, and we talked about what I knew about this guy, and I never knew what happened to him, either. [laughter]

SH: I was just curious.

KG: Yes. You know what it is, it was there, but I guess I was not that interested in it. I knew it was going on, but [was not into it], yes.

SH: At that point, was there any talk between your family and you or anybody about the politics in Washington?

KG: I really don't have a clear recollection. I know we used to talk about it--I don't think politics so much as the antiwar demonstrators not being patriotic, more than anything. I mean, I don't remember a lot of political talks, yes.

JB: How was your trip to Vietnam? You flew, right?

KG: It was a joy, yes. [laughter]

JB: How many stops did you have to make?

KG: I had a lot.

SH: What did you fly on?

KG: Flying Tigers, a 707, Flying Tigers Airline, which I guess was an improvement to a C-130. Yes, so, we left San Francisco, or Travis Air Force Base, and we flew out to Hawaii, and then it's like a two-hour stop wherever you go. I don't remember the exact sequence, but I know we made Wake Island, I know we made Okinawa, I know we made Guam, and then, Vietnam, but Wake Island was a rude awakening, just because of what happened in World War II, I mean, and it's just, like, this airstrip. That's all that's there. I mean, it's such a small island, all that's there is that airstrip, and you saw all the havoc that was raised during World War II and you're saying, "Hmm."

SH: Did you really?

KG: Yes, "Was that all worth this?" yes. We arrived in Vietnam at night and it was dark and the first thing they do is, they tell you, "Close all the shades," on the airplane. Then, they shut all the lights off and you're sitting there in the dark and you're feeling the airplane going up and down,

up and down, and, finally you feel the wheels hit the ground. The next thing you know, you hear the explosions of the mortars coming down the runway as we were [landing]. Yes, Tan Son Nhut was attacked that night.

SH: No kidding.

KG: Yes, and they pulled us off to the side of the runway, because they didn't want us near the guys going home. When it stopped, then, we taxied over and we got off the airplane and all the guys cheered. I guess we're their replacements. Yes, so, it was quite a start. Then, they put you on this bus and you're going through downtown. Of course, you've got to remember, you don't have any guns now, right. You're not armed at all. You're just in your jungle fatigues and they put you on this bus and, here it is, like, midnight and they're driving you through town. Everything you hear, you're waiting for snipers or whatever and somebody to shoot you, but it was relatively safe, I guess. The next morning, you get up and you look out the back of the barracks and there's the street right there, with people walking by and whatnot--so, quite a culture change.

JB: This is Saigon, right?

KG: Yes, Tan Son Nhut, right outside of Saigon.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: I am going to turn it on now.

KG: Okay.

SH: We were talking about your flight, how you landed at night, waking up the next morning.

KG: Right.

SH: Talk about your first impressions and your expectations.

KG: Oh, yes, the first thing that hits you, when you get off the airplane, is the humidity. I mean, it's just like walking through water. They [people associated with the Memorial] were just kidding me about how one of the guys in our theater [video] here says, "Oh, I was walking down. The guy in front of me had a darker uniform than me, and then, I realized, 'No, I'm sweating, too.'" It's that way. I mean, it's just so hot when you get there. It's quite a transition. Also, it smelled and I don't know how to describe the smell, other than it's just different. There's something off. The next time I felt that way is when we landed in Bermuda. I mean, I just kind of got that same heat, smell. Then, we were in barracks and there was no air conditioning in the barracks. Everything was open and you wake up, you're sweating already, because it's hot and humid. We went through, I guess, about three or four days of indoctrination in Tan Son Nhut. Then, they shipped us up to 34th Group in Saigon and we were there for two days and in-processing with the group. The thing I remembered is that we were actually, literally, sleeping in a hallway in a hotel, or somewhere, just because they had no room for anybody. The walls were

lined with beds and, somehow, back in those days, you could sleep through anything, right. [laughter] So, you managed to sleep. They sent us up to our battalion in Nha Trang and we spent a few days there, like three or four days, filling out paperwork, being indoctrinated to the battalion. Then, the courier run actually took the replacements, but they didn't go directly to Pleiku. We went up to Qui Nhon, where the 79th and the 540th, two of our sister companies, were located and I spent two days there, waiting for the courier run from Pleiku, the 604th, come down and picked me up and flew me back. So, all in all, I think it took ten, eleven days to get to my unit.

SH: What were you hearing about what was going on, how the war was progressing?

KG: You remember, after Tet, that was big, in January of '68, that was my last, really, impression of the war before I was drafted, was that, "Here it is--it's all out. They were all over the place," and it isn't until years later we realized what a devastating defeat Tet was for the Communists. [Editor's Note: The Tet Offensive, a series of offensives conducted from January 30, 1968, to September 30, 1968, by the Vietcong against every major city in South Vietnam, is seen as the point when American public opinion began turning against the war.] Back here in the United States, Walter Cronkite's telling everybody we can't win this war and there's that disconnect, disconnect that, according to our military, we're not losing any of the battles, but we're still losing the war. How does that happen? Then, the uncertainty starts creeping into your mind about, "Are we doing the right thing? Should I--should we--be going over there?" but, on the same token, you still have that loyalty to your country, that, "No, they need us over there. We're going to go," and, when you arrive, of course, again, you're disconnected from everything you know. You're just surviving the situation at that moment, trying to figure out what your next step [is] or where you're going to be next or, "What are you going to do when you get there?" and, "Are you going to be good at that? Are you going to screw up?" or full of doubts. Everybody keeps telling you, along the way, how bad Pleiku is and you start to say, "Oh, what am I getting myself into?" but, as it turns out, I arrived at Pleiku, or [the] 604th, about ten o'clock in the morning and there was an officers' call going on and I walked in. So, I met everybody and, with a maintenance unit, you don't have a lot of officers. There were eleven officers in the company and, for a year, I was the junior officer. So, that meant I got all the extra details, but a friendly group, a mixed bag of pilots and non-pilots, because it was the transportation company and they're not necessarily all pilots. There are some guys that are mechanical, that are in charge of the maintenance, and there are some people in charge of the clerical. So, I was one of four pilots, five pilots, at the time.

SH: Does that give you a leg up?

KG: It gave me an incredible learning experience, because two of the pilots that I served with, one was a chief warrant officer four and the other one was a chief warrant officer three. Both had been in the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley with the First Cavalry Division. [Editor's Note: The Battle of the Ia Drang Valley, fought in November 1965, was the first major engagement between the US Army and the North Vietnamese Army.] So, they would have [a wealth of experience], and they were both on their third tour. Yes, you had built-in teachers and mentors right there. So, they were very good and the other pilot was a warrant officer, like me. He was about six months ahead of me. He arrived six months earlier, and the third one was, the fifth

one, was a captain and I was told not to trust him flying at all. As a matter-of-fact, after my first mission I flew with him, they told me I was in charge, not to listen to this guy. [laughter] "He's just filling the seat there." So, like I said, you have different levels of competencies, and so, after introducing everybody, the next day--they let me settle in--the next day, I went for my first test flight, on a new H model. They neglected to tell me when you practice auto rotations, you cut your engine, how to land without an engine, and, yes, it's fun. I'm telling you, it's a lot of fun. You can land a helicopter very easily without an engine, as long as you don't bleed off your rotor RPMs and your rotors keep flowing. The thing is, typically, on the earlier models, the clutch is so much slower. So, when you cut the engine, you pushed the collective right down, so [that] you keep the speed of the rotor going. The H model is so freewheeling, you do that, you over speed the rotor. So, I over sped the rotor on my first test flight. Ralph was such a good guy, he says to me, "My fault." He goes, "I should've told you." [laughter] So, believe it or not, that was my first maintenance lesson on [the H model]. We're standing there with a quarter, tapping on the rotor blade, to make sure we didn't stress anything, [that] there wasn't a hollow spot, but, yes, that went fine, and then, I was glad to fly after that. Like I said, the next day, I had my first mission and they just told me not to trust this guy, "Just trust your instincts." So, now, there you are; you've got to remember now, you're just what they call a "wobbly one." [laughter] You had this captain sitting in the left seat; what?

JB: No, I am saying, what a way to start. [laughter]

KG: Yes, and you've got your map on your lap, because you don't know where the heck you're going, right. As it turns out, it was a good training mission, too. It was good to build your confidence in it, and so, we got through it and we made it back, and it just seems like you start a regular routine. Typically, my primary job would be to recover shot down helicopters or helicopters that had crashed. Sometimes, it was [that] business was very busy; sometimes, it was a little slow. So, a lot of times, you would hang out in the pilots' ready room, and so, they start giving you extra duties as they start getting more confidence. One of the things they gave me was to run the armament shop. So, that means I had a few guys working for me and I would also be the test pilot for the guns, the gunships, and that starts filling your time, and then, the two older warrant officers started training me on how to be a maintenance test pilot, and so, that took [some time]. So, basically, I wound up busy. Then, you start getting busy again and you have no free time. Typically, you're working until about eight o'clock at night and you would take a dinner break, then, go back to work for a while. It was a long day and seven days a week, too. There were no days off, and then, once in a while, they would send you down [to battalion]. Well, we did a courier run two or three times a week, I think it was three times a week, and we'd take turns flying down. You wouldn't necessarily have two pilots on that, because, like, you can imagine, with five pilots, you don't have a lot of [extra pilots]. So, you'd run down to battalion. You'd have lunch at battalion, which is kind of like, instead of having mess hall food, you actually have restaurant food, because they had an officers' club down there. The Air Force ate very well [laughter] and that's where we went for lunch, whenever we flew down there, yes.

SH: Describe the base and your quarters.

KG: Oh, I'm smirking because we do have a lot of infantry volunteers here [at the Memorial] and I kid them about my room. It was a typical hooch, four walls and a tin roof. We each had

our own room; each officer had his own room. It was eight-by-eight or nine-by-nine, something like that, not very large, just large enough for a bed, a locker and, maybe a little work area, a little desk area. It was basically a helicopter base and there was the 52nd Aviation Battalion when I arrived, there was the 7/17th Cavalry, which is air mobile cavalry, and us and a flying crane unit and a fixed-wing company, and that was it. It was an all aviation base for the Army and they had a metal runway, a short metal runway, and it had barbed wires and bunkers around the outskirts. It was an old French base. We had one concrete bunker that we didn't use. We just used it as a tower, because the bunker was always full of water, because the French dug in and we put ours above ground, because of the water and the rain and whatnot. Every fourteen days, I caught duty officer. So, I was on guard duty for every two weeks--a little less than that, I guess it was about every twelve days--and it was basically red clay. We had a hangar, but it wasn't finished until after I got there, and so, they were working in large tents. Then, like I said, it's an all-metal runway and it was overrun in 1965, that the North Vietnamese overran it and destroyed most of the helicopters. The scary part about it is, the flight crews got M-16s, all the mechanics still had M-14s. I guess they figured they couldn't hit anything anyway, that they had to shoot at it. Our hooch was, like, the first one after the wires. So, we were about a hundred yards from the perimeter. So, I could look out my window and see the perimeter; learned to sleep with a thirty-eight under my pillow, next to my M-16. I got so good that, when a mortar round was fired, not necessarily a hit, I could tell, in my sleep, whether it was incoming or outgoing. [If] it was incoming, I was on the floor before it hit, but that comes from a lot of practice, unfortunately. We took a lot of mortar and rocket attacks.

SH: Did you?

KG: Yes, and we were pretty much the target, because we had the big hangar there. It got to the point where I suggested we paint a target sign on it, which we did. [laughter]

SH: Did you?

KG: Yes, I have a picture of it. So, they may even have it here [at the Memorial], but, yes, as a matter-of-fact, I have it on my computer. I'll show it to you later. Unfortunately, one day, they were aiming for it and they hit the supply building behind us. So, they pretty well blew it up. One night, they blew up our ammunition dump. I had that on tape. My wife threw it out. It was a little too graphic, I guess, because we had a young lieutenant who was going to be a country singer, singing star, and so, he would practice. While I was over there, I bought this reel-to-reel tape, with an eight-track in the side, which was, like, the latest technology. We had it set up to record in my room and, that night, the attack happened and I threw the tape recorder on. I caught it all on tape.

SH: Did you really?

KG: Yes, but, like I said, that tape disappeared. So, I don't know what happened. Well, one time, I think, my younger brother and sister were over and they pulled it out and they said, "Oh, this isn't labeled. What is this?" and then, they started listening to what was going on and it was a little too intense.

SH: Oh, my.

KG: Yes.

SH: How soon after you got there did the shelling begin? Did you have a three-day grace period, twenty-four hours?

KG: Oh, yes. I had my first duty officer. The first time I had duty officer, I was up in the mess hall, at midnight, getting coffee, and they assigned you, a driver. So, we hung out most of the night together. I remember, we're sitting there, having a cup of coffee, and, the next thing you know, the mortars started hitting. I started heading to the bunker and I remembered I didn't have my weapon with me. I turned around to go back to [the mess hall] and the driver grabbed me. He said, "Sir, you don't need that now," [laughter] and threw me in the bunker, which, again, experience--he had the experience. He knew. So, when the mortars stopped, I went and got my rifle and my pistol and put my flak jacket on. We had a couple wounded on the perimeter. So, I was going down there and, just as I crested, it's like you go over the hill, and just as I crested, the mortars started again and they bounced on either side of me. Again, lesson learned, you don't go [out] on a full moon and walk across a field, right, because, then, you become a target. It turns out the guys were all right. They brought the ambulance over and we shipped them off to the hospital. The next day, one of the civilians, because we had a civilian group there to help fix helicopters, to augment the troops, the guy in charge of it went down to the perimeter. He got one of the mortar fins, and then, he had it hollowed out and he had it chromed and he presented it to me as a pencil holder. I'll show it to you; it's on my desk. So, that was, like, my first souvenir of Vietnam, right. I had my first attack. As I tell the story, the mortars got closer and closer and, now, it's up to about a foot away, but, no, [laughter] it probably wasn't that close, but it's close enough to have a ringing in my ears. So, that was my introduction to Vietnam and it just seemed like, after that, the whole year kind of runs together. Then, about halfway through--no, no, in November, I guess it was, I arrived in May, November--President Nixon decided the war was ending and he started pulling out troops. [Editor's Note: Mr. Gurbisz is referring to troop reductions initiated by President Nixon as part of his Vietnamization policy.] They pulled the Fourth Division out of the Central Highlands and, coincidentally, Ho Chi Minh died at the same time, who was born in Pleiku. So, they vowed to bury him in Pleiku, in a Communist Pleiku. So, for six weeks, we were considered under siege. They pulled all the nurses out. The Air Force base pulled back. Now, Camp Enari or Dragon Mountain, depending on when you were there, with the Fourth Division, was now an ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] base. So, it was just us and the Air Force base at the time, and, pretty much, it was, like, every night, we were getting hit and we're getting probed, or every other night. We may have one night off or so, and the interesting part about that is, if you're under siege, you don't have to buy your cigarettes. The Army gives them to you. They give you shaving cream, but, then, the bad part about that is, you start eating C rations, because they don't spend a lot of time resupplying food, and that just kind of ended. It was not like Khe Sanh, where the guys were getting shelled with artillery on a regular basis. It was more like just whenever they feel like hitting you with something, they hit you with something. Finally, what happened is, they did move a group of Rangers in with us to help us, because we had no infantrymen. We had mechanics--that's what we were guarding the perimeter with. Everything kind of quieted down for a while.

SH: Really?

KG: Yes, and didn't realize it at the time, until I read one of these books, but that actually what happened is, when General Abrams took over, he went after their supplies, not after the main forces of the main fighting forces. [Editor's Note: General Creighton Abrams replaced General William Westmoreland as commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, in 1968.] So, he stifled them. So, probably, what happened is, they ran out of stuff to shoot at us with, and so, it's just like a quiet period. My friend, John, he was [at battalion], he would check the casualty listings every day and check on me, make sure I was all right and stuff like that. That's when he started laughing at me. He said, "Hey, it's getting to be like Nha Trang--nothing ever happens here." [laughter] That's our little joke. It was just, like, a quiet period. You would have somebody crash, maybe have somebody shot down, but it was not like the pace that it was for the first seven months of the tour, or eight months of the tour, and it almost became civilized. We started having picnics on a Sunday afternoon. At three o'clock, we'd quit work and have a barbecue and just the tour was going through. That's the way it was going.

SH: Before November, when things quieted down, how often would you fly and where?

KG: I would fly almost every day. Like I said, we did courier runs three days a week, so, if things were slow, two of us would go on a courier run and go flying. We may go over to the Fourth Division. We supported the First of the Tenth Cavalry that they have supporting the Fourth. Particularly, [if] they were behind in what they were doing or whatnot, we would go help them. I would even fly with the combat units, if they were really short on pilots, like, maybe one day a week, or something like that, do the assaults and whatnot. That's what the helicopters were noted for. So, at one time, in the First of the Ninth Cavalry, which was part of the First Cavalry Division, very high casualty rate, were looking for pilots to volunteer and I was going to do that, almost like, "Am I doing enough here?" and whatnot. My two mentors got a hold of me and go, "You're not going." [laughter]

SH: Really?

KG: "You're not going," yes. He says, "No," he says, "you're halfway through your tour. What do you want to do that for? Your job is to make it home alive, not to be a hero," and they actually talked me out of going, which is probably, I don't know, saved my life, I guess, because the average flying time for the First of the Ninth was, like, two hundred hours or something. Yes, it was always that, "Hmm, I had it a lot better than a lot of people did over there, and a lot better than many other pilots did, but a little worse than some other people." So, I guess, a little better than middle of the road; we went through it and we survived it.

SH: You talked about having the recording equipment and this budding country-and-western singer.

KG: Yes. [laughter]

SH: What other things did you do for entertainment?

KG: Every so often, they'd bring shows on the base. It was basically rock and roll shows with a Vietnamese slant to it. They would come on and sing the local songs. We had a TV. We used to watch TV. We used to play poker and shoot craps every so often, but you didn't have a lot of free time. I'm not the best person [for] writing home. Well, my wife wrote me every day that I was away, but it's just that you were always tired and incredibly tired, because, even though I had my own room, probably, fifty percent of the time, we were out on the perimeter somewhere, because somebody called a red alert, that we're going to get attacked that night. I think I spent more time sleeping on sandbags than I did in my bed, to be honest with you, but it makes for good conversation and kids enjoy it. I mean, we had running water, too, which was really, really a luxury. We dug our own well and we went downtown, but we bought, like, French bathroom fixtures, say, the flusher above the tank above the toilet and whatnot. We got caught. Well, the Army's the Army and the Engineers approved buildings and nobody approved our building. So, for penance, I had to fly some engineering colonel around everywhere he wanted to go for a month. [laughter]

SH: They did not make you take it out.

KG: No, no. They'd threatened to make us take it out. That was the scary part, but, no. Yes, so, it was nice. Typically, you had hot food and, every so often, you went down the coast and Vietnam has haves and have-nots. We were eating decent food--I'm not saying we didn't--but our sister companies along the coast, their Friday night lobster and shrimp dinners were supposed to be the top. You'd go down there, like, one Friday night, I got stuck there, because we had a problem with the helicopter, and they said, "Jeez, if we knew, we would have ordered you a lobster," but I ate C rations instead, that kind of thing. All right, we're going to take a break and have our pizza.

[TAPE PAUSED]

KG: Ready.

JB: We were talking about your experience in Vietnam, your first missions. How was your company commander? Would he go out on missions with you? How was the leadership?

KG: No, well, typically, the company commander wouldn't go on missions, no. In fact, they got very little flight time. They were field grade officers and, yes, the only time I remember him going out flying is when we were going, like, to a meeting or something in the battalion headquarters and one of us would fly along with him. He wouldn't go on the missions, no, which is something that kind of, like, now, I look back on it and I think about that. Our field grade officers were experienced pilots and they would be test pilots and they'd be instructor pilots, but they really didn't go on a lot of missions. Look at the Air Force--like, lieutenant colonels are flying these little observation planes and were shot down or they were killed or they were captured. I wonder which service had the right idea. Let's face it, you invest a long time in a field grade officer; to throw him up there in a little airplane looking for Charlie, when you've got a bunch of young kids to do that, that doesn't make a lot of sense to me. They had a lot of responsibility in the aviation unit, field grade officers, and, truth be told, they probably would rather be flying than sitting in an office.

SH: You talked about seeing shows sometimes. Would it be the USO that would bring those in?

KG: No, they were basically hired. They were just, I guess, talent companies that would bring them in, yes. I didn't see Bob Hope when he was over there. [laughter] They weren't allowed up in the Central Highlands. It was too dangerous. There was one show, the New Christy Minstrels. That was a USO show, but we didn't get to see that, either. What would happen is, they did a lottery. Each company got to send two people, and so, the two guys that won the lottery, I got to fly them over. So, I stood outside and we listened to the music. That was about it, yes.

SH: Did you have any of the Vietnamese working on your base?

KG: Yes, we did. In fact, we had "hooch maids."

SH: Did you?

KG: Yes, people to do our laundry, make the beds, everything like that, and we had laborers to do things, clean up and work around the base. Also, they had what they called Pacific Engineers and Architects, which was an engineering firm that the military hired to do repairs on the base. Yes, so, we saw the locals, pretty much. We weren't allowed downtown, because it was one-third VC [Vietcong]. So, they're pretty restricted on where we could go in Pleiku.

SH: That is what I wanted to ask.

KG: Yes.

SH: Was there any outreach to win the hearts and minds?

KG: Well, "hearts and minds;" [laughter] no, simply put. Nobody knows, but American GIs, American servicemen, love kids. Wherever they go, they take on a project. We supported an orphanage while we were over there, a Catholic orphanage, and, also, we helped build a school. Our company and another company actually built a school. Katie's got a picture; we can show you that later on, too, but gave us a little cellophane star, a big cellophane star, for helping. I wrote home and my younger brother and sister, they were, I don't know, ten, twelve then, they actually had a carnival and they raised money and sent over school supplies. So, yes, hearts and minds, I don't know, it's a term that the politicians used and, typically, American servicemen go out in the community and they do what needs to be done to help them and bring them along. I think that's the strong point of our military, to be honest with you. They're human beings, too, but I think everybody had a project. I mean, every payday, I'd be collecting money for the orphanage or collecting money for the school and, when they opened the school, it was around Fourth of July, so, we introduced the village children to hot dogs and popcorn and corn on the cob. Yes, it was really great, because probably the nastiest sergeant we had, the most sour personality, he was, like, melted with these kids. He's like the old granddad or whatnot. It was neat. It's like we're out there. The soldiers are always out there. They're always out there helping people, okay.

SH: The draft is on.

KG: Right.

SH: There are people who enlisted, who are career military, who are just there to survive and get out.

KG: Right.

SH: Was it cohesive? Was it adversarial?

KG: I'll tell you the truth, in basic training and as you went through basic training, there was a big deal made about who's RA and who's US. US is drafted and RA is "Regular Army," and, after that, no. You know what? Probably because there weren't a lot of draftees in aviation units, because you're always signing up for an extra year, that was not an issue. I think the racial issues were more in the rear echelon than they were in the frontline troops. I remember going down to Nha Trang and I saw a bunch of black soldiers on a truck and, as they're driving by, giving the Black Power salute to everybody. You didn't see that in Pleiku. You didn't have that. The enlisted men wouldn't salute us, which was a sign of respect for where we were, because there was always snipers out. I'll never forget, they started flying helicopters, transporting helicopters, into the Air Force base at Pleiku and the first airplane we met was a Hawaiian National Guard airplane, which we didn't see a lot of National Guardsmen in Vietnam. You had to screw up to get over there and miss your [duty]. No, we had one officer that missed his training two years in a row, so, they put him on active duty and sent him to Vietnam. So, anyway, the airplane lands and we got our crew of mechanics there and the deal was, we were going to put the thing together at the Air Force base and I was going to fly it back, and then, somebody else and ferry two helicopters back. So, the airplane lands, the tail comes down and this colonel comes off. He goes, "I want to be out of here in ten minutes. It's dangerous," and I looked at him. He goes, "Another thing is, you guys are not very;" can we just take a quick break?

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: Ready?

KG: So, anyway, just to start again, this airplane drops the tailgate and, about two seconds later, this colonel gets off and my guys are standing around. He's looking around and he finally comes over to me. He says to me, "You know," he says, "I want to be out of here in ten minutes and you've got to teach your people some discipline," and I said, "Sorry, sir. What's the matter?" and he says, "You know," he says, "not one of them saluted me when I got off this airplane." So, I says to him, "Well, sir, up here, we only salute the officers we don't like." With that, I gave him a sharp salute [laughter] and the look--what's he going to do, give me a haircut, send me to 'Nam? [laughter] Then, he just kind of looked at me, and then, my sergeant said, "Sir, you don't realize, there's snipers all over the place here. They just look for somebody to get saluted." Then, he changed his tune, but, yes, the deal was, there we were, we're there for a year and this

guy flew in for one mission and he's going to collect his 115 dollars a month flight pay and he's going to get his sixty-five dollars a month combat pay and we'll see him again next month. Then, pretty much, Vietnam was like that, the haves and have-nots, right, and, again, then, you had these bomber crews that were flying daily missions every day. Although they didn't land, they were in harm's way every day, too.

SH: You said that you wound up with ARVN right alongside your base.

KG: The outer perimeter was supported by the Vietnamese Army and the listening posts, which we called them, were usually manned by the Fourth Infantry Division and, when they pulled out, the ARVNs. Then, what happened was, they put lights in their bunkers. So, the North Vietnamese knew where they were, knew where we were. So, they would bypass them, yes. You could see the fluorescent lights from our perimeter, yes. Yes, again, it's just a strange place, strange war, right.

SH: Did you ever have any interaction with their people?

KG: With the?

SH: With the ARVN?

KG: Oh, the ARVNs? not very much with us, because we supported their support troops, so, we were, like, a level away from them. Occasionally, we'd bring wounded in when we went to recover a helicopter and some bodies, but that was about it. Then, they'd come over to our base and pick up the bodies or we'd drop the wounded off at the hospital, or it's an aid station, by that time, yes.

JB: In the recovery process, would you hitch a downed helicopter to yours, and then, carry it out?

KG: No. If it was a light observation helicopter, a small helicopter, we would fly it out ourselves. If it was, like, another Huey or a Cobra, you actually had to bring in a Chinook or a twin-rotor helicopter, because of the weight. One time, actually, I recovered a flying crane [Sikorsky CH-54 Tarhe]. I don't know if you're familiar with that. It looks like a mosquito. It's got, I think it was, twenty-five tons of lift. It's a big helicopter and, what happened, it was flying into Plei Djereng to deliver artillery rounds and either an engine got shot or an engine failed and they couldn't release the load. So, they tipped over on its side and they hit its rotor blades into the ground. So, we spent three days there. It's so heavy, such a big helicopter, you can't lift it out with another flying crane unless you removed the engines and the transmission. So, that's what we did. We were going back for three days, taking pieces off it and returning it, but that's typically what we would do. In Vietnam, if you look at the Chinooks, we were very, very careful about where they put them.

JB: Really?

KG: Well, they were expensive and the Hueys did most of the assaults. They would use the Chinooks to move artillery pieces and things like that, [with] flying cranes actually delivering heavy parts or artillery rounds. Nowadays, they use the Chinooks as assault vehicles, pretty much the way we used our Hueys.

SH: Do you want to talk about any of the rescues that you performed?

KG: No, I think that the one that concerned me the most was the other pilot in the company. He crashed in an observation helicopter he was test flying and it was very nerve-wracking going, hoping he was all right, but it turned out he was all right. Then, it varied from have a platoon of infantrymen on the ground, where everything was safe, to going in not knowing what was there and being shot at and, [in] some cases, waiting for us to get there, so [that] they could try to shoot us down, but it was, I don't know, all in a day's work. I don't know if that sounds like it's too condescending, but it was just the routine of the day. You just kept flying the missions. I was actually more scared on the ground than I was flying.

SH: Really?

KG: Yes. I just felt like I didn't have as much control on the ground. Maybe I didn't know what I was doing as much on the ground as I did when I was flying. Well, in fact, I teach a course now and one of the things was, and I don't remember what they called it, but, in the Army, you drill and you drill and you drill. So, when something does happen, it's [that your] instincts take over and you internalize the lesson, so [that] you're doing everything automatically correctly. Maybe that was part of it, that, after a while, you just felt like I could handle any situation that happened in a helicopter; on the ground, not so much.

JB: Did you always have the same crew, the crew chief, same crew chief? Did you always fly the same helicopter?

KG: Yes. Actually, we only had two helicopters, right, so, pretty much, I flew the same helicopter and I had the same crew. Our crew chief was John Peoples on one helicopter and he was a kid from California, a typical surfer. It was amazing that he enlisted in the Army, but he did, [laughter] and then, we would change the door gunners, but, pretty much him and Sam. I can't remember Sam's last name--it was a Polish last name--was the other crew chief for most of the time I was over there. We'd go back and forth and switch crews and I told you, when we're busy, if we had to do a courier run, one of us took the courier run and we took the crew chief and taught him how to fly, which was not unusual. Just in case something happened, at least you had a feeling for what he could do, at least land the airplane, get us on the ground, yes.

JB: Did you name your helicopter?

KG: No, no.

JB: A little art or anything?

KG: No, just our unit crest on the nose of the helicopter. Yes, the Highlander crest was on the nose of the helicopter. No, we didn't name our helicopters. [laughter] Actually, by then, the Army was frowning on that, to be honest with you. They didn't want you to name anything, but, anyway, I think that's the crew chief's job, to name the helicopter or the airplane.

JB: Okay.

KG: Yes.

SH: How often did you have inspections or brass coming through?

KG: Oh, there's two good stories to that. First one was, we had a new group commander decide the war was over. So, I think he read it in *Time Magazine*. [laughter] By this time, we had changed leaders--we were on my third company commander, because they used to do six months of line duty and six months of staff. When I got there, Colonel (O'Connor?) was just finishing his tour. So, I was only with him a few weeks, and then, Dan, he was the second one, Madish was there, Major Madish was there, and he had just come out of group headquarters, so, he had a friend down there. Well, the new group commander decided that, because the war was over, we'd have formations every morning, inspection formations, which, of course, we did. The other thing he did, he would pull surprise visits to the various companies and he would leave, like, early in the morning, so [that] he would be there for the formation, to see if you did it. So, this particular night, I had duty officer, too, and so, about four-thirty in the morning, I get a call that he's on his way and to look like we're really having them. So, we started waking everybody up and all that. So, at his prescribed landing time, I just happened to be walking by the runway, near the hangar, when he landed. He had one of the twin-engine, fixed-wing planes. As it started landing, the mortars started hitting in the runway, because it's right at dawn. The plane just, like, touched and took off again and we never saw him again. My CO walked up behind me. He goes, "I don't know how you arranged that, but it's worth every dime you spent on it." [laughter] So, I took credit for it; no, whatever you say, just fate. You decide to land at dawn and Charlie's still out there. [laughter] So, I guess the war wasn't over.

SH: Reevaluate.

KG: That's right, and the other one, we actually had an inspector general's inspection while I was over there, which I didn't ever realize that they would do in a war zone, but they did. They inspect how much equipment you have, how much you're supposed to have, your table of operating equipment and they would match what you're doing, and just to make sure you're doing everything you're supposed to do. It's panic time, because everybody squirrels in Vietnam, everybody. So, you would move equipment across to the other side of the base and they would do the same thing when they had theirs. The night before the inspection, they realized nobody looked at the armorer, the rifles and the pistols and whatnot. So, they gave me that job and I was up, like, all damn night, right. I learned a lot about a forty-five [that] [laughter] I never knew about a forty-five, but I knew now what a loose breach was, and we were inspecting them, and so, this went on all night. About three o'clock in the morning, I woke up one of the captains and told him I needed his forty-five and he goes, "What if we're attacked?" "I don't know, sir. Here, take my thirty-eight. You can hold that and make you feel better," and so, I went through the

whole thing, and it turns out that we had, like, so many rifles that were non-shape, would not pass inspection, right. So, we kind of, like, put them in a spot that we hoped the inspector wouldn't grab. So, we're going through the inspection and, the next thing you know, the armorer, I guess, didn't have a PhD, because the inspector says, "Just grab our last rifle. I'll take a look at it." You can imagine which one he grabs--one of the broken ones, right. [laughter] I just felt like, if that rifle shot, I would have shot him with it. So, you can't make these stories up, but we still passed the inspection by the skin of our teeth.

SH: Did you?

KG: Yes, just by the skin of our teeth, and I said, "You know you could have picked any good rifle." He goes, "I don't know." I looked at him and I got nervous." I said, "Right." Then, the executive officer came over to me, after they left, he goes, "Why don't you just go to bed? You've been up for, like, thirty-six hours now." [laughter] I just said, "Yes, I'll do that." Yes, so, we did have our inspections.

SH: Usually, you get a leave about halfway through your tour, right?

KG: I went to Australia.

SH: Did you?

KG: Yes, and it was, like, February, if I remember correctly. So, it was, like, nine months into my tour, but you had to wait for Australia. As a matter-of-fact, John and I went to Australia together. [laughter] Yes, that was interesting, too, because you can't wear your uniform in Australia, and what did we have? We had uniforms. That's what we had. So, they actually had a clothes rental place, that you actually rented your clothes for a week.

SH: Did you really?

KG: Yes, you rented a suit, you rented your shoes, casualwear and whatnot. I don't remember what it cost, but it was kind of, like, funny. Everybody's in the Air Force [base], renting their civilian clothes, and it was nice. We did some sightseeing. We weren't allowed outside of Sydney. So, you had to stay in [the city]. There's entertainment there, there's bars and, just generally, talking to round-eyed people--and I know this sounds terrible, but it's closer to your own culture than Vietnam is. Sydney reminded me a lot of San Francisco, the same kind of atmosphere, and so, we had a good time.

SH: They treated the American GI well.

KG: Yes, they treated us very well, very well. As a matter-of-fact, we went to [a pub], and I don't know, we were out, and then, there was, like, three or four of us, stopped in an Australian pub, a local pub. They wouldn't let us buy any drinks for the rest of the night. They just sat there and treated, fed us and gave us beer all night.

SH: In Vietnam, did you ever interact with any of the other countries' soldiers?

KG: No, not really.

SH: Anything to do with their air component?

KG: No. Up in the Central Highlands, it was strictly, us and the ARVNs, right, and the Montagnards. We had some interfacing with the Montagnards, because, like I said, the one base we were at for three days, they were a special forces base and they had Montagnards there. It was an interesting culture, very interesting culture. They really didn't care for either side of the Vietnamese conflict. They just wanted to be left alone. They had a primitive lifestyle and they liked it, yes.

SH: What about the CIA? I know there are catch phrases for them.

KG: Yes. Not so much, no, we didn't [interact]. I know there was always Air America. Everybody knew what Air America was and they were always recruiting pilots, but, typically, we didn't see much of these, with the CIA.

SH: No one tried to recruit you.

KG: No. [laughter]

JB: Do you want to go into the Cambodian incursion?

KG: Okay, yes.

JB: It occurred at the end of your tour.

KG: Yes.

JB: It started May 4, 1970.

KG: Yes, we ...

JB: That is what I found in my research.

KG: Yes, it actually started in April, the week before that, but, anyway, I was actually on jury duty. I actually was on a court-martial board, and John was on the court-martial board, too, because we were short. We had, like, a couple of weeks left on our tour of duty. So, it was kind of, like, "You know, throw them on the court-martial board. Let them travel around." We started and, for the life of me, we had a sister company down south in Nha Trang and I didn't go there very often--I just can't remember the name of the town they were in. I've tried to look it up, I just can't find it. So, to make a long story short, we started there. We started at battalion, we worked our way up to Qui Nhon. So, we were, like, on our third or fourth day of this court-martial and we got a call that they wanted me back at the company that day. Nobody said anything and I thought that we were going home. I thought we would have been home by then,

because *The Stars and Stripes* had printed new DEROS, date of eligibility for return [from] overseas, dates for [the troops], because Nixon said the war was ending. So, if you looked, I was supposed to go home on May 19th. I should have been home for Easter and, in fact, I got all excited. I started packing up, and one of my COs goes, "No, it doesn't mean helicopter pilots." So, we got back to our company, my company, at around dusk, on, I believe it's the 5th or the 4th, the night before the Kent State massacre, right. [Editor's Note: On May 4, 1970, Ohio National Guardsmen fired on students at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine others. Some of the students had been protesting the United States entry into Cambodia, while others had been passing nearby or observing the demonstration.] There was a brigade there. There was some of the 101st Airborne and a bunch of helicopters there, and I'm pretty sure it was the 101st. I don't know, but, anyway, to make a long story short, that night, we took a lot of mortar fire and, the next morning, they started the northern invasion of Cambodia. Of course, we followed them through and there were helicopters all over the place. They were shot down, ran out of fuel, and it was a particularly sad note to me, because we had a Cobra that was having a problem with electronics. I worked on it for five days, and it was every time they thought they knew what the problem was, I'd run over, I'd start it up and I'd lift it to a hover and the shorts kept coming. They finally found out, somebody put a wrong harness on, from a different helicopter, and we fixed it, and then, two days later, they took it to Cambodia and it ran out of fuel and they left it there. So, it was, like, we'd go out almost all day, flying around, rigging helicopters, and the Chinooks, on the way back, would pick them up and drop them in near our company. So, we'd patch them up for the next day or two days later, but the first day of the Cambodia incursion is when they told us about Kent State, and you've got to remember that, typically, we didn't get news that fast.

SH: That was what I was going to say.

KG: Yes, and we're just saying, "Ah, that doesn't happen in the United States," but, yes, it did happen. So, now, I'm getting short, and so, for the next week, just pretty much normal flying routine, doing what we have to do, a lot towards the Cambodian border, back and forth, and test flying airplanes. It was very busy. We were test flying airplanes at nine, ten o'clock at night, just to get them back on the line, and, about a week, just about a week, before I was supposed to come home, the commanding general of all the engineers in Vietnam and his staff were shot down by a missile, on our side of the border. So, my CO looks at me, he goes, "You're not flying anymore. That's it. You're going to go home soon," and I said, "Okay," and then, the next day, they had a Cobra down. It wasn't near Cambodia and they were short of pilots. So, I said to Gene, "Come on, I'll go with you," and then, as we're sitting there in the LZ, as we're rigging the helicopter, he's giving me this lecture, because this is his second tour. He goes, "You're crazy. I don't want to see you in a helicopter again," and he goes, "You've got six days until you go home." He says, "You're just tempting fate. You made your year--just sit around the company area. I don't care how bored you get. Read a book." Just then, an RPG [rocket-propelled grenade] went through the landing zone. I said to him, "Gene, I believe you. Let's get the hell out of here," [laughter] and, of course, our job then was, we'd take off, and then, we'd fly cover for the guys on the ground, and then, we got back and I said to him, "Yes, you're right. This is, like, nuts," and so, the next day went by pretty quietly. Now, we're down to four days that I have left in the country and the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] overran one of the artillery bases for the South Vietnamese and they turned the cannons on us that night. I'll tell you, it didn't last that

long, but, when I saw that five-ton truck flying in the air, after it got hit with the artillery round, I'm saying, "Whew." I have a whole new respect for the guys from World War II that used to get shelled like that every day, especially the guys at Bastogne. I'll never forget, the first round went over and I said to the CO that I was standing next to, "That sounds like artillery." He says to me, "You've been watching too many John Wayne movies," and then, "Wham," it hit. I said, "That's not a mortar," [laughter] but you stand there. I mean, you stand there, you kneel down, whatever you do. You just hope it doesn't hit near you, because there's nothing we have that's going to stop it. He said to me, "Yes," he goes, "you're going to battalion tomorrow morning. [laughter] This place is too dangerous for you. You're not going home in a body bag." So, he says, "Go back to your room and pack up." So, I did and he flew me down to Nha Trang that night and I think that was, either two or three days, I think it was three days. That night, Nha Trang had its first mortar rocket attack in nine months. [laughter] Nobody would talk to me, nobody'd go near me. I was the bad luck child. [laughter] Trouble just follows me wherever I go, and the battalion commander came over to me, he said to me, "You and John are going down to go home tomorrow." So, we get down there and we're going home a day early, right, and we're, like, psyched, and our airplane had an engine failure in Hawaii. So, we still wound up going home on the same day we're going to. So, that was the end of my career in Vietnam, yes.

SH: What was it like to get on a plane and leave?

KG: Surreal. I'm sure that you [to Jesse, who served in the US Army during the Iraq War] found the same thing, it's almost like you put your time in, but it seemed like it went so fast. It seemed like, "I can't believe I'm going home." I'll never forget, going over, they told us--we were new warrant officers, new officers--that it's a military flight, there's no drinking, there's no nothing. I brought my bottle of Chivas Regal on the airplane [laughter] and I just told the stewardess, "Just keep bringing glasses of ice. It'll fine," and, yes, so, we went to [Hawaii]. It was a military [flight]. It was mostly Army and we had one Air Force colonel with us, death in the family or something and he was going home. He looked at us when we broke out the bottles and we Army helicopter pilots already had their reputation, so, it was no surprise. So, I said, "What do you drink, sir?" and he says, "I like scotch," he goes. "Like some Chivas?" "Sure." So, he joined us and it was good. It was a good time. As a matter-of-fact, I should have told John to bring it with him, he actually has a picture of us when we were flying home, the three of us in the same aisle, [that] Richie Andrews took and gave him, on our flight going home. All I said was, "Man, we were so young, we're just so young, [laughter] when we did that."

SH: It is amazing.

KG: Yes, and it's almost like we took the same route home, except we landed in Seattle. The other thing I remember, when we landed in Hawaii, they let us off into the terminal, which they didn't let us do going over, and so, we went into the bar. As soon as everybody saw us, again, it was that they were welcoming us home, "Welcome back to the United [States]," because even the pilots on the airplane said, "Welcome home to the United States." You don't realize Hawaii's home, [laughter] but the people were very, very nice. Then, we landed in Seattle, in Fort Lewis in Seattle, Washington, and we sat on the runway for two hours because there was a flight coming in from Germany and they had children on it. It was more important to unload the children than it was for us to come home after a year, and then, we pulled up to the terminal.

There's this little second lieutenant at the bottom of the ramp or the staircase going down off the airplane, screaming at us to roll our sleeves down, "You're not in the 'Nam anymore," and he almost had his last day that day, except the Colonel braced him and chewed his ass out when we got off the airplane. Then, we came in and we went through customs and they dumped everything I had on the floor.

SH: I am sorry.

KG: They dumped everything out of my suitcase on the floor, looking for drugs, and it's just, like, insulting, totally insulting, and then, they made us change in the bathroom. We had to change into our dress uniforms to go home and all that. It was, like, thirty of us in a bathroom for about eight people changing and, because of the flight, I had a one o'clock flight coming to Kennedy Airport, because they delayed us so much, I was barely making that flight. Then, we're in a cab and the cab driver says, "Listen, I'm a World War II vet," and I had two of us, three of us friends, took us back. It was real ironic, that we left out of Cam Ranh Bay, we all met at Cam Ranh Bay after a year and we're sitting there, and we were sitting there before I went home with the other guys. We're talking about who didn't make it home, who we saw, but Richie Andrews and John Dougherty and myself wound up the same way. We went in a cab, we're coming home in a cab, and so, I didn't have time. My flight was at one o'clock, but the cab driver said, "Listen, antiwar demonstrators are out there. They're going to throw paint at you, they're going to curse at you, they're going to spit at you. They want you to react, because the police are there and they have orders to arrest anybody who does anything physical." So, as we got there, there's a bunch of the guys that were on the airplane with us and we just got them all together and we said, "We're going to walk. Don't react, don't do anything--you're going home." We went into the airport and they were insulting, as they said they were, and I got to the gate and the ticket agent said it was too late, I wasn't going to go home, because the flight had boarded already. I said, "The plane's right there. I couldn't help it if the door is closing," and she was giving me a hard time and John whispered something in her ear. Next thing you know, she turns scared [laughter]--I'm not going to tell you what he told her--but she said, "Okay, I can get you on the airplane." So, I wound up [boarding]. There were twelve people on that airplane, twelve people. That's all there was, and John and Richie, one of them was supposed to call my parents, to tell them I was on my way. They wound up at a bar, so, you know that my parents didn't get called [laughter] until it was, like, almost too late, but, yes, they did make it to the airport. My parents met me at the airport and we went home and there was a big sign to welcome me home and, after that, nobody wanted to talk about it. Nobody cared.

SH: Really?

KG: Yes.

SH: Were they just not interested or were they afraid to ask?

KG: I almost think the family was afraid to ask. I think, also nobody ever talked about PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] before, nobody. You maybe were shell-shocked or something like that, but, again, nobody ever talked about it, and not that I necessarily wanted to talk about

it, but it was almost like, "Well, okay, you're home. Let's just forget about it," and that was the attitude, "Forget about it, you're home and everything'll be all right."

SH: Do you think you would have talked about it if someone asked?

KG: No, no. I wouldn't have been specific, not like I do now. I would have never did it. It took me thirty years to do that, yes. I would tell some of the funny stories, but not actually some of the bad stuff.

SH: You talked about hearing about Kent State within twenty-four hours of it happening.

KG: Right.

SH: In that year that you were there, had the news changed, that you saw or heard? *Stars and Stripes* is basically it.

KG: Right, it's a propaganda sheet. Yes, it's a military propaganda sheet, and, you've got to remember, the news was filtered by the military. There's military channels. There's not, like, CBS there or anything like that, but, yes, no, I think they might have the antiwar demonstrators more, which is kind of interesting, because I've never met an antiwar demonstrator that wasn't supporting the troops. I just asked them the same thing, "Who were those people at the airport? Who were those people calling up the parents of the casualties and saying how happy they are their kids are dead? Who are those people out there supporting Jane Fonda?" I said, "History changes itself as you get older, right?" and they never have an answer to that. That's why, as Jesse knows, we're very adamant about not confusing the war with the warrior, because, I'll tell you, it wasn't until 1984 that anybody even wanted to acknowledge we had Vietnam veterans in this country, unless you put them on television or movies that they're crazy people. We're all having flashbacks, can't hold a job, drug addicts--that's how we were portrayed for ten years.

SH: When you were in Vietnam, what other news were you getting, besides *Stars and Stripes*? Were you getting anything?

KG: The local newspaper, *The Bayonne Times*, my folks sent it to me. That would be weeks behind, a couple weeks behind, though, just like any other mail, and letters, but, typically, it was all filtered by the military, yes. That was it. I mean, you didn't see *Martin and Rowan's Laugh-In* over there, that was for sure.

SH: What about your brother? He was still in the military.

KG: He was still in the Air Force, right, and then, at one point, he said he wanted to change his MOS, which is your military occupation, because he was in missiles, to small arms and go to Vietnam. I just said, "That's not the place to be. It's not a John Wayne movie and, once you get over, you realize that it's ninety-nine percent suffering and one percent joy, I guess. It's long hours. You're hot, you're tired all the time, scared a lot of the time."

SH: What about drugs on your base and with your group?

KG: Not so much; marijuana, typically. You had your potheads and your alcoholics. That's what you had, and each one said the other one was worse. I had to laugh because there's a guy I really liked, the first driver I told you about, in the mortar attack. He used to tell me, "Oh, yes," he says, "you're drinking alcohol and you have a mortar attack, you can't snap out of that, but us potheads, we can just snap out of it right away." I said, "Oh, man, what world are you in? [laughter] You got to get off that ganja, man, Jesus," but, yes, it's predominantly marijuana. I don't think cocaine or heroin made it on the scene until after the Cambodian incursion, and then, we heard stories--and, naturally, it was after I came home--about people would go back to the base and there'd be vials along the road before you got in, but the Cambodian incursion made cocaine readily available.

SH: Did it really?

KG: Yes, it did.

SH: Before you left, had any of the race relations issues that we saw in the news affected your base at all?

KG: No, it didn't. I think I mentioned this earlier, I saw it more in Nha Trang, when I was down there for business on a courier run or whatever, than I did in Pleiku. You have a common bond, staying alive, and the fact that we didn't get a lot of free time, you didn't get a lot of time to think about much else, other than doing your job, I think is one of the reasons why you didn't see a lot of problems. You didn't see a lot of problems with drugs, either, because everybody's so busy. You worked a lot of hours a lot of days and we didn't really have time to think about some of this stuff.

SH: Is there one incident that you are most proud of from your time in Vietnam?

KG: I think the opening of the school. I think that was it, and the second one was, we had two gunships shot down one day, and with the extra guns and whatnot, that the newest Chinooks, which are C models, could lift out the crew plus the helicopter. The older ones, the engines weren't strong enough. So, there were two crews of helicopter pilots and two helicopter crews on the ground and it just so happens both Chinooks weren't the newer ones. So, they couldn't take them out. So, rather than let them sit there out in the field for the night, I loaded all eight of the crewmen, plus my four--so, we had twelve people on our Huey, plus their guns--and I managed to get the helicopter out of there and flew around for an hour, until we burned off enough fuel to land. So, that was another. It was one of those "a-ha" moments. I said, "I really did a good job today." Other than that, we did our job. I just did my job for a whole year.

SH: What about the weather?

KG: Oh, it's ugly. You know that--you must have heard enough of these. It's hot and humid, and then, it rains for eighty-nine days, right, and then, you're soaking wet. Then, you try to fly in that stuff and you can only fly as far as you can see, because you're in the Central Highlands and there's mountains. So, you've got to try to climb through them, through the clouds, without

hitting the mountains. So, sometimes, you just don't fly them and you turn around. I mean, the Mang Yang Pass that led from Pleiku to An Khe, which leads to the coast, there are days when it's socked in with clouds. You can't even see to fly through there, to fly a mission. So, yes, for eighty-nine days, it was, like, ugly. You're just flying around rain, when you can fly around it. So, you're always wet. You're always wet from your sweat if you wear a rain suit, it's always wet from rain if you don't. I always thought, "It's better to be wet from the rain, because I smell better," and so, yes, you did what you had to do. I mean, the hooch maids would dry your clothes in the eaves of the buildings, so [that] your clothes weren't even really dry. Yes, they were semi-damp when you put them on and they were wet by the time you finished the day, and then, at the end, it got cold at night. I say it went down to the thirties, but it might have been only fifties, but, when you're used to the nineties, it's quite a swing. Actually, I have a picture of myself in a field jacket, next to a jeep. That's how cold it got at night, and then, you went back and it was dry and it was dusty. For the next nine months, you had no rain, or very--no, we had no rain, not very little. You didn't have any rain.

SH: Earlier, you talked about having to identify snakes and things like that.

KG: Yes.

SH: How much of that did you have in the Highlands, bugs, snakes?

KG: Oh, during the rainy season--we've established I had my own room--you'd wake up in the morning and your room was full of spider webs. These spiders would bite and it's like a bee sting, and so, you sprayed it with Raid, and then, you clear out the webs. You come back three hours later, it was full of spider webs again, and that went on for most of the rainy season, and the guys in the barracks were always getting bitten by the snakes, by the spiders. I saw a bamboo viper one day and it's not something [you forget]. It's a little snake, that they call them the "two-steppers," because that's what you get after it bites you. It's got to bite you in-between the fingers, but it's so venomous that you had thirty seconds to live after it bites you, and I didn't sleep for about a week after that. [laughter] I always imagined that snake coming through my door. I'll tell you the truth, I'm not even sure it was a bamboo viper, but it looked enough like one to just [scare me], and that's about it. There was a python on the base one day, which is supposed to be harmless, but it's big, big snake, [laughter] and rats, we had the nice-sized rats.

SH: You talked about how you celebrated the Fourth of July with the opening of the school.

KG: Right.

SH: How did you celebrate the other holidays?

KG: The military tries very hard to feed you well. So, Thanksgiving, we did have turkey and that was the only--I had a meltdown, it wasn't a meltdown, more like a little fit--but I remember flying every day, and then, Thanksgiving Day, and I don't know why it was important to me, because that was probably, like, the only family I had, was up in the Central Highlands, they were going to send me on a courier run to battalion. I'm saying, "No, I'd really like to be here with everybody and have turkey." So, somebody else took the flight that day, and Christmas was

sad. Christmas was a big family holiday for us and, I remember, we walked, going around, at night, on Christmas Eve, wishing everybody a Merry Christmas. We're down on the perimeter when it was, like, right at midnight, and, right at midnight, somebody shot a flare up and there was, like, this one red flare floating down and it's, like, to mark the start. Then, everybody started shooting machine-guns and it was like, "Okay, this is our celebration," [laughter] yes, and it's a lot of drinking on Christmas, too, if I remember correctly, yes.

JB: How available was beer and alcohol?

KG: It was readily available. It may not be the beer that you want. There were ration cards. You were only allowed so much alcohol, by the way. Talk about Christmas, I'll never forget, everybody sent me a package, sent me alcohol, and it wasn't just me, it was all of us. Even my grandmother sent me a bottle of wine and we're sitting there, we're kind of laughing about it, because you could buy a bottle of scotch for two dollars. [laughter] It was nice, and my mother sent me kielbasa.

SH: Did she really?

KG: She did, yes, and it made it through, surprisingly. I mean, it's smoked meat, so, it shouldn't [rot], but it was in fairly good shape and, yes, typically, all kinds of food and cheese and whatnot. So, we ate pretty good that week.

SH: What about chaplains and church services?

KG: We had Mass every Sunday morning at ten and I was so-so about going. We had our battalion chaplain, who was a Lutheran, and he was a good guy and we'd see him once a week. He would come up once a week, but they were readily available to you if you needed to talk to someone.

SH: What about the Red Cross?

KG: Red Cross, we talked about our semi-siege, or whatever it was, but, once that started, we didn't see any Red Cross, any "doughnut dollies," at all, yes. They were not allowed up there, and the one night I was in Qui Nhon, I saw some nurses. They were having a party, so, that was kind of, like, fun. It's just that where we were, you never felt really safe to just let yourself go, you know what I'm saying. We didn't have a good time. There was always that feeling that you have to stay alert, but, then, down there, it's, like, so safe, it's almost like, "Well, I can really have a party. We can have a good time." So, that was, like, my one night of having a lot of fun--same thing with Nha Trang, if we ever got down there at night. The thing about Nha Trang is, or any of these places, they had air conditioning, right, the barracks, the offices. It was like, "Turn the air conditioning as low as you possibly can," [laughter] and sleep under as many blankets as you possibly [can]. It's just little things that make you happy. That's what I always remember, "Just turn the air conditioning down, let me feel the air."

JB: We were talking about the antiwar protests.

KG: Right.

SH: In the mail, with your family sending you stuff, did you receive any care packages from, say, schoolchildren or random people? I feel like that is a big part of the wars today. A lot of people do that.

KG: Yes. I got picked by an American Legion post in Massachusetts--my uncle was in Massachusetts--for a care package and they sent the care package in. I also got something from a school, and I don't remember which school it was, but it was just a little [package], cookies and stuff like that, which makes you feel good, too. It's [like] you're not there alone. Let's face it, the problem we had was, ninety percent of the time, you just felt like you were alone, and then, when you came home, you felt like you were alone, too. Yes, that was the only two times and, typically around Christmas, too, because everybody remembers the troops at Christmas.

SH: We were talking over lunch about POWs. What were your instructions if you had ever been taken?

KG: Instructions; well, you have the code of honor. It's just, "They're going to come for you, sooner or later, and just don't lose heart," and the other thing they told us is that they don't expect us not to tell them what we know, that, "Sooner or later, you're going to be tortured. You may be tortured, that the old school--you should give them your name, rank and serial number--just don't tell them everything, but, again, everybody has a breaking point and they'll probably reach that breaking point if you're taken, and it's understandable."

SH: Did you ever transport anyone who was a prisoner of war from the other side?

KG: No, not my job.

SH: Taking them for questioning or something?

KG: No.

SH: You talked about not talking when you first got home, because no one seemed interested and you were not sure you wanted to talk.

KG: Yes.

SH: When did you first start relating anything other than the humorous incidents?

KG: I guess I started when my son went to West Point and being as close as we are to West Point, we used to get a lot of the cadets from out of state, far from home, and we were, like, a stopover. We always had, like, anywhere from four to ten cadets at the house.

SH: Really?

KG: Oh, yes, no, it's fine. It's just this kind of thing. Typical was four, four to five, right, and then, when 9/11 hit and they were all excited about going off to war, I started talking to them about it. I just [felt I should], and because it's being glorified. Even in their minds, it's glorified, and my son played rugby and they were sitting there and they were telling us about how they're all going light infantry now, because it's going to be a light infantry war. Somebody had to tell them that, it's not the panacea you think it is, even if it's not the shooting or the explosions or everything like that, is that you're going to suffer for a year or two years, whatever you're over there for. It's not fun, it's not glory and, ninety percent of the time, you're bored or you're waiting for something to happen and, the other times, you're afraid. Then, it comes to the point where, in all honesty, when things start happening, you're not afraid anymore, you're just reacting. Again, I started talking to them a little bit about it. They were curious, they were asking me about it, and so, I started talking.

SH: What did you think when your son decided that he wanted to go to West Point?

KG: [laughter] To be honest with you, he surprised me with it. I knew Bob Sutton, the coach of the Army football team, was coming to talk to him and he had been recruited. He was a good football player, a good baseball player and half the Ivy Leagues were recruiting him for football, the other half for baseball. West Point started recruiting him and he told me, Bob Sutton was coming to talk to him. I was sitting in my office with somebody and the phone rang and it was Jim and he said, "Dad, I don't know if I did the right thing." He says, "I gave a verbal commitment to go to West Point." Now, I know Jim--we lived near Fort Monmouth and I know he loved it. I know he was raised around military families, so, he knew the deal. I said to him, "Jim, we're just going to talk when I get home, okay," and we talked and I said to him, "You don't do West Point for a free education, you don't do West Point for your parents." I said, "You don't do West Point for anybody but yourself and you've got to really, really want it in order to go there," and he had that commitment. He wanted to go. So, I was proud of him, you know. I want to say he excelled there, but he did excel there. He was an engineering student, too. He was in the top third of his class. The first year he was there, he called me up and he said, "I'm not going to play football anymore," and I said, "Why?" He says, "Well, just talked to the coach," it was right after this first training camp, and he said, "he wants me to gain fifty to sixty pounds and play linebacker next year," he says, "and you know what?" he says, "I'm not going to have a career in football, but I'm going to be, maybe, a career officer--I definitely want to be an engineer," and he says, "I've got to lose all that weight before I go in the Army. I just think that I'll do something else and not play football," and it's very time consuming, too. So, I said, "Fine, I mean, it's your decision to make," and so, instead of playing football, he played rugby. [laughter]

SH: Oh, dear.

KG: Oh, yes, exactly, and it turned out it was actually better. He liked the camaraderie with the rugby players better. The thing is that, because it's a club sport, not a sanctioned NCAA sport, like, when they played a game, they didn't have to come right home. They could stay wherever they were. So, he got to play in California, in Canada, he went to France to play, he played in England, Ireland.

SH: Really?

KG: Yes. So, it was actually quite an experience for him and he was part of the bicentennial class. [Editor's Note: The US Military Academy celebrated its bicentennial in 2002.] They were seniors when 9/11 came about, and that's when he decided not to go into armored, to go into infantry. I was proud of him. It was a big decision, very dedicated to the country, believed in what he was doing.

SH: How many children do you have?

KG: Two, yes. I have a daughter. Jim hurt his knees last game of rugby and he went through the infantry training--he did finish the infantry training after he graduated--but he didn't make the last two-mile run in time and they sent him to the hospital and they took more X-rays on his knee. They found out he actually fractured his femur and needed surgery. He had a successful surgery, but he couldn't be an infantry officer anymore. So, that's when he went to Transportation [Corps] and he was in charge of the security down the Airport Road. His lead Humvee was hit by a roadside bomb and, when he went to help, his Humvee was hit by two and it killed him.

SH: How long had he been there? He was in Iraq.

KG: He was in Iraq. I'm sorry, he was in Iraq for ten months. He was getting ready to come home. They had six weeks and they were going to go to Kuwait. He was supposed to come home and teach convoy tactics in Virginia.

SH: I am so sorry.

JB: I am sorry. What unit was he assigned to?

KG: He was the Third Infantry Division. He was with the Second Brigade, 26th Forward Support Battalion, yes.

JB: Is that out of Fort Benning or Fort Stewart?

KG: Fort Stewart, yes.

SH: Perhaps this is the time to back up and talk about your family. You had met your wife when you were in ...

KG: High school, yes.

SH: You started dating her when you were working in the grocery store.

KG: Yes. We both worked at [Acme]. Her father had worked for Acme in the warehouse and he used to come in. He was quite a character--in a nice way, you know what I'm saying, not [negative]--and then, because he knew when the trucks came in, so, he wanted the fresh produce

from the back. One day, he says to me, "Ah, I've got a nice girl. She's going to come and work here," and so, the following week, she came, and then, I guess about a month later, may not even be that long--I'll have to ask her tonight--we started dating.

SH: How long after you came back from Vietnam did you get married?

KG: It was almost two years.

SH: Was it?

KG: Yes, because we talked about it. She wanted to finish her education and I was stationed in Fort Stewart--not Fort Stewart, I was at Hunter Army Airfield, which is part of Fort Stewart. It's downtown Savannah.

SH: Newburgh, New York?

KG: No, this is Hunter in Savannah, Georgia.

SH: Georgia.

KG: Savannah, Georgia, yes.

JB: This was active duty after ...

KG: After Vietnam. You've got to remember ...

SH: I think we skipped over that period.

KG: Yes. No, what actually happened was, we came back and I was stationed at Hunter Army Airfield and she was still going to school. She was supposed to finish up in '71 and we were going to get married the following year. So, in the interim, now, remember, I only have a year-and-a-half in the Army after my training, I was supposed to go back to Vietnam in October of '70. They were quick turnarounds, so [that] they can get two tours out of you, and, all of a sudden, my orders were cancelled and nothing was ever said. So, okay, and then, in December, they called us all into the fort theater and they got up there and they said, "Well, here's the deal. Air Force, Navy, Marine pilots all get eighteen months between combat tours and you guys are getting less than six. The casualty rate in Army pilots is, like, ten times that of the other services and Congress says we can't send you back unless you get eighteen months in the States. So, your choice--either you become a career officer, go back to Vietnam, or you go home." I went home. [laughter]

SH: Did you consider it?

KG: I tell you what, I liked the Army, I liked the Army life. The final decision was that you only have so many tours over there. I was very lucky in my assignment the first time, the way it played out--why tempt fate with two more tours, three more tours?--because they had it

scheduled. The way the deal was you sign as a career officer, you go to Vietnam and you come back. They send you to maintenance school for three months or fixed-wing transition. You go back. So, you were looking at three to four months between combat tours and they had you scheduled for four before you can get a stabilized duty in the States. That's just tempting fate too much.

SH: Was there any talk of the war ending at this point?

KG: No. Well, nobody realized that the Cambodian incursion was about the pull out. You've got to remember that the riots in the schools started because they thought that Nixon was expanding the war, and what he was really trying to do is buy time to pull the troops out. So, in 1970, they were looking at, five years down the road, we're still going to be there.

SH: When you were in Vietnam, what did you think of Westmoreland?

KG: Abrams took over when I [was there]. Really, they didn't ask me how I felt about anything.

SH: I know they did not. [laughter]

KG: Pretty much, I didn't have many conversations with either one of them. We didn't know anything. You know what? We didn't know why we went into Cambodia, and it's only now I'm learning why we were in Cambodia, or why we did this or why we did that, you know what I'm saying. We were just [following orders]. We did it, yes. This brigade all of a sudden shows up and, the next day, we're going somewhere, and that's the way it was. Nobody actually knew what was going [on] or why it was happening. So, yes, they were commander-in-chief, I mean. It's interesting, we just had our oratorical contest in the American Legion last Saturday for the district and one of the topics they picked up was the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, which gave eighteen-year-olds the right to vote. After the contest, I just said to them, "Ironically," I said, "I was one of those that went to war before I could go to the voting booth," and so, that I always used to kid, I said, "I never voted for any of these guys who sent me to war. [laughter] How do they get to pick where I go?" Yes, actually, Westmoreland, I think, had a lesser reputation than Abrams. Abrams was kind of more a respected general.

SH: That is what I wondered, if the rumor mill was saying, "Whew, finally, we have got Abrams."

KG: Yes, exactly. A lot of people were very happy that Abrams was in there, yes.

JB: When were you discharged exactly, just for the record?

KG: It was December 17, 1970. I wasn't actually discharged until four years later. I was put on the Inactive Reserve.

JB: Were you promoted to chief warrant officer two?

KG: Yes.

JB: When you were over there?

KG: Yes, April of 1970, yes. A little side note to there, too--the orders didn't come through and they forgot to file the paperwork. Well, you know what it is, when you're making as little money as you're making and you're due a raise, you want that raise, right. So, unbeknownst to me, my company commander cut his own orders. [laughter] So, he cut the orders and they made a big deal about it. They promoted me, and I actually was not promoted, I mean, it was retroactive, but I was not promoted until, like, the next month.

SH: Oh, dear.

JB: When you were discharged, you came back to Jersey right away.

KG: Yes.

JB: To Bayonne.

KG: Right.

JB: Did you reenroll in school right away?

KG: I reenrolled that following summer. I got home in December. I started back to work in January and I took a summer course, a history course, with a leftist--I'm sorry--a leftist social studies teacher, [laughter] and it was a rousing course, believe me. [laughter] I half expected to fail that course.

SH: Were you planning to continue with your degree in engineering?

KG: Yes, that's what I did. What had basically happened is, I had to start all over from the beginning. They didn't give me any credit for my first time at college. All my grades weren't that great, but, basically, what they said to me was that, "Well, they're all new courses, so, you have to take them all over." Then, when you think about this, what went on then, also, we had the lottery draft and being in college wasn't a safe bet anymore. So, enrollment was down. So, what they were doing is, they were just making you start over to keep the revenues up. That's why I don't give them any money--now they got it up front.

SH: The GI Bill paid for your education.

KG: GI Bill paid for me. Like I tell them when I teach at Brookdale [Community College]--I sometimes like to tell my students, "A whole semester used to be 321 dollars a month for twelve credits," and, no, I'm sorry, it cost 231 dollars for a semester, "and the government used to give me 321 dollars a month for my GI Bill. So, it's like a nice part-time job."

JB: You mentioned the American Legion before. When did you join that?

KG: I joined that, it was Jimmy's junior year. He went to Boys State, so, that would be 1997. Yes, that's the first time I joined anything, right.

SH: When you came back, you said you were not talking about it, but did it ever come up in any conversations where someone would be saying something that you knew was just totally wrong?

KG: Yes. My typical reaction would be, "Well, when were you there?" [laughter] Yes, yes, sometimes, but I'd almost [think I was] better off not even getting involved in it, a conversation, because, at that time, like I said, I didn't think anybody cared, number one, and, number two, we were not portrayed very well. So, everybody's going to take your opinion with a grain of salt, that you're probably a nut job anyway.

SH: What did you think when the war finally ended?

KG: At which time?

JB: When Saigon fell. [Editor's Note: The North Vietnamese Army captured Saigon on April 30, 1975.]

KG: When Saigon fell, it was almost like a waste, you know what I'm saying. For it to fall that fast after we left was a sin.

SH: To watch these images on television, how did you feel internally?

KG: A great sadness. It's almost like we wasted fifty-eight thousand lives and we didn't want to go back again and stop it. I think that's the big thing, not so much; you can debate until the cows come home whether we should have got in there, we shouldn't have got there and there's the domino theory and the spread of communism and practicing air raids and everything, but the bottom line is that once we committed to something, we should have stuck with it. In 1968, I think we could have finished the war within a year or two and we didn't do it. I think the politicians had too much to say about what's going on in the war, I think that the correspondents had too much coverage of the war. It was almost as if they sensationalized the death over there and it was more about, "Can you show somebody on television dying? Can you show somebody being wounded? Can you shock the American people by something?" and I think that was the start of the downfall of our news media, that here they are now, everything's got to be a bigger and better story. I don't know about you, I'm sick of hearing about Charlie Sheen. Let's face it, the guy has his problems, that's very obvious, though he doesn't think he does, but why do I have to see this every morning? Why do I have to see the couple that go into Mexico, when you're not supposed to, and he gets killed, and now the shock value of that. It just keeps going on and on and on.

SH: Did any reporters ever come to your base?

KG: Too dangerous. [laughter] No, we didn't. I never saw a correspondent.

SH: I have to ask.

KG: Yes, I know. I'm being facetious about it, but, no, I never saw any. We never saw any.

SH: When the war officially ended, was there any sense of celebration?

KG: No, like I said, it was not a positive thing when the war finally ended, and even worse is when they brought the people that went to Canada home and gave them a free ride. I mean, that's the biggest insult to our soldiers than anything. You know what? I have more respect for the people that stood up and said, "It's wrong," like Cassius Clay or Muhammad Ali, "I'm not going," and take the consequences, than the people that just ran to Canada and hid out for a couple, three years.

SH: When you were in Vietnam, and even in the months afterwards, people who came out as Americans against the war, were you ever approached to join such organizations?

KG: No, nobody ever asked me. I wonder why. Nobody ever asked me. [laughter]

[TAPE PAUSED]

KG: You know what? It may be because of where I lived and it may be because of how I went to school at night, instead of during the day, that it seemed to me like the protestors were around the colleges, they were trying to unite the college students to be against the war, that I didn't see a lot of that. The other thing is, like, face it, I came home and I was working and I was trying to get an education and I didn't have a lot of time for fooling around. When I wasn't working or going to school, I was studying or trying to take care of a family, fixing up a house, so, just there was no time for fooling around.

SH: After you and your wife got married, where did you live, in Bayonne?

KG: No. We were rebels. My wife's originally from Jersey City, but we moved to Nutley. We lived in Nutley for a couple of years and she taught in Clifton, and then, we moved to Lake Hiawatha and we were up there for eleven years.

SH: That was where you raised your family.

KG: We started, and then, we moved down the Shore. When my son was born, the house was small. We came down here twenty-five years ago.

SH: Did you?

KG: Yes, we're down in Eatontown now.

JB: All this time, you worked for PSE&G.

KG: After I graduated from college, I worked for PSE&G. I worked for Hunt-Wesson Foods, I guess, officially, for six years, but it counts the military time, so, it's like a little under four years.

Then, I went to GAF for six years and that's where I finally got my degree. I was supposed to work for them and, last minute, they rescinded on a job offer. So, they gave me a choice to stay in the job I was in or look for another job, and they treated me very well. I mean, they paid me for my travel pay and whatnot while I looked for another job, and then, shortly after I started with Public Service in 1976, the HR manager called me and says, "I couldn't tell you this," he said, "we just laid off twenty percent of our engineers." I would have been the junior guy in the office. So, they actually did me a favor, and so, then, I worked for PS for twenty-seven years.

SH: Were there others who had also served in Vietnam?

KG: In Public Service? Yes, there were a few, yes, quite a few, as a matter-of-fact.

SH: Did you ever talk together?

KG: It wasn't that kind of [thing]. It was more like, we came home, we went back to work. Like I said, there was no PTSD, there was no Agent Orange back then, there was no support groups back then--they just cut you loose and sent you back. That's pretty much what they did in World War II and Korea, too. It's just, I guess, our generation said, "No, this is not right. There's stuff going on there," and I would also hear from some of the World War II vets, "You guys didn't do enough. You're a bunch of crybabies." So, we didn't even fit in with them, and it's interesting because, like, in the American Legion, there are World War II vets and they're sitting there telling you, "You guys didn't do enough." "Well, you were a clerk for three years in the Army," I said, "or in the Marines. We have guys that were out in the bush for a year that nobody else knew they're [there]," and I appreciate that now. I didn't appreciate it when I was younger; I mean, I didn't understand it when I was younger. I mean, like I said, nobody wanted to talk about it, I mean, but I think, because of the Vietnam vet, the PTSD is recognized. Recently, somebody gave me a copy of *The Pacific* [the 2010 HBO miniseries] and guess what? They mentioned that at the end of the movie, not PTSD, but about the nightmares. Then, we just had the Chosin Reservoir from the Korean War here [the documentary film *Chosin*] and guess what? They mentioned PTSD in that, too. So, it was always there, but it was ignored until people started--we started--talking about it.

SH: When did you first start using the VA [Veterans Administration]?

KG: When?

SH: Have you?

KG: Let's see, June of this past year. I had a heart attack in April, as I told you, and one of our service officers had me fill out the forms and systemic heart diseases has been related to Agent Orange. I know my base was sprayed with Agent Orange and I wasn't there the day they sprayed it while I was flying, which was typical--but the mechanics and the guys started complaining that the Air Force just flew over the base and dumped Agent Orange on everybody, and so, I know I lived with it. So, it doesn't surprise me. It surprised me I don't have any cancer, but, knock on wood, that's so far. [Editor's Note: The defoliant Agent Orange, widely used during the Vietnam War, has since been linked to a variety of ailments in the veterans exposed to the chemical.]

SH: Had you been in treatment for PTSD?

KG: No. I was just diagnosed with PTSD last Wednesday. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

KB: We can do that.

SH: Before we finish, I would just like to know if you would like to talk a little bit about your son and how you found out.

KG: Yes. We had talked to Jim. It was Columbus Day. He had a satellite phone, because of his job, and he would call every couple of weeks and we'd talk. On November 4th of 2005, we have a friend who works for Linens and Things and gave us a friends and family discount card and Jim's wife asked for a vacuum cleaner for Christmas, because she had a dog. We went out and we shopped and we bought it and we came home and we were just sitting there. Helen was starting to get dinner together and I was sitting, talking to my mother, and the doorbell rang and I opened the door. I saw the three officers standing in our front door and I knew immediately it was bad--at least I thought I knew immediately that he had been killed, but they say they'd come even if he was wounded. They came in and I sat them in the living room and I excused myself and I got Helen. I just told her she's going to have to be strong, and then, they came in and they started and they told us how he was killed, and they were very good. The one colonel started breaking up and it was hard to keep control, but they followed up with us. They were with us throughout the whole procedure, and they had told his wife a couple hours earlier. They tried calling the house and we weren't home, so, they asked her not to call us, because they wanted to be there when we were told. From then, it was hard. You don't have a wake and you're waiting for his body to come home. You never know when he's going to come home, you never know when the funeral is going to be. Tory was a wreck, as you can imagine. She's twenty-five years old and she's now a widow, and so, she left it up to us where to bury him. We decided Arlington [National Cemetery] was a good place, because his grave will always be taken care of, so, it'll always be nice, and then, we didn't know whether it was going to be an open coffin or a closed coffin. It turns out it was open, which was good, because we got some closure, and so I'll always be proud of him. As you can imagine, we'll always miss him. There's always that piece and there's always a reminder of him, and the holidays are always hard, but he died doing something he believed in and he died serving his country. I look at the parents that lose a child in a car wreck or lose a child with a drug overdose and I've got to say, "Well, I'm blessed. I'm blessed that if I had to lose a child, he was a hero, and, if I lose a child, I have nothing but fond memories of him." So, I can cling to that.

SH: Thank you for sharing that with us.

KG: Yes.

SH: We really appreciate your taking the time to talk with us today. In the future, if there is something else that you want to share, let us know; again, thank you.

KG: Thank you.

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Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/22/11