

Conversation
With
Kevin Kuzel

Jacksonville City Hall
117 West Duval Street Street
Jacksonville, Florida
April 5th, 7th, and 14th 2017



Recorded and Transcribed
By
Lyn Corley

TAPE 1 SIDE A

LYN-Today is April 5th, 2017 and I am at City Hall for the City of Jacksonville, Florida. I have the honor today of talking to my friend Kevin. Kevin works in the City Council office and he has a most amazing Navy career. His family has these amazing military careers so as we begin out project on Cecil Field, I am going to ask Kevin to introduce himself and just guide us, first of all about your birth and your family and then we'll go into your own career. You have this intriguing career with your family that we want to get on tape. So, Kevin, tell us when you were born, where you were born, and about your family and I am going to let you guide this interview.

KEVIN-Well, I was born in Washington, D.C. in 1952 and I was the product of a Czechoslovakian immigrant. My dad's name was Frantisek Kuzel and of course Frank is short for that. My mother was Barbara O'Brian. My father emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1923 and came to this country with his family and settled in New York. They came here legally here, I might add, through Ellis Island and settled in Binghamton, New York.

My mother was born in Dallas, Texas and she, her heritage I believe is English, Dutch, Welsh and especially Irish, a lot Irish, definitely a lot of Irish. Both of them served in World War II. My father served in the 101st Air Born Division during World War II and was captured during Operation Market Darden in Holland in September 1944.

LYN-I'm going to ask, how do you think your father happened to serve? Was he drafted into the military? Do you know if he wanted to be in the military?

KEVIN-It was a matter at that time where his brother went into the service as well and so did a lot of other kids that were in his age group from Binghamton and so he wanted to go as well. At the time he was not a citizen, a full citizen of this country. It was only after he left the prison camp in Germany at Stalag 2A and got back here that he got his citizenship.

LYN-It always amazes that someone is willing to go serve our nation and put themselves in harm's way and they are not even a citizen of this nation. He had a patriotic feel to some degree.

KEVIN-To a great extent. When I, it was a few years before my father passed away, it was in the mid '90's to late '90's, and I was mentioning something about our Czech heritage to my dad on the phone, I remember talking to him from my office in Middleburg, and his comment, "All that doesn't mean anything, I'm proud to be an American and always was."

LYN-Good testimony. So, he enlisted.

KEVIN-That's correct.

LYN-That was in New York.

KEVIN-I don't know exactly where he enlisted, probably in New York, most likely in New York at the time. He had gone to, I believe art school. He was a very accomplished artist in fine arts painting at that time, for his age. He, I'm not sure exactly where he enlisted and departed for Europe at that time.

My mother on the other hand joined with my grandmother as a mother-daughter join-up, enlisted in the Women's Army Corp during World War II. My grandmother became a recruiting officer here in Jacksonville, Florida and had her own radio show. My mother went to, with a number of other women, military in the 9th Air Force, she was assigned to the 9th Air Force, and she served in England as a radar plotter for the 9th Air Force in England. I'm not sure exactly at this point exactly where that was.

She also was an excellent artist and the guys quickly enlisted her to paint the nose art on the bombers that would fly the missions.



Barbara O'Brian (Kuzel), U.S. Women's Army Corp

In addition to her work as a radar plotter, Barbara's artistic ability was put to use during World War II painting nose art on bombers

LYN-Kevin and I talked about this previously and we have some photographs of her. She became fairly famous for that art work. We will include that in this project, visuals of her, a cute little girl drawing on these airplanes. She flew all over. Her art was shown all over Europe on these planes.

KEVIN-At least it is now. I'm sure the Germans probably wouldn't have wanted to see that art work. (Laugh)

LYN-I'm sure not.

KEVIN-But her main job was as a radar plotter. She had big table in front of her at the headquarters, 9th Air Force Headquarters, and she would with a long stick and the map was painted on the table, she would move around the figures that represented the German air craft and the American and allied air craft, the British air craft. She would show their positions from radar reports that would come in from the British radar that was along the coast. It was a while before the Germans figured out where that information was coming from. Radar of course was a top-secret equipment and projects during World War II.

LYN-How about your grandmother? Did she stay here in Jacksonville?

KEVIN-My grandmother was from, not originally from Dallas, but had settled in Dallas and she was a fashion designer. After the war she took up her residence back in Dallas and she was one of the top fashion designers in the Southwest United States. Her line of clothes was sold to exclusive stores including Neiman Marcus. She had a long-standing relationship with Stanley Marcus, business relationship, and in other smaller outlets for clothes.

LYN-We want to make sure we put her name on tape.

KEVIN-Her name was Nova O'Brian.

LYN-Sounds like a very talented family we're delving into here.

KEVIN-I do want to say this, one of the interesting things about the service of my mother and father, the history of my parents' parents, my grandparents is interesting because my grandfather on my father's side, his father, fought on the side of Germany during World War I. My mother's father fought on the side of the Americans in World War I. So, that's kind of an interesting story. It's kind of like I guess people here in this country who have relatives that fought in the Confederacy on both sides of the Confederacy.

LYN-That would be my family. So, tell me about your dad. He had quite a hard time.

LYN-He was captured by the Germans during Operation Market Garden. They had taken off from England in mid-September 1944 in a joint operation with the British under General Montgomery. It was called "Operation Market Garden" and it was designed to quickly end the war. They did not realize, they had ignored some things and had not done the proper intelligence

having to do with German displacements of forces and the overall German strength, force strength.

When they got to Holland and other places near Germany they had, they were met by superior, or I should say “very active German forces” and the C-47 that was pulling the glider that my father was in had an engine shot away. He had to release the glider which released the glider into a field. The pilot of the glider that my father was in, he landed successfully in that field but the field was surrounded by the Germans. They were, according to what I understand, they were zeroing in on the glider, my father and his compadres with mortar rounds, and so they had to surrender. My father was injured. He later received a Purple Heart for that injury.

He had originally, my father before I continue with that, he originally had participated in landings during D-Day on the 6th of June 1944 and the ship that he was on, the Susan B. Anthony, I believe hit a mine. They for a long time were not sure what happened to the Susan B. Anthony but they are pretty sure it hit a mine. It was not torpedoed.

The ship did sink I understand but all the troops and the crew were able to be rescued so he did not, he was not injured as far as I know in that at that time. He had gone back then after operations, they came in late to the beach which saved his life. They quickly went back to England not long after that and he was retrained for Operation Market Garden.

When they landed and they surrendered, the Germans of course were collecting what they could from the Americans. Recently, just a couple of years ago, I was, a gentleman called me from Dallas and his father, one of the soldiers, one of the American soldiers that my father was with in the 101st he had a very expensive watch on and it was a family heirloom and the Germans wanted it. One of the German soldiers was collecting souvenirs as I’m sure the Americans probably did from time to time. My father made a deal with the German that he would give his watch instead of taking the other guy’s watch.

That story was given to me not by my father but by a third party who called me recently from Dallas and told me about that story that his father had told him.

LYN-So he’s surrounded. How long was he held?

KEVIN-They were marched off I believe to a university campus or near one. I know he mentioned that in Holland and I forget exactly what town. They were put into, let me say this, “The SS were the ones that interrogated him initially”. Then they were then, the American soldiers that were the prisoners were then taken to an initial stalag camp. It was the disbursement camp. It was a camp where kind of a collecting area. Then they were then sent after that camp, that stalag camp, they were sent to other camps for the rest of the war. My father ended up in Stalag 2A which was near New Brandenburg, Germany.

While they were in this collection camp, this gathering area, he talked about, and I'm pretty sure it was there and not Stalag 2A, but he said that there were German, young German soldiers who went in with very friendly attitudes and would talk in very excellent English to the American troops. They would talk about everything from baseball to all kinds of things that was Americana. They wanted to learn as much as they could about the way Americans talked, what they talked about, etc.

It was a couple of months later, November or December time frame, that the Battle of the Bulge started. There was an operation by the Germans where they would put at crossroads they would put soldiers, German soldiers in captured American uniforms, and they were then directing the forces, the American forces and allied forces to places other than they were supposed to be going. It was a secret operation that the Germans had, and may I add, a very brilliant idea.

LYN-Simple and brilliant.

KEVIN-Simple and brilliant idea. Sadly, very sadly, many of those Germans were executed after, right after the war. But, he, they were issued, their uniforms were taken at one of those camps. I believe it was the initial camp. According to my father, they were given Dutch military uniforms from World War I. I believe he mentioned wooden shoes but I'm not positive about that. (Laugh) I don't know about that but that was the case. So that actually accounts for, fits into that story well with having to do with German operation that I talked about.

The guy who headed up the German, a colonel or a general who headed that up, they were I believe they were going to, they tried him but I believe in the end he was spared.

Our OSS at the time, before we had the Central Intelligence Agency, our Office of Strategic Services, OSS and the allies wanted to, were already beginning to think about two things; number one how do you de-Nazify this country, this nation of Germany and then also the Russians, the issue with the Russians. He was spared, as well as some other people that deserved to be executed. He though, in my opinion, probably did not deserve that. So, I'm glad he was spared.

My father when he was at New Brandenburg at Stalag 2A, he was like so many of the German soldiers, and of course all the American and British soldiers, the biggest problem was the cold and the lack of food. They were very, very, very hungry there. I've got a telegram, my brother has a telegram from him sent to his parents, my grandparents saying how hungry he was and how cold he was.

It was in late April of, I believe it was late April I don't think it was early May yet, but I think it was late to mid-April of 1945 that the Russians came through New Brandenburg area and I don't like to use the word "liberated" they just basically over-ran everything and the Germans left and the gates were open and the Americans departed Salag 2A.

Stalag 2A was an interesting place because it held not only the Americans that were captured recently but Stalag 2A was one of the oldest camps. It had soldiers from Dunkirk, British soldiers from Dunkirk, which was in 1939 or '40 and it also had Polish prisoners of war and Russian prisoners of war from Operation Barbarossa and the invasion of Poland. It had a long, long, long history. It was probably the oldest if not one of the oldest camps.

LYN-I also wondered, when the Russians come through and suddenly you're liberated, we are just using that term loosely, then what do you do? How do you get home? Do you know how that happened?

KEVIN-Yeah, basically they just started walking down the road and heading to, trying to head to American lines. I'm not sure if the Russians pointed the way or whether how that worked. I know that my father, the Germans knew that the end was coming one way or the other and it was going to be negative against the Germans. It was not gonna be good for the Germans. So, at that point in time he, and I'm sure the other prisoners, were not treated as poorly. They probably shared virtually the same rations and were just as cold as the German soldiers were.

They, I know that when he walked out of the prison it was just a short distance away that he found the body of the soldier and the German police dog that were the guards' dogs that the Germans used and also the guard himself had been shot by the Germans. He had traded and talked with this German soldier quite a bit and you know they were able to trade a few things across the wire with the Germans. It was not, it was not all together an adversarial thing at times. Human beings are human beings.

LYN-That's a good thing to have, we have the use of television and movies have, there was great suffering no doubt, but I don't think, I've never seen or even thought about how at the end of this war, how did these people in these stalags, what happened to them, how did they get back? It seems a little anti-climactic when they have been shot down and what a wonderful thing it must have been that day to walk out toward freedom.

Kevin and I are going to continue this conversation at another time. We're going to talk about his parents meeting and how he grew up, and then his service. Thank you for this initial interview, Kevin.

KEVIN-Thank you for allowing me this time.

INTERVIEW PART TWO

LYN-Today is April 7, 2017 and we are back with the interview with Kevin. We had talked earlier about his dad's capture and then release. I want to know how these two amazing parents met and about this amazing son. Take us from that point.

KEVIN-Thank you for the "amazing". (Laugh)

My mother and father, my mother was in the 9th Air Force in England and she had gone forward with the group, or in back of this group, to Basingen, Germany after the war. My mother was in, released from active duty and she came back to the United States. I'm assuming she went to Dallas where she was from, for a short time, and then went on to San Miguel de Allende which is an art colony in Mexico at the time. It is still there and it still a big art community. There is an art institute there. She went to art school there.

My father, after he was repatriated, came back here to this country to Binghamton, New York where he was raised and he, at some point went to San Miguel as well and that's where my mother and father met. Somewhere between the time when he came back to the United States, I believe, and then went to San Miguel in Mexico is when he received his citizenship.

LYN-You were born...

KEVIN-My brother was the first. My brother was born in Washington, D.C. He was the first to be born and I was as well. My father had a job with the War Department at the time, before it became the Department of Defense I believe, as an illustrator, as an artist illustrator. He and my mother had settled in Washington, D.C. at the time. So, he was initially black-listed because of his association, and not any intention of his, but his casual association with the Communists that had infiltrated the art community in San Miguel. That took a short time to get resolved but then he was taken off that black-list and was allowed to do work for the War Department.

LYN-A hard time for someone who had served our nation to come back and then be black-listed.

KEVIN-Isn't that something? You know, I can understand it to a point but back then you didn't, nobody had access to records and nobody would know here, it would be very difficult to know exactly what the depth of your association with people was. I, when I think back to that particular time as far as the way I see it in my knowledge of history, my knowledge of intelligence gathering etc., I would say that more than likely they probably, the Defense Department, the OSS maybe at the time, the CIA probably had people that were either reporting back to them from San Miguel or actually had their own agents there to find out what was going on.

It was not long after World War II ended, of course, that the whole fear of Communist Russia, Soviet Union that is, as well as the Chinese Communists, began to be a dominate thing in our defense, national defense.

LYN-So, as a child, did your dad talk about the war?

KEVIN-To some extent, to some minor extent. He didn't get into the gruesome details, a lot of it. He was wounded, I believe at the time he was captured, and received the Purple Heart. That would have been in Holland of September of '44. He didn't, I remember seeing his Purple Heart. I think my brother still has it at home in Dallas, and different pictures of him and his

uniform. My brother has most of those in Dallas, which is fine. He's the senior member of the team now, the Kuzel brothers.

But, he didn't talk much about the war. My mother said that he would wake up sometimes screaming in the middle of the night. It was a scary thing for her and of course for him as well. He eventually got over that.

LYN-Not knowing a lot about it, did you see him as a hero who served his nation or what it just part of your childhood.

KEVIN-I did see him as a hero, without a doubt. He was, to me he was a larger than life figure because of two reasons. Number one his military background and what he did and what he sacrificed for the country. Also, basically coming from nothing as an artist which is a very difficult thing. We did not have a lot of money growing up. I'm sure my mother would have loved to have had more. For us kids, we dealt with what we had and weren't overly concerned about that.

LYN-Now, I'd like to know when you became intrigued with Navy aviation.

KEVIN-I was crazy about airplanes from the time I was a little kid. I was crazy about two things, electronics and airplanes. My first flight ever on an airplane was when a friend of mine, John Tomoso, his uncle who is still with us in this world, his uncle took us on a flight right after we graduated from Jesuit High School in Dallas. We flew down to I believe it was Cedar Creek Lake or something like that, southeast of Dallas. It was in a Cessna 172 or 182 or something like that. That was the first time I had ever been in an airplane and I was eighteen years old.

LYN-It was the event you had been waiting for.

KEVIN-It was everything I was hoping for and so when I went off the college at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas the first thing I did was join the Air Force ROTC at Texas Tech University. I was there for I believe two years at Texas Tech in ROTC.

I worked my way through college. My parents didn't, were not able to help me a lot so I worked all the time. One of the jobs I had was as an elevator mechanic. I remember I was at the bottom of the dormitory that I lived in which was Weymouth Hall, it was a new high-rise dorm at Texas Tech. There was a guy at the window in the lobby at the desk at the administrative desk and he was talking to somebody that was behind the desk, a student who was helping out with the dorm, and so we started talking and he said, "Would you like to go with me over to the girls' dorm to get these girls out of the stuck elevator?" I said, "Of course." (Laugh) It would be ridiculous if I wouldn't. So, we went over there and then I was, he offered me a job.

I became an elevator mechanic, an escalator mechanic, and so as it turns out, this man who I have been trying to find and locate over the past year or so, I'm still looking for him, I'm sure he

is probably retired now from virtually everything he was doing. He should be around seventy-eight or seventy-nine years old at this point.

Bob Zerby was the elevator mechanic. He was also a Baptist minister and also an Air Force veteran and he was a flight instructor. The man had it all and also a wonderful, wonderful personality, just an incredible personality. He became my flight instructor and I took flying lessons from him. I saved every penny I could.

LYN-And you saved the girls out the elevator, you never did say.

KEVIN-Yes, as a matter of fact, I helped get somebody out of an elevator here about three weeks ago. That was the first time that I had been on top of an elevator car working to get somebody out of an elevator in approximately forty-five years.

LYN-And you did it. You got them out. I heard that report. [Elevator was stuck at Jacksonville City Council chambers as time approached for an important Council Meeting]

KEVIN-But anyway, so I began to progress in my flying. I had also flown before that with a friend of mine, Bill Bergstrom, who was a very wild kid, very independent wild kid at Texas Tech University. He later sadly committed suicide. I think that you could probably find out a little bit more about him on Wikipedia has a blurb about him online on the internet. Bill Bergstrom, William Bergstrom, Bill was also a private pilot. He was from Austin, Texas and I believe he had told me that Bergstrom Air Force Base in Austin, Texas where he was from and his family, there was a relationship there as far as the family name goes.

But Bill and I had flown together a couple of times and we had a lot of fun together. One of the flights that I had done once I became a private pilot there was a friend of mine who lived in the apartments where I lived, this was I believe 1973 approximately '73 or '74 when I got my pilot's license. One of the flights, we had rented, me and another pilot who was an Air Force student pilot, who is now living up in Northern Georgia, he and I got together and we rented an airplane south of Lubbock at Town and Country Air Port and we just enjoyed, West Texas was a great place to fly because you didn't have a lot of trees. It was flat. If you had an emergency you could virtually land anywhere and be able to survive quite nicely.

But we rented the airplane and it was late afternoon. We flew underneath the radar, the radar net which the radar was at Reese Air Force Base and the airport, and flew over to the north side of the campus and flew right over the cotton fields, over the wires, and in-between the rows of apartments where we lived and then out again. We did this I think twice until we noticed the campus police across the highway were shining their lights and it was just beginning to get dark. So, we heard them try to contact us by radio from the control tower at Lubbock Regional Airport so we decided that that was not a good thing to continue doing so we boogied down very low once again and went down south.

I think they were able, barely able to trace us on radar because the next day I got a call from the guy who rented the airplane who thought it was actually he thought it was pretty funny but made me promise to never to do that again. We had a lot of fun down there. Flying was a wonderful thing.

This was the first time I had met in West Texas near Lubbock, there was a number of young men from Africa who had come to this country to learn to fly agricultural operations and they would take their flying lessons in the Lubbock area at one of the airports. Then they would do crop dusting, etc. Every one of them was just a marvelous, marvelous people. Just absolutely incredible people.

LYN-I grew up with crop dusters in the tobacco country of Gadsden County, Florida. We were the shade tobacco capital of the world and we had crop dusters. It looks a little dangerous like you're talking about your escapade over the dorns. It looks a little dangerous.

KEVIN-But a lot, a lot of fun. (Laugh)

LYN-We are seeing from the expression on Kevin's face, that was a delightful day. (Laugh) You did have a lot of fun.

KEVIN-Well, I had a girlfriend that lived there and of course the girls were all crazy about the guy that I was flying with. He was a young Air Force pilot already and so everybody was thrilled to see us. We had a good time. It was a lot of fun. Normally we were safe in what we normally did. I would often practice cutting the engine at about fifteen, twenty, thirty miles away, cutting the engine off and then gliding into the field just for the practice of doing a dead-stick landing so that I would know what do in case the engine actually did that. Of course, I would be able to restart the engine very easily since I was able to shut it down and it was still running but never the less that was a good practice.

LYN-So, as you began that what were you thinking in your mind your career would be?

KEVIN-Air Force, it was going to be U.S. Air Force. I was going to go in the tradition of my mother at least and my friend and of course, I was in Air Force ROTC at Texas Tech in the early '70's and Reese Air Force Base was right nearby and for the most part most of the bases that I had been near to had been Air Force in Ft. Worth near where I grew up was a big Carswell Air Force Base was there. Dyess Air Force Base was Abilene, Perrin Air Force Base had been up near Sherman before the BRAC Commission closed it. That's the area that Sullenberger who landed the airliner down in, up in the Northeast on the water, that's where he was from, the Sherman area. He probably had the same feelings about it all that I did.

The reason I ended up going and becoming a Naval aviator is because for no other reason at the time other than the fact that the Air Force at the end of Vietnam was pushing people out the door and the Navy was still pulling them in. It was not easy to get in. Your marks and your grades on

the exam, both the officer exam and the aviation exam were, they had to be high. But that's the reason was because if I was going to fly military I had to take the Navy at that point.

LYN-So what year did you pursue the Navy career?

KEVIN-Well, I pursued it in 1977. I started air AOCS in Pensacola. I was accepted into flight training earlier that year and then started in either September or October of 1977 and that lasted, AOCS lasted until my graduation I believe on February 3, 1978.

At that graduation, I am very proud to say that Chappie James, and I might have mentioned this to you before, but Chappie James who was one of the Tuskegee Airmen at the first, I believe four-star Air Force General, I believe three or four-star Air Force General, the first black Air Force General of that rank, he was living in Pensacola. I didn't know that at the time.

Talking about Chappie James, we had a young man in our AOCS class, a young black man, his last name was "James" and we thought maybe there was a relationship there with Chappie. It turns out our drill instructor told us that "No" that was not the case. However, the young man that was in our class whose last name was "James" and I forget his first name, but he was in the program that General Chappie James had created that pushed and allowed for young black men that were in college to go through the officer programs and become officers in the military. This is how, it was through those programs that this young man that was in our class ended up in AOCS with our class and graduated with us.



Air Force General
Chappie James
(Tuskegee Airmen)

Sadly, three weeks after I met General James he passed away. He had a heart attack. He was an incredible guy. He would, he and Robin Old, one of our World War II Air Force aces, Robin Olds who was also an ace in Vietnam, or at least was an F-4 Phantom pilot air wing commander, they combined one of the air wings and flew together, Chappie James and Robin Olds both working with each other in Vietnam.

LYN-So you are in Pensacola and have you decided what kind of Naval pilot you want to be, what you want to fly, what you want to be doing?

KEVIN-Not really. At that point I was trying to survive “swim” and the brutal physical training and all that kind of thing. I really hadn’t put my mind to it. You know, I had just flown regular straight wing air craft and no helicopters of any kind or anything like that and so I was just waiting for the Navy to tell me what I was going to be flying. It didn’t really matter to me at that point.

When I graduated from Pensacola, February 3, 1978, when I graduated and got orders to begin flight training in T-28’s in Pensacola, or Corpus Christi, Texas that’s when you know I began to kind of want to perhaps fly helicopters which was totally different from anything that I had flown.

The T-28 was an incredible airplane. It was designed at the end of World War II and put in production in the late 1940’s first by the Air Force and then by the Navy. So, it had the same, the T-28 was marvelous, it had the same engine as the B-17 had. Of course, the B-17 there are four of them. But it had the R-1820 engine, just an incredible airplane.



Navy Training Airplane
T-28

A very unique opportunity to fly them because it was shortly after that that they surplused all the T-28’s, got rid of them, back in I think it was 1982 or ’83 that was the end of it. They went to all turbine powered. They started with the T-34 “C” model which was a turbo prop, had a PT-6 turbine engine in it and now they are flying T-6 and that’s the 34-C model that are gone or are going to be gone soon.

But anyway, my experience in Pensacola, a lot of it was, a lot of my time was spent at the extra-swim at the survival swim tank at Pensacola because I just wasn’t that great of a swimmer and so every afternoon it was me and all the Iranian officers would collect together and do free swim and so forth. I was able to get to know the Shah’s Imperial Iranian Navy guys that were there. The Shah actually took his best officers that had already gone through basic, had already obtained two or three levels of ranks in their military, and put them back through our basic training at Pensacola because he wanted them to be the best.

LYN-Incidentally, my husband was also teaching them [the Iranians] up at Norfolk. Many of his class were Iranians in the VAST program. Our government was definitely supporting the Shah.

KEVIN-Absolutely.

LYN-That was the first time I had been aware that we had Iranians in our military being taught the maintenance of these Naval planes. Now you're telling us that they were going back through training.

KEVIN-They went on, and they also were trained not only by the Navy in flight training but they were also taught by the Air Force as well. When I went to South Texas for flight training, NAS Corpus in Kingsville, I met a couple of them up in San Antonio where they had been in training at Lackland Air Force Base and probably at Randolph Air Force Base at the time. Kelly Air Force Base, there were three major Air Forces Bases there, at least at that time, thirty-five or forty years ago in San Antonio, Texas. But Kelly was a logistics base and a base was where they refurbished air craft and air craft systems.

LYN-At the same time they were recruiting Navy guys, like my husband, to go to Iran. We chose not to go to Iran.

KEVIN-I had a lot of good friends who did go.

LYN-It would have been a very poor choice to have gone because very shortly after that was the take-over.

KEVIN-By the Islamics, radical Islamics which is really to me one and the same.

LYN-You are deciding what you want to fly.

KEVIN-Well, you know I graduated from Pensacola and then went on in February of '78 I went to NAS Corpus Christi and flew the T-28's and then I had gotten, I was "stashed" they would stash us before a class if we had enough time before the class started. At Corpus Christi they would stash us in some sort of job. So, my position was a stash job in the SAR unit, Search and Rescue Unit at NAS Corpus Christi. It was an absolutely wonderful experience. George Silonan was the head of that group. There was a guy names Harcourt Reynold who was a lieutenant at the time and he was a wild man. These guys were just incredible human beings. There were pretty hard drinkers I will say that. George suffered from that.

I know that, at least as a couple of years ago, that Harcourt is still living out west I believe. I'm going to try to get in touch with him. I don't know about George Silonan at this point. But these people impressed me to such an extent, the kind of people that they were and the mission that they had in search and rescue that I wanted to be a helicopter pilot. However, the people with the highest grades were sent to jets, So, my grades were high enough that they selected me for jets and I went on to fly jets at NAS Kingsville, Texas which is right there co-located with King Ranch in South Texas, not far from Corpus Christi.

LYN-So you started with what jets?

KEVIN-Started with the T-2 jet which was a straight wing jet, kind of very much fashioned after the original first-generation jet air craft we had at the end of and slightly after World War II. It had two J-85 engines and was extremely stable and yet very nimble air craft. It was a lot of fun to fly. We did a lot of crazy things in those airplanes and learned to do air-to-air gunnery in the T-2 and also, I don't think we did bombing practice in those aircrafts but, we did the air-to-air gunnery. Did quite a few cross-country flights in those airplanes and also that was the first time I carrier qualified in jets in the military, flying on and off the aircraft carrier.



Navy T-2 Jet

LYN-And what carrier?

KEVIN-It was the World War II Lexington, CV-16 Lexington which to me, to this day now makes me feel extra good knowing that I had a chance to land and take off on a World War II air craft carrier. I was in those years when it was the transitional time where the last of the military, of the World War II hardware and the last of the World War II guys were still serving, master chiefs at that time and captains and some commanders and so forth. Of course, the T-28's were still around and as a matter of fact the T-2 jet that I flew was really a conglomeration of parts that North American Air Craft had put together. It had the wing of the FJ-1 which was the first, the FJ-1 was the first North American jet after World War II, right after World War II. It was straight wing and the wings were used on that. The landing gear was from the T-28 so it was just a hog-podge of parts that Northern American successfully made into a very, very fine training air craft.

LYN-I've been interested about the location of the carriers. When you were qualifying were you in Pensacola landing on the Lexington or the Lexington came to Texas?

KEVIN-Yes, it went to the Gulf Coast off of probably thirty, forty, fifty miles off the coast of Corpus Christi and that's where we did our carrier practice and carrier training.

LYN-So during that era, on the East Coast, all pilot would have qualified on the Lexington.

KEVIN-No, just your, probably at that point mostly I would say, mostly it's gonna be your low-time students. It's gonna be in other words your flight students that are working to get their wings etc., both the A-4's and T-2 jet and I will say this, let me back up just a moment and say this, when I was driving from Corpus Christi with all my stuff in the car to go from Corpus to Kingsville, I looked over at Cabaniss Field which was at that point, during World War II had been a full-blown Naval Air Station but it was an auxiliary field at that point in 1979, and I looked up and here was a T-28 they had actually taken the last class that they ever did, from what I understand, they took this group that was going to go on to fly props like E-2's and C-2's and C-1's etc. in the fleet, they took them and they were going to carrier qualify once again, first time in a long time they were going to carrier qualify guys flying the T-28's. I remember seeing them flying around Cabaniss in the pattern with the canopy open just like they did during World War II. I know, I had seen a couple of the guys who actually had scarfs on. (Laugh) They were proud of what they were doing.

TAPE 2 SIDE A

LYN-Today is April 14, 2017 and I am back at the office at city hall with Kevin Kuzel and we are going to continue his story about his Naval career. We have talked about his parents, his family's service to the nation, and we are beginning as Kevin is leaving Corpus Christi and continuing his Naval career. So good morning Kevin.

KEVIN-Good morning. I remember, I think I might have told you before about having, the Marine Corps fighter pilots that were my flight instructors made sure that in order to get my wings that I had to drink a "Flaming Hooker". I think I told you about that. It was a jigger of Drambuie and lit with a flame in the glass and you had to drink it and leave the flame in the glass after you drank it. So, the night that I got my wings which was early January of 1980 I was able finally to leave the flame in the glass (Laugh) and survived it without my mustache being burned too bad. Then I was, that was when I got my wings. We are starting here from Corpus Christi.

LYN-You had told us about seeing these guys with the open cockpit and the scarfs around their neck.

KEVIN-They had, if you were going to fly, if the Navy had designated you to fly props or helicopters, especially prop aircrafts like the C-1, the C-2, etc. then you were, they put you through after your basic flying solo in the T-28 they would put you through BI, Basic Instrument and RI which is Radio Instrument Training. Then you would then move on and fly a multi-engine aircraft, twin-engine aircraft like a T-44 I believe comes to mind which I believe was a large Beach Craft something like that. That was all done in Corpus Christi.

They had initially, everyone had carrier qualified in T-28's and so they stopped that for a while. Then they decided to carrier qualify for whatever reason one more class of guys. I was not in that class because I was selected to fly jets and I was gonna be going to start at VT-23 at Kingsville Naval Air Station which was only several miles away from Corpus Christi, Texas.

So, I remember they, there was an air field, I think they called it an out-lying field, and OLF, and that was Cabiness and it was just to the north I believe of Corpus Christi, maybe the end of Padre Island Drive. So, I remember driving by that, by Cabaniss, and watching what would have been, probably the last class to carrier qualify, which means to land and take off on an aircraft carrier which would have been at this point the USS Lexington. The last class to actually do that in T-28's. The T-28 was a rather large single engine attack trainer. It was also used as an attack aircraft in Vietnam. It was designed at the tail end of World War II. It was the last radial engine, single radial engine aircraft engine, that was produced for the military.

So, anyway when I was passing by Cabaniss I saw them in the pattern over the air field making their touch-and-go landings and their carrier practice and I remember seeing them, you know you could plainly see them up there because the carrier altitude was only six hundred feet. That's the carrier pattern altitude; standard carrier pattern is six hundred feet, at least over the water. On land it would be a thousand feet or twelve hundred feet depending on where you are. But always over carriers it was standard altitude of six hundred feet.

So, you could see them plainly and everyone had their, just like World War II, everybody had their canopy open and they were flying with I'm sure the breeze coming through the cockpit and all that, and you could see some of them wearing scarfs and the scarfs were kind of blowing in the breeze as well. But it must have been quite an experience for them and I wish that I had had that opportunity but they had stopped carrier qualifying guys that were going to jets and allowed them to do that in the jet pipeline once they got to Kingsville or whatever jet they went to.

Then I went on to, I transferred to NAS Kingsville which is located near the King Ranch and began VT-23 which at the time was commanded by Commander White and I flew T-2's, T-2C's I believe was the model that I flew. We first carrier qualified in, in the group I was with we carrier qualified I believe probably in early '79, early to mid '79, is when I think that was, 1979.

We carrier qualified on the USS Lexington which was a World War II aircraft carrier that had been modified in the 1950's to an angled deck. All carriers during World War II, the American carriers were all straight decks but many of the ones that were kept after the war were modified to angled decks so that they could have a quicker take-off time for more aircraft and also allow landing to occur at the same time they were catapulting the jets off the carrier.

So, I carrier qualified in T-2's and that was the last final step before going to fly the advanced jet trainer which was the trainer version of the A-4 Skyhawk and that was for me that was with VT-21 also at Kingsville. So, we carrier qualified in that in late, I guess late November, maybe early December of 1979. We did our carrier qualification in A-4's, we did that from NAS Key West.

I remember going from Kingsville, we were taken by Navy transport aircraft, a large aircraft, and it was either a T-131 which was a Convair 640 or it was a C-9 which is a DC-9. I remember specifically when I went up into the cabin area, got out of my seat, I noticed that the guy in the right seat, the co-pilot, was not an officer. He was a Master Chief. I quickly remembered that during World War II they had the enlisted flying program. This was one of the two or three remaining flying enlisted pilots that were left in the Navy. He was flying that aircraft.

He was a Master Chief and I was lucky enough also to have flown on another transport slightly later when I was at VA-174, I believe at Cecil Field here in Jacksonville, Florida, and the final remaining Master Chief Naval Aviator from World War II was on that flight as well. Both of them had spent probably all of forty years in the military.

LYN-You don't happen to remember the names do you?

KEVIN-I don't. I believe the name of that last Master Chief that I flew with was Master Chief Bob Jones and he retired in 1981 I believe. That to me, what an ultimate experience to be able to work on an aircraft, especially during World War II, work on an aircraft and then jump in the cockpit and fly combat missions with everybody else. To me that just would have been the ultimate experience for me if I had gone that route, that would have been, and I wish if I had lived during that time I would have done everything I could because the Navy I believe the only one that had a program like that.

The Air Force you had to be an officer to fly. I never, I don't believe I've ever heard otherwise. I believe all through that time that was the thing. They stopped the enlisted flying program in the Navy, they stopped that right after the war, not too much after the war ended because obviously they didn't need pilots that bad and they had enough coming in from the officer corps who had gone to colleges etc.

But Bob Jones, that would have been it. Of course, I just looked that up to remind myself what his name was. I do not know if at this point in time if he still living. I would love, if he was I would love to kibitz with him.

We went on, I went to Kingsville in jet training VT-23 for T-2's and then A-4's at VT-21 and I tried to remember some of the experiences I had in flying. I know that we had one kid that was one of our buddies that we were going through with that particular class or that particular group of guys in T-2's and I remember listening on my aircraft radio in my BOQ room, I remember hearing an emergency going on and I later found out what happened was there was a flight that took off and it was a T-2 jet and a Marine Corps flight instructor was his student saw the jet take off and he was coming back to land so he decided he was going to do what is called "thumping". Thumping meant that you got underneath an aircraft, came from behind and got underneath the aircraft, and then quickly pulled up in front of the other aircraft and caused the unaware pilot and aircraft to get in your jet wash.



Well, he didn't time it exactly the way he should have, this Marine Corp pilot didn't with his student. So, he hit the other aircraft with his tail, hit the nose of the aircraft, the other T-2 jet with his tail, knocked a portion of the tail off of the Marine Corp pilot T-2 and also the nose off of the Navy instructor and his student, the T-2 that they were flying and left the aircraft that had been damaged, left it with one engine that was totally foded. FOD means "Foreign Object Damage". One engine had to be shut down immediately and the other was running at eight-five percent and they had a full bag of fuel so therefore they were at just about maximum gross weight with only about two-fifths, maybe less of the power that they needed, two-fifths of the maximum power that they had available.

The Marine Corp flight instructor and his student who were flying the T-2 that bumped the other guy, they had to eject from that aircraft so they lost that aircraft but both those guys were OK. They parachuted down following ejection.

The T-2 with the Navy instructor and his student in the cockpit, they landed safely. I was able to take a good look at that jet before they fixed it up in the VT-23 hangar. I can tell you it was absolutely a mess. The canopy was gone. The canopy had been damaged and it was gone. I'm not sure if it was damaged, I'm pretty sure it was damaged during the incident itself otherwise he might have blown the canopy in order to prepare for ejecting even though I believe in the T-2, the T-2 you could eject through the canopy. I forget which.

But, the canopy I think at that time was valued at somewhere around twenty to twenty-five thousand dollars, something like that. That was forty years ago.

LYN-And the plane that went down, what do you think that value was?

KEVIN-That was probably valued at two and a half or three million dollars I would think at that time. That would be probably twenty million dollars now or fifteen million dollars now or something like that. But the Marine Corp instructor that initiated that particular incident, first they were going to court martial him and then they decided to go ahead and allow him resign his commission and of course he was out. I doubt that he got another job as a, either commercial

pilot or anything else I'm sure. To me, hopefully he did because he probably learned his lesson. (Laugh) Thank God that nobody was hurt so it was quite an experience to see the aircraft after all that happened.

One of my incidents in T-2's at VT-23, I was on a night flight which was the second night flight in the training syllabus in the T-2's and I was with a flight instructor and we had, I believe there were four to six night flights that were scheduled or were programmed as part of the T-2 flight syllabus. This was the second flight, and the last one before I would solo at night in a jet and the first night flight, Night Flight One, you went to, directly from Kingsville you went to a pre-programmed altitude from Kingsville to Laredo and then from Laredo you turned back and went south of Kingsville and then went back up to Kingsville. On Night Flight Two, was actually was exactly the same route except opposite with a pre-programmed altitude. The person that set the altitude was the ODO, the Operations Duty Officer at the squadron.

I remember, and I don't remember his name at this point, and it's probably better if I don't get it, but the instructor pilot I was flying with, he and I took off, it was after dark. It was probably, I'm not quite sure when that was, it was probably seven forty-five or maybe eight o'clock at night we took off.

So, we were flying Night Flight Two which meant we were flying south of Kingsville then turned to the west to fly toward Laredo and then from Laredo we were to turn and then fly back to Kingsville. So, what had happened, what happened was when we were in-bound to Laredo we were probably about sixty miles from Laredo, I was flying in the front seat and the instructor was in the back seat. I was doing the flying. I had my hand on the stick and the power etc. He was simply taking a look around outside and watching me making sure everything was OK with the aircraft and etc. So, we were flying west-bound toward Laredo, and I noticed, and I had been a civilian pilot before and had flown night flights many times so I knew what I was looking at.

I saw lights from another aircraft on the horizon dead ahead. It probably, we were thirty miles away, something like that. So, at that time, I advised the instructor that we had another aircraft that was co-altitude with our aircraft and he was not moving. So, the instructor said he didn't see anything and so he said, "Not a problem. Things just look differently at night."

So, when I say the other aircraft was not moving in relation to the point on the wind screen on my, in my cockpit, that means it was either going directly away from me or directly towards me. Within, I would say probably fifteen, twenty seconds, I made the call again on the intercom to the instructor in the back seat that "Sir, he's not moving. He's co-altitude with us." The instructor said, "I don't see anything. Don't worry about it, it may be just be lights on the horizon or something like that."

So, I started to, as the aircraft in front of me closed in co-altitude with me, exactly in a straight line with me, I started to slowly pull back on the stick and he said, he had his hand on the stick

and pushed it forward and put us back on altitude and said that “No, just stay at your altitude, you’re doing fine. I don’t see anything out there.”

Just before we would have collided I took both my hands, put them on the stick, forced his hand back, in other words forced the stick back and overpowered the flight instructor, and the other jet which was a T-2 jet with a friend of mine, the friend of mine in that jet sailed right beneath us. The instructor said, “Oh my God, I had no idea you were right.”

So, I had that unique experience in my life where I could go around thinking that I saved at least two people’s lives.

LYN-You did.

KEVIN-But, so anyway, we, after we completed our flight, and I do remember now the name of the other pilot. The name of the other pilot in the other aircraft was Steve Bachman. Steve was very, I think I remember seeing him it was so close that I could see him, the lights on his cockpit. He may have looking at a chart or a map or something. I don’t remember exactly but it was Steve Bachman.

When I told him about it back in the locker room back at the squadron after the flights were over, he was still there Steve was, and he said, “Was that you?” (Laugh) So he was obviously unaware as well so anyway. But, what happened the cause of that incident was the fact that the ODO, the Operations Duty Officer had made a mistake when he went back with my flight instructor. They went back to the squadron we confronted the ODO and he said, “Oh, my gosh.” He said, “I put ya’ll at the same altitude.” So, I never took any wooden nickels after that. Obviously or before that.

LYN-The subject came up in another interview about mistakes being made. Every flight mistakes are made but what was said by the other person was there no screaming and hollering, we admit our mistakes, and then moved on. In this incident, were there any repercussions to what happened?

KEVIN-Well, he thanked me, my flight instructor thanked me for what I did when we were at the squadron after talking to the ODO and his comment was, “I don’t know if you know it or not but I’m going to the airlines” in other words getting a job flying the airlines and” I would appreciate it if we don’t talk about this”. So, I didn’t.

He was an excellent pilot and a very, very, very fine person. It was just one of those things where he just didn’t see it coming. I’m sure part of that was the fact that he would have had to have looked through my windscreen up front, over my shoulder and it would have probably have looked a little bit different from the way I was seeing things etc., etc. When I called for a change of altitude you know and attempted to make that change of altitude he should have made me

make that correction if he was letting me fly the aircraft he should have listened to me or acquiesced to that.

LYN-Thank you Kevin for three lives. So, you still wanted this career. Let me ask you this, “In the career by this time what did you see your responsibility, your end responsibility, what was the end game of what you are training for?”

KEVIN-Well, you are training to be a carrier pilot and at this point you are training to be an aircraft carrier pilot and at this point when I was in T-2's in VT-23 you were at that point in time you were not sure yet, you hadn't gone to A-4's yet which was advanced jet training. You didn't really know whether you were going to go to attack, to an attack aircraft, or you were going to go to a fighter or both which later in the case of us, we would have gone to either F-4's or F-14's on the fighter side or A-7's or A-6's which a lot my friends did at the time, the Intruder, the A-6 Intruder or the A-7 Corsair.

You would have gone to one of those two jet pipelines more than likely. There were a couple of guys that got some oddball stuff out of there. One of my friends I learned later had actually gotten F-86's which was the Korean War jet. I mean, fabulous, fabulous first or actually a second-generation jet. It was produced originally right after World War II and they were flying them at China Lake as the weapons test center for the Navy in California. He had had some problems, this friend of mine had had some problems with motion sickness in fighters so they, he went through de-sensitization at Pensacola for that and then they ended up sending him I believe over to F-86's to fly which to me would have been the ultimate experience. That would have been a real trip for me.

LYN-Let's interject this, we're talking about attack and fighter. You know that's where you're headed to one or the other. Explain to persons who don't know what those responsibilities and what the end game of each of those could have been.

KEVIN-OK, if you go to fighters you're gonna be flying, you're gonna be flying, you're gonna get some training in attack which means close air support for ground troops, dropping bombs, rockets, guns in support of ground troops. That what's your attack, your ground attack mission is is dropping bombs, rockets and guns in support of ground operations for the most part.

If you go fighters, that's your light attack or your attack and of course A-6's was a light attack aircraft that carry a lot of bombs. A-7's that was still considered light attack. The, if you went fighters you were going to be flying combat air patrol missions. You were going to be flying intercept, you were going to do dog fighting, you gonna be trained for that just light they did in World War I and World War II and Korean War and everything else. You gonna be taught to mix it up and so you know you could, in that case you would be flying the F-14 Tomcats at that time. We're talking about the late '70's. They were starting to get more F-14's into the pipeline and into the fighter community which was a pure fighter, there's no doubt about that.

Then the F-4 Phantom, which had been used for everything from fighter to ground attack, etc. but it was still in the fighter community. You would have been flying one of those two aircrafts if you'd gone to fighters.

LYN-At this time politically, where was America? Where was the world?

KEVIN-We were at this point in time, we're talking about 1979, we were four years away from or past when Vietnam had ended which was April 24th approximately, give or take a day, 1975 and you know we were still in the Carter era and the post-Vietnam era which was not Carter's fault by any means. America basically had down-sized its military. We weren't competing so much as a super power in the world at that point in time until of course Ronald Ragan came into power, came in early 1981.

But that's where we were. We were at a point in time that we were kind of treading water as a country with a large military capacity but we weren't at where we had been in the, right after World War II or where we would be soon in the mid-1980's.

LYN-So how did you, the mind-set is hard for me to get into but how did you and did you foresee what you would be doing world-wide where did you see our nation? What did you think you were going to be doing?

KEVIN-Vietnam had been the experience that we all had, I guess it was pervasive, the Vietnam experience was pervasive in the thinking which meant we were talking about wars that were limited wars, counter-insurgency operations, flying aircraft like this for instance some of the lighter aircraft used in Vietnam. The special operations wing used all World War II aircraft during Vietnam to, because there was nothing really high-tech about that particular war in the air. So, they used a lot of low-tech weapons. Special operations wing which if I had been a few years older I would have loved to have been a part of, they flew all World War II aircraft in Vietnam as, to interdiction for the supply route, etc., that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese had.

Put me back on track.

LYN-I guess what I'm trying to wrap my mind around is that as a man who has devoted his life now to flying, your goal is to fly, what are you understanding that you are going to be doing for this nation?

KEVIN-Right, and like I say, in the Vietnam experience was pervasive. We did not want to, we knew we would but did not want to get involved with a limited war scenario which was no more than a protracted war where we were going to lose our friend's lives and end up with nothing like we did in Vietnam. It was a pathetic experience. You know, a lot of us, we all had friends if you're aged fifty-eight, fifty-nine on up we all had friends that lost their lives in Vietnam or were injured or changed them forever.

But that was what we looked at, was these limited operations. We had when I was at VA-174 in the A-7's training pipeline we had the issue with Libya. I remember we had buttons that were made up that said, "US-2/Libya-0" or something like that. I forget exactly but I think I've got that button at home somewhere. We didn't look at a large-scale massive at that point and time in the early, early '80's we didn't really look at any sort of massive war with the Russians or the Chinese or anything like that that I remember.

Our job as Naval aviators was to train as hard as we could and be the best so that whatever we encountered we would be able to defeat. That was our mind-set. That was the mind-set of the Navy and the Navy flight-training program.

When I was at VT-21, dropping bombs and firing rockets was a lot of fun and exciting but what I think I excelled at the best was in air-to-air combat. So, what I was hoping for at the end was to fly either F-8 Crusaders or F-4's or F-14's and I ended up getting A-7's light attack because the training air wing commodore who had been a former commanding officer of VA-174 here at Cecil Field in A-7's, he liked me and wanted me to, he said, "You're one of the classiest guys to come through here. I'm sending you to A-7's?" (Laugh)

Well I said, "OK, thank you." (Laugh) I mean what do say, you know when you're an ensign you don't have a whole lot to say about it. So, I came here. That's when I came here to Cecil Field to the A-7's.

LYN-Being sent to Florida, did it matter what part of the country you were in? You've been in your home area a lot. Coming to Jacksonville, Florida, coming to Cecil Field, did you know Cecil Field? Did it have a reputation? Did you realize it was this isolated air station?

KEVIN-Out in the middle of nowhere.

LYN-Nowhere.

KEVIN-It was a surprise. This is what, thirty-seven years ago, so it was a lot of things have changed out in that area. Now, when I, I didn't know anything about Jacksonville, Florida. I knew absolutely nothing about Jacksonville. I didn't know anything about Cecil Field. I had looked at it a couple of times as far as on the map and the charts and saw two sets of parallel runways and you know on the charts. One of the runways was twelve thousand five hundred feet and I said, "Hey, that's plenty of runway, I like that, that's good." (Laugh)



Cecil Field Runways

So, you know, with that, with all that I had no pre-disposition except you know, “Where in the heck is this place?” You know that was really about it. I remember driving I-10, I had contacted Bob Fosterman who was a Lt. Commander who was in charge of the younger guys that were going through the replacement air group which the RAG they called it, at Cecil, VA-174. I called him and said, “Leaving Kingsville, can I have a couple of days to go through Dallas and say ‘hello’ to my friends and my parents and brag a little after I had gotten my wings and then go on to Cecil Field?” He said, “Sure, that’s no problem.”

I remember it was a thousand miles away and I remember driving in I-10 toward MacClenny, Florida and just outside of Jacksonville and I saw on the map that you could kind of make a south turn down 228 and then it curved back up and around and became Normandy Blvd. That’s where, right where 103rd Street and Normandy Blvd. are at where Cecil Field was. So, I remember coming up that way and it was all farm land. You know it was all farm land at that time. You know that was nice. I always loved farm land or ranch land being a Texan and having had done my college, my seven years working on that four-year degree at Texas Tech University in West Texas so farm and ranch things were getting to be old hat for me.

When I started coming up Normandy Blvd. the single-wide with the trucks up on jacks and no tires did begin to disturb me just a little. (Laugh)

LYN-You had come to North Florida. (Laugh)

KEVIN-I wasn't, my first thought was "Why on earth did they send me here?" I remember staying on the base for a few days at my BOQ and getting checked into the squadron etc. I remember I finally adventured off the base and went towards, I guess town or you know downtown or something. I realized that this place had one amazing river which our Council President right now is working hard on making the river a centerpiece for this community.

But at that time, it really was not. It was taken for granted. It was not a show-piece. We had very little access to it at that time and so forth. You know, Jacksonville really was just a large small town thirty-seven years ago and it is still that way. Of course, it wasn't long after that we ended with The Landing and The River Walk and all this kind of things you know.



LYN-'87 for The Landing.

KEVIN-'87. So that's the way I found Jacksonville to be at that time. I remember we went through fire-fighter training. We all had to have fire-fighter training.

LYN-That was at Mayport?

KEVIN-At Mayport, that's right. I remember doing that so that we in case we ever had to fight a fire on-board the aircraft carrier or whatever ship we were assigned to at the time we would be able to part of the team of fighting the fire.

LYN-I will add this, it is in another transcript of Dave Dollarhide who was on the Forrestal says that much of that training came as a result of what they went through on the fire on the Forrestal.

KEVIN-1967.

LYN-July 29th.

KEVIN-Summertime, I'll never forget listening to that. As a kid I was, that year I was fifteen at that point, fifteen years old and I remember listening to the radio, listening to music on one of the local AM stations and I remember hearing the news reports coming in. They would break in with the news report, the latest news report on the fire on the Forrestal. I remember the last one, the last one I remember hearing was the broadcast where the Navy was appealing for blood donations. It was just one of those fleeting memories you know. I have part of that recorded because I used to record music with my little cassette recorder you know off that radio. So, I have part, I have a recording of part of that broadcast that the Navy was appealing for the blood donations. I still have that somewhere in my man's den at my house.

LYN-So by the time you were in fighter training you realized the dangers that can happen on a carrier. It made you very aware, and I believe, they did when my husband went through, they used films from the Forrestal.

KEVIN-They might have. I don't remember at this point. I do remember that we had to dress out in our masks etc. and go into this smoke-filled room and then they wanted you to take your mask off and come out. I'm not sure if I did that one or not. I'm not sure if I did that. I might have skated on that one.

LYN-Well, my husband has a real interesting story of his experiences so I'm going to interview him.

KEVIN-I want to be there when you do that. (Laugh)

LYN-About the experience he went through at Mayport Fire Fight School. The famous Mayport Fire Fighting School.

So, you're at Cecil and you're discovering Jacksonville.

KEVIN-I was not thoroughly happy with flying A-7's. I wanted fighters. I wanted to fly something else. There were other things I wanted to fly as well. I kind of began distancing myself I guess a little bit. I remember one of the flights I had was one of the early flights I had was with the British pilot we had stationed with us. We had at one point in time had a British pilot, through NATO, he was assigned to VA-174. His name was Lidbetter. Either Litbetter Ledbetter or Lidbetter I'm not sure. But a great guy, a good guy, a very British aristocracy you might say. Then, at another time we had a French pilot who was there as well. Both of them were both absolutely great guys and they were there as instructor pilots or I guess they went through part of the syllabus and then became instructor pilots.

I remember one of the flights I had, I got a "flunk" on it.

LYN-Oh, Kevin.

KEVIN-Yeah. I joined up, it was the British, it was Ledbetter. He was either a lieutenant, I think he was a lieutenant at the time. He's retired since. Lt. Ledbetter we had gone out on a flight. He was my instructor and it was a formation flight. It was one of the early, early flights, probably the first flight I had in A-7's and so I remember joining up with him. I remember closing in a little bit too fast so I did a standard cross-under. I know that American pilots wouldn't have given that one bit of concern because that was the standard procedure if you're closing in too close to do a cross-under under the back and come up on the other side and join up.

Well, he got so freaked out he decided, I mean he says, "We're gonna go back." So, we went back and he gave me a down for that flight which was not a good thing for me. But was not a smart thing on his part. That's was not, it was nothing that was unsafe you know if you do your procedures correctly there's nothing unsafe there.

So, I took it and then went on and I remember a variety of things that occurred over there. I remember one flight I had to get out. It was, this was an interesting one. I was behind because of the weather that had caused problems on different days so I would be scheduled for a flight and then would not be able to fly the flight. I was getting behind. This was all due to the weather issue. I remember this one flight I was supposed to get out with an instrument flight where I was supposed to do an instrument flight.

I was supposed to plan it out, do the instrument flight, fly a certain number of places and do ground-controlled approaches etc., GCA. That means the guy on the ground on the radar looking at you on the radar actually calls you and if you're in bad weather they can actually, a good GCA controller can bring you in on a dime. I mean, the call "You're left of course, right of course, slightly high above glide path, slightly low on glide path", all these things. So anyway, I was supposed to get some GCA's out on this, on this flight etc.

So, I remember taking off and it was just at dusk. Just a little bit of light left in the sky and I went full-power and wheels off the deck. Hit my landing gear with my landing gear switch, the gear came up, and went I forget how that procedure was. You had stability augmentation, you had STAB AUG was what the switch was called. All I remember is the aircraft yawed violently and I was at a very critical altitude at that point, at a critical air speed, low air speed because I had just taken off. I had a full bag of fuel etc. So, I quickly righted the aircraft, I trimmed the aircraft out and all my trim indicators were way off, extremely off. So, I knew I had to get this flight out so I didn't want to give it up all at once.

So, I went and asked the control tower if I could orbit the field. So, I orbited the field at about, I forget what altitude probably around twenty-five hundred or thirty thousand feet, and I look at it and look at the situation and I looked at my engine, my engine was good. I looked at the flight controls. Flight controls were good except for the trim. The trim indications were way off just for straight level flying.

So, I decided to go ahead and take it. So, I went ahead and proceeded on and shortly after that my route was to go to the Crestview DOR in Crestview, Florida out here not far from Pensacola and all that. Then go right, turn northeast and then go to Robins Air Force Base and then shoot some GCA's up there and then come back to Cecil Field. That was the route of the flight.

So, heading over about one-third of the way over to Crestview I remember that my nav and computer went out on the aircraft. So, I lost a lot of stuff but I still had radio communications. My engine was still running, was still in good shape. (Laugh) I had my magnetic compass and my basic flight instruments so I said, I had to make a decision. I had to get the flight out so I could continue flying. So, I'm coming up and I take a right at Crestview and go up to the northeast towards Robins Air Force Base. About half way there all the lights went out on the instrument panel and in the cockpit.

So, I said, "You know, it's probably a smart idea if we don't try to do a GCA or ground-controlled approaches and low approach to missed approach etc., and back to the GCA pattern at an air field that I'm not familiar with. I decided to come back to Cecil and try it there. So, I got my flashlight out (Laugh) and clipped the flashlight on my flight suit and I would have to, then I went back to Cecil. They didn't say a lot about the issues but I went ahead and did my approaches, my GCA's, two touch-and-go and then back up and then back into the GCA pattern and then back around doing radar, you know the GCA radar approaches. Then I got my touch-and-go's out, the number of touch-and-go's out of the way, got my GCA's out and came back with the aircraft in one piece. That was an exciting night.

LYN-And you still wanted to be a pilot.

KEVIN-You know, it was, I brought it in and the aircraft in and filled out I think it was a yellow sheet or whatever it was, I forget what the maintenance form was. I listed the maintenance form what was going on there and wrote a note. They never found anything wrong which made me wonder if that had been a problem before that they were trying to hide having to do with the staff ops and if you're coming up etc., etc. I don't know. To this day I don't know. I don't think, I don't think it happened again to me but I asked around and I believe that it didn't occur to anybody else. It might have been just at that particular moment.

LYN-Well, amazing.

TAPE 2 SIDE B

LYN-So you were not really happy with the A-7's.

KEVIN-Well, the A-7 was a fabulous aircraft and of course it was a home-town airplane. Dallas, Texas, Grand Prairie which was a suburb of Dallas and that's where Ling-Temco-Vought is manufactured the F-A Crusader and the A-7. They have been in operation, there is an air field there called Dallas Naval Air Station which had been something that I always just prized the

moments of watching those guys take off and land there at that base when I was younger. That was where Kinsley Field Air National Guards, Texas Air National Guard was NAS Dallas co-located then across the field was the big complex that was Vought-Chase that later became Ling-Temco-Vought.

So, LTV had that location and they also had a big plant up in Greenville, Texas where they worked on a lot of government contracts on a lot of larger aircraft including the EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft, the Constellations, that the military had.

They had huge antennae on them and so forth. But yeah, we had a lot of inspiring for a young man who wanted to fly, we had a lot of inspiring facilities within sixty miles of Dallas you know. We had Dallas Naval Station and LTV and Texas Air National Guard. We had Carswell, we had up north and I was telling you about Sullenburger, the guy who landed the plane in the, on the Hudson River. Yeah, he was from the Sherman-Dennison area so we had those guys or we had the base there which was Dyson in Abilene it was an air defense command base. Its specific job was to intercept enemy aircraft from that base.

They operated F-102's at that time, F-102's and maybe some F-106's at that time from that base. So, we had a lot of different places where a guy like me would just go nuts over. It kept your enthusiasm up.

LYN-You are not being negative to the A-7's but you were just feeling...

KEVIN-No, I just wanted to do something else and quite frankly the start that I got there was a little bit off and I wanted kind of a fresh start somewhere else. Eventually I got out of flying. I decided that flying A-7's in that particular community was not what I wanted to do.

I talked to Captain Possum Terrell who was a former A-7 pilot. As a matter of fact, he's still around with us. He's living at Fleet Landing, I believe, at Atlantic Beach. I talked with him and he said, "I can use a good guy like you over at Safety and Air Operations." He said, "Get you to fly the C-1."

The C-1 was really very much like a World War II medium bomber. It had two radial engines, RT-20 radial engines and it was, the C-1 was the cargo plane and people-hauling version of the S-2 tracker which was the Navy's, right after World War II, within a few years, Grumman built those as a carrier based medium-range submarine tracking aircraft.

So, I got a chance to fly the C-1 at NAS, well I was assigned to Naval Air Station Cecil and I also got a chance to fly flights with VT-24 which was an Lockheed Electra which when the Navy calls for P-3, a fascinating airplane and so I got a chance to fly with them and also got a chance to fly some other things because I managed the detachments that came into Cecil. I hosted them.

We provided them with everything they needed etc. and I would be compensated with gifts. You know like a tip you might say. Being a good waiter, I got tips. One of the things that I got a

chance to fly one of the airplanes was from the 82nd Airborne and 101st Airborne Division. They each had detachments which came to Cecil to fly from Cecil to Camp Blanding.

So, I had the opportunity to fly with both of them just a few hours each in Cobra gunship helicopters which was absolutely the best flying I ever did. That was the most fun there is no doubt.

Originally, I wanted to be perhaps a helicopter pilot back in my earlier years in the Navy, back in '78 when I, before I started flying T-28's I was assigned to NAS Corpus Christi to the Search and Rescue, SAR units, and those guys were wild men and I wanted to be one of them. I thought helicopters was the way to go back then. It kind of went full circle for me because the last aircraft I really flew any length of time, beside P'3's because in my reserve, when I left active duty in '85 I went to the reserves.

I went to Attack Wing 1174 reserve augment group that augmented patrol air wing 11 which was the air wing over all the P-3 squadrons, the anti-submarine warfare squadrons in this area, in the southeast and that means NAS Jacksonville for the most part. But as far as anything else goes that was the last thing I really flew and it was marvelous. They were actually also built in Ft. Worth at Bell Helicopter, Bell-Textron. I believe that Textron owns that. Bell and Textron were combined.

LYN-So then you moved into a unique position at Cecil. You had told me about a newspaper.

KEVIN-Yes. My last year, year and a half there, maybe a little bit less than a year and a half, the base commander, Capt. Jack Austin, he needed somebody to, because the lady who was the officer, the Public Affairs Officer, she had left and he was looking for somebody to fill that slot as Public Affairs Officer for the base. It's Public Affairs has become quite an important, by that point it had become quite an important task. So, he needed somebody with, he loved the fact that I had pilot experience and also personality which he liked so he asked me if I would be the Public Affairs Officer. I said, "Absolutely, I think this will be a marvelous experience."

LYN-What year was that?

KEVIN-This was 1984. So, he, I ran the base newspaper, the Cecil Field Air Winger and I met with the press, the media. He assigned me to Clay County to the Chamber of Commerce to sit on the board for Clay County Chamber of Commerce and also as the Navy representative and also the Westside Businessmen's Club. He assigned me to that to be the Navy representative for that.

We also, at the time, we were the Navy here, was working on the AICUZ, area installation compatible use zoning A-I-C-U-Z. AICUZ zoning issue which had to do with protecting the area surrounding the different military and civilian air fields in the area, protecting them from development which could cause an issue with either expanding the air field or the operations of the air field. It was a protective measure to make sure that you wouldn't end up with people

having houses anywhere near a runway or landing pattern or whatever, at least any more than you already had. So, it was an effort to protect both civilians and military.

LYN-Do you think that anyone out at Cecil was foreseeing that its end was coming?

KEVIN-I think, you know, it was the BRAC Commission, Base Realignment and Closure Committee, the BRAC Committee up in D.C. that made that decision in the early '90's. I don't think being '84, '85, I don't think there was a lot of thought because by that time Ronald Ragan had been around the block there for what three or four years already. Obviously, it was very obvious that the big push was to build a military back-up and to make America the winner of the Cold War because Ragan wanted us to be stronger and to win that one to be the winner of the Cold War.

You know, I get the term for me "Cold War" is a hard one to push out of my vocal chords and the reason is because how many people died during the "Cold War" if you include Korea in that and Vietnam you're talking about a hundred and twenty, a hundred and thirty thousand guys were killed probably during that time since World War II. So that's much to me, not much of a "Cold War". I rather call it an extended protracted war that the Communist countries had against us.

LYN-So you made at some point the decision to retire. How did that happen?

KEVIN-Well, I had always, you know we, me and some other friends of mine from the day one that we got in we kept the "R". You could augment, you could place "Augment" to USN and drop the "R" in other words be full active Navy with USN but I had always thought that there was nothing finer than citizen soldiers.

That concept to me was the very fundamental strength of America going back to the Revolutionary War and after. You know the Citizen Soldier concept. We used to, me and a buddy of mine, Mark Roswell who passed away several years back, he was an airline pilot. He and I had gone through the Navy together at Cecil and all the way from basic training, AOCS in Pensacola from day one. So, Mark Roswell and I, Mark taught me the simple phrase way back then it was "You can take my wife and you take my car but for god's sakes don't my 'R'".
(Laugh)

You know that was just a little humorous play there. But reserve to me was important and I, when I left I had probably sixteen, eighteen thousand dollars in the bank, you know in my bank account that I had saved up because we had gotten some pretty good pay raises and I was getting to be a mid-range lieutenant and had been around the block there for seven, eight years and so I was finally able to bank some money you know. At one point even had two cars. (Laugh)

So, I bought a little condo at Wells Ridge on Wells Road in Orange Park not far from the Orange Park Mall and you know I had started my own business. It was a military electronics business and primarily avionics and infantry or ground communications.

So, I started that business from scratch, from nothing and back then we used, I was like the first on my block to have a computer and a FAX machine. (Laugh) I was you know, I never, I kept, we were still in the era where TWIX and TELEX, the teletype system was still running. So, I was close to doing that at one point but decided not to and am glad I did because it wasn't long after that slowly but surely the Internet came online and I adapted to that rather quickly.

LYN-While we are saying this, people will read this in the future and we want to put on this tape. It would be pretty hard to even find a FAX machine in most offices any more.

KEVIN-That's right, FAX machine, that's right. It turned into becoming a scanner and that's now an attachment for your computer.

LYN-So there are very few FAX machines.

KEVIN-FAX was a big thing. As a matter of fact, Capt. Jack Austin at Cecil Field come to think of it was responsible for me meeting my wife because when he assigned me to Clay County Chamber of Commerce that was when I got involved with the people that I later was involved with when I met my wife who had her business, her accounting business and business support activity, at the Clay County Chamber of Commerce Building which was there on Kingsley in Orange Park. It was built at the site of the old what they called the "Monkey Farm" which had been the site of where they trained the primates, the monkeys for the early part of the space program NASA had.

Most people probably had no idea about that but I actually went down there in there in some of the areas, some of the cage areas and one of the buildings that at one point back then, this was probably about 1988, '89 timeframe, something like that, and I remember seeing the areas where they kept the apes and the training areas and so forth.

LYN-You know, I'm just gonna add this. This is funny you are saying that but I have heard that we did have loose monkeys. Have you ever heard of that?

KEVIN-I think I have.

LYN-Loose monkeys and that would not be that far from that area. Switzerland area, is that right? Am I on the right road?

KEVIN-Well Switzerland is down 13.

LYN-13 or 17?

KEVIN-It would have been 17 if at all unless those monkeys were swimmers.

LYN-They were swimmers if they could cross the St. Johns River. [Highway 13 and Highway 17 are separated by the St. Johns River] Down 17, it just came to me, “Did those monkeys get loose because there were loose monkeys I remember hearing about.”

KEVIN-I would say more than likely that’s a possibility.

LYN-That’s a funny story if we could find it.

KEVIN-You know NASA might have a whole different take on it and not want to talk about it.

LYN-I’m sure not. (Laugh)

KEVIN-But possibly. It’s possible, very possible.

LYN-We had monkeys living out in the woods down there.

KEVIN-I heard something about that.

LYN-With you telling the story that could be some connection, some funny connection.

So, you met your wife and you married here in Jacksonville and you stayed in Jacksonville. Coming from Texas, how did you end up, did you not want to go back to Texas?

KEVIN-Oh, I did. Oh, I do, I mean I did. (Laugh)

LYN-You still do.

KEVIN-I mean I did but I keep meeting, I mean I met my wonderful wife. I keep meeting great people like you and your husband. You know, I mean Carol Harper out there [Carol is Councilman Gulliford’s assistant and was sitting right outside the office door when we were interviewing] You know I met her and how can I want to go back to Texas any more. You know all my friends are here. It’s kind of like Lubbock you know, to me when I think back it’s very similar.

You arrived at Lubbock, Texas out in the middle of nowhere and you said, “Oh, my God I can’t believe they put a university here.” Now, all I can possibly think about is going back to that place and being there again. It’s where your friends and your memories are and how could you get away from that? You can’t you know.

LYN-So we are on, one day after a major attack by our US government, I assume the Navy. I don’t know if it’s Navy or Air Force on Afghanistan. It was called the dropping of the “Mother of all Bombs”. I am interested in your perspective of what we’ve just done with the military in Afghanistan.

KEVIN-OK. We have not, and I will say this, since we are at war with Islam and I don’t mind you putting that out anywhere or telling anybody because when, supposedly Jim Love had the

job of being the Council Chaplain, basically I put myself in charge of doing, of rearranging the invocation program and I made damn sure that there was not going to be any Islamic come up here and do the invocation.

We are at war with Islam. Islam is fundamentally not just a religion, not just a matter of relationship between you and god. It is a social order, family structure, military mind-set as well as political. So, it is all those things. It is a governing concept like our constitution in our history.

So, the quicker we get that into our brain the quicker we're going to be able to defeat who we are fighting. Other people up here and other places may very well have a different idea about that. Everybody is welcome to their opinion but I'm a realist. I'm a Christian first, I'm a realist and I know what we're facing today. When we first, when 9-11 hit back in 2001, is that correct 2001, when that hit and then George Bush was voted in as president and he was talking about going over and doing a second invasion of the Middle East like his dad had done. His dad had done it appropriately. It was in defense of Kuwait back in 1990, '91, it was in defense of Kuwait. It was a limited operation. It had a beginning, it had an end and they left in power Saddam Hussein who kept the nut jobs in the Islamic world, who kept them at bay and limited their power. At that time, Saddam Hussein who is a Sunni Muslim had in that nation in Iraq he had Christians and even some Jews living there.

There, it was not a situation where people feared to go because he had it under control. The same with the way Turkey was, the same with the way Persia or Iran was under the Shah, etc. When we went, when Bush started talking about going into the Middle East again and cleaning up the mess which he thought had create the 9-11 issue, the attack on the World Trade Center in New York.

LYN-And the Pentagon in Washington.

KEVIN-Yes, that's right and it could have even been worse.

LYN-The White House.

KEVIN-There was one aircraft that was headed there but the passengers took care of that issue. God bless them. But anyway, when he was talking about that I remember telling a friend that we will not have learned the lessons of Vietnam and we didn't.

We went to Afghanistan, we stayed. We messed up with other countries over there with Ghadaffy, with Saddam Hussein, with all these people who, yes, they might not have been great allies of or they might have been somewhat of an enemy of Israel, but never-the-less we could still work and deal with these people one way or the other. They kept the nut-jobs that were in Islam at bay.

So, sure enough, there we've been pretty much ever since. Just the other day up here we had George Duskin up here. They would like George and some of the other guys who came up here,

they are all Navy pilots, Bill Willingham, George Duskin, Admiral Moriority and I forget who else but they came up here to talk to Councilman Jim Love about maybe sponsoring legislation in the future having to do with making Hemming Plaza [Park] more of a Veteran's Memorial Park you know rather than you know the fun time thing that hasn't seemed to work out over here at the park.

LYN-What we are talking about is that there is a monument with a supposedly Confederate soldier on the top. I'm now hearing it might actually be a Union soldier because when they put him up there didn't have any more Confederate soldiers cast and he might be a Union soldier. So, I've been researching that and there's no definitive answer on that one. But we do have controversy here in Jacksonville and I saw on the news that Charlottesville, Virginia is going through the same issue about removing the memorials to the Confederacy and those who served in the Confederacy. So that is a controversial thing in the city park. We have a one-block city park called Hemming Park in front of City Hall. That's what we are referring to. [another issue concerns the contracting of the park to a private organization that was to make the park more "interactive" but the concept has drawn much criticism]

KEVIN-Anyway these guys were up here and the reason I brought that up is George Duskin who happened to be, I knew George when I first got to Cecil I failed to mention earlier that you went through VA-45 which was, it was kind of a composite squadron. At the time they were flying A-4's, VA-45 was located near, right next to VA-174. They were flying A-4's. They would get guys that were coming in and it was called the "Instrument Rag", Replacement Air Group. You would come in and do some instrument flights in the A-4, it's kind of a pump-up, get ready to fly the A-7.



So, George Duskin was one of my instructor pilots and probably one of the finest people I ever met, just incredible human being. Anyway, he was up here the other day. He lost his son in Afghanistan about two or three years ago. He was a special forces guy who was assigned to, I believe Camp Blanding, and you know I mean it's a horrible thing the way this war needs to be fought is determining what the outcome should be in your favor, in our favor that is. Going to war ninety to nothing, high speed, overwhelming force and create the kind of environment that's not going to be a problem for us in the future, plain and simple just like we did, or similar to what we did in World War II.

We had two major powers that had to change the total way they thought and the way they operated, Japan on one end of the world and Germany on the other end. Our biggest problem we had was we left Russia and China alone which once again like World War I led to World War II that World War II then led to the quote, unquote “Cold War” and all the things that have occurred, some many things that have occurred since then.

LYN-Do you know what kind of planes dropped that bomb?

KEVIN-Yes.

LYN-What was it? Was it Navy?

KEVIN-No, it's probably Air Force, probably C-130 transport aircraft that dropped the MOAB bomb. That's a, we had bombs like that similar to that in World War II. It's many thousands of pounds of very high explosives. It's designed to penetrate deep in the earth and it's designed to basically it's designed to crush infrastructure that is below ground level. That's its primary or if exploded on the surface it is designed to clear an area on the surface of buildings, trees, and everything within a great distance. That's what it was designed to do.

LYN-And we are learning in recent years that the underground tunnels, the underground works have been enormous in that part of the world.

KEVIN-Yes. This is, any time once again, we would not, we did not, as I said earlier, “We will not have learned our lessons from Vietnam”. Look at what the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong did because we took the time to do what we were doing over there. In other words, our military, we stretched it out. When you do that you allow the insurgency against you to get stronger and stronger and stronger and build up that infrastructure and then as in the case of Vietnam, as well as here, both of those built huge underground infrastructures and facilities.

Look at what's been done in Iran because we did not take care of that when the Shah needed us. They then developed a nuclear program which is for the most part underground. I mean, to me it's easy to see this coming. Whoever the people are that are our government that are not taking this seriously and not doing what they should do, they're irresponsible. That's the nicest word that I can use.

LYN-We'll put this in perspective on tape for future readers. We don't know what is going to happen but we are facing the launch, probably Saturday which would be tomorrow, of North Korea of another nuclear missile. We are watching to see if China is going to continue that support or back away. We are hearing maybe they will back away from their support of the North Koreans. Is that what you understood? [tensions have lessened but the leader of North Korea and the President of the United States have begun making public demeaning comments about each other]

KEVIN-Well, OK.

LYN-So are we doing a “warning shot”? Is that what we’re doing?

KEVIN-I’m not sure exactly what is going to occur over the next short period of time but taking a look at the history, and by the way when I’m thinking about China I do want to make mention of one thing, when I was at Cecil Field one of the things I was able to do was meet, talk with, and basically chauffeur Charlie Bennett to and from the base because he would set up at post offices and talk to people as they came through the door.

He did the same thing at Cecil Field that he had done at other post offices in other places in the city and in this area, this region. But incredible human being. The reason I brought him up was is that he was a gorilla organizer with the Chinese during World War II against the Japanese. This is one of the things, that was his contribution to World War II. He was a basically a, he was an organizer, that’s a broad term. He was a gorilla organizer and we’re talking about he probably had some, probably some connections with both the Nationalist Chinese as well as the Communist Chinese because both of them, both those troops were fighting the Japanese, both of them.

Anyway, I wanted to throw that in because that statue is also right out here in Hemming Park.

LYN-He is known not only as a military person and a congressman but as a historian. It is Mr. Bennett who taught me to understand the French Huguenot, our first Navy. He wrote twelve books. That was his passion was the story of the French Huguenots and of course Ribault named our river that we talked about, the River May [St. Johns River] so we have the Port of the River May which is “Mayport”.

KEVIN-Oh.

LYN-It was right from that place that our first Navy protected against the attack of the Spanish into that river and Ribault had two ships blocking that entrance and then lined the north and south banks and did defend that colony of La Caroline in 1565 from the Spanish.

KEVIN-A very appropriate place to put Naval Station Mayport and NAS Mayport. Isn’t that something?

LYN-If we could just teach them this history.

KEVIN-You obviously can’t teach history because of course that would be considered, for the river that would be considered a choke point and strategy and tactic, strategy you always make sure you keep the high ground. You keep a choke point. You maintain that choke point OK? In this case Mayport is at the river but that’s what you were talking about there with the French.

LYN-That’s right where they were.

KEVIN-Which makes you, if you understand that “choke point” concept, then you must look at Cuba. And you must ask yourself, “How did we ever allow Cuba to become Communist right at

the choke point between the Yucatan and Florida, right at the choke point strategic choke point of the Gulf of Mexico.

LYN-It is amazing.

KEVIN-It should have never, ever happened.

LYN-Then we did come close to World War III over that very point. Cecil Field airmen were very critical in what happened in having a Russian ship turn around and go home.

KEVIN-Right. So was NAS Key West and McCoy Field, McCoy Air Force Base which is Orlando International. Both of those.

LYN-We are at a very strategic area for the defense of this nation, there's no doubt.

KEVIN-Yes.

LYN-So, Kevin's career at this point, Kevin, tell us what you're doing now.

KEVIN-Ok, I ended my business which I called Milcom Electronics. That was the name of my business that I had to 1985 through 2001 and then for a short period of time I did 501-C 3 work and I also worked with a film studio, a couple of different film studios that etc. working with major motion pictures and TV productions doing the props and advising on how to use the props in the proper way and so forth and I was able to work with Travolta having to do with the film "Basic", the movie "Basic" which was shot at Cecil Field and shot at Camp Blanding as well as other places.

So, I did that for a while and I had worked on a couple of campaigns, John Drayford's campaign, I worked on that. He was unsuccessful in the attempt to be a councilman. John had been a councilman back in the early '90's and is a very fine guy and a very fine Christian guy.

So, in the early 2000's, I believe that was about 2003, and so I did that and I did the movie props for a while and so forth. I was also active with the Park and King Area Association [Park and King Streets of Jacksonville] and got reacquainted with Jim Love who was very active with that. His business was at one end of King Street which was where he had a State Farm Insurance business.

So, I got involved with him. We got involved with the building of that shopping center, the restructuring of the sidewalks and buried the electrical and utilities and all that kind of thing and the islands and mediums and all that stuff. He decided he wanted to run for city council in 2010 so we got together and we, you know we, I helped him run. I put him over the line by a hundred and thirty-four votes, I'm sure I put him over the line by a lot more than that a hundred and thirty-four was the winning number above the break-even point.

Jill Dane, he ran against Jill Dane.

LYN-How did you end up moving into this office?

KEVIN-Well, I told him, "I said, Jim, I understand, I can see that ya'll might need somebody up there to assist you" and I said, "Hey, I'm available" and he said, "Well, sure. That's good". So, he hired me.

LYN-What's the official title?

KEVIN-The official title of what I do is Executive Council Assistant, ECA, Executive Council Assistant.

LYN-And it is a full-time job.

KEVIN-I put in somewhere between an average of forty-three to sixty hours a week for a forty-hour work week.

LYN-And we do have term limits in these seats. City Councilman Love was re-elected.

KEVIN-Yes, he was. This is his second term and we've got a little over two years left.

LYN-After two years he cannot run again and how do you see your future?

KEVIN-Oh gosh, I have all kind of different things in mind. Rock and Roll band. (Laugh) I'm learning to play the keyboard. Of course, that would be only at night. But since I can't drink any more it might have lost a little of its luster. (Laugh) But no, I've thought about going back and getting my doctorate in psychology or getting my full-blown electrical engineering degree which I got a degree in psychology, I defaulted to psychology from electrical engineering at Texas Tech and I have a few hours left to get my master's degree with Central Michigan University years ago, about thirty years ago. And so, there's a lot of things I want to do.

LYN-So we're not talking retirement, we're just talking a new life.

KEVIN-I'm sixty-four years old. I'm in the middle of middle age.

LYN-And the reserves. When did that retirement come?

KEVIN-I retired out of the reserves in 1995. So, it's been a while.

LYN-So it's been a while.

KEVIN-Yes it has and I remember being at Cecil Field, I remember being at the closing ceremonies for Cecil Field in '99. To me it was very sad. And I think that, I might have said this before but what was so sad about it was it shouldn't have happened number one. It should not have happened. You don't give up that kind of infrastructure which, by the way the runway, the twelve thousand five-hundred-foot runway is I'm sure you know was an emergency space shuttle landing runway with the navigation system in place there as well to make sure that the

shuttle got done safely. So, the twelve thousand five hundred foot was a nice long runway that any aircraft of any kind could have landed on.

Here's the sad part, the sad part is there's enough land area at Cecil Field, there's enough, there's so many acres of land and I forget, I think you told me. [Cecil Commerce Center comprises over 3% of the land area of Duval County]

KEVIN-Because it extends all the way down into Clay County.

LYN-It's massive.

KEVIN-It's massive and there was plenty of room to build new civilian infrastructure, plenty of room. There was plenty of room to keep the military infrastructure even if you put on the same side of the field like gosh, what is the name of the Air Force Base in Albuquerque, Albuquerque, New Mexico? Kirkland Air Force Base. You know, Kirkland Air Force Base had both civilian functions and military functions going on at the same time. So, did other bases. Our international airport, not a regional airport any more out here on the north side of town, that's got the 125th Fighter Wing on one side and the civilians on the other side.

There is nothing wrong with that concept. It works out just fine. We already had the ACUZ ordinances in place to keep the development from becoming a problem and to me it just shouldn't have happened. What we ended up doing was taking all of our finest fighters and our air craft carriers and bottling them all up in the Norfolk, Virginia area.

Now militarily when you're talking about the next war will be fought with large missiles, with large nuclear war heads, you're talking about absolutely nuts that that would occur.

LYN-So there were two Master Jet Bases, one at Cecil and one at Norfolk. It's now all combined.

KEVIN-Oceana, in Norfolk.

LYN-It's combined at one place. There are no carriers in this area so we went from three Naval Air Stations with air craft carriers and master jets and there are no carriers currently and we don't know if one will come. It's a political pull. The whole thing looks political.

KEVIN-Yes, it's been the military and proper function of the military, proper functioning of our defense strategies like placement has definitely boiled down to a lot of politics. But also, it had to do with finances as well due to the stupidity of extending out the war in Vietnam for so long and also the incursions, extended incursions that have occurred over the past twenty or so years, twenty-five years or longer in the Middle East.

We should have, the whole thing with the Islamic issue in the Middle East you know the second time an airliner in the '60's and '70's and the Olympic issue that occurred where the Islamics went after the swim team for the Israelis, we should have seen this coming forty-five, fifty years

ago. This is not rocket science. When somebody hates you and they hate you continuously they're gonna hate you not just then and not just now but also in the future.

LYN-We talked about what happened yesterday with dropping that bomb so we are probably in a pretty critical time for our Navy and Air Force to be strong and ready and to see what this nation chooses to do.

Well Kevin, I want to thank you for telling us about your career and your life here and we look forward to seeing what will come of possibly a memorial at Cecil Field that would honor those who have given their lives.

KEVIN-I remember, I remember going through the area near the chapel over there. It's not just, you know that whole area around that chapel, there's also an area in back of it that's an amphitheater is what they call but it is kind of a gathering area. I remember as Public Affairs Officer you know I didn't know as a pilot and being involved in operating and flying and other operations of the base, I didn't really know about all of that until I became the Public Affairs Officer. Once I did, I got to know about the other nooks and crannies on the base and found out about that and so forth and also you know went over there for different ceremonies and programs occurred over there and so forth. You know I look, when I got over there I've seen names, a couple of names I recognize that are over there.

LYN-I believe there are sixteen memorials there presently. Thank you, Kevin for your service.

We are going to add a little bit to this tape. Kevin is going to give us a little bit more information on Cecil.

KEVIN-Well, I was just gonna add that as Public Affairs Officer I got a chance to run into all kinds of issues and involve myself with all kind of issues and you know one of the issues was the environmental hazards and so forth that was going on at that time. We had a number of things that came to light, Hipps Road issue on the Westside having to do with a lot of things that had been buried below ground, toxic, perhaps toxic chemicals and different other things that had been put in the ground I think in fifty-five-gallon drums etc. over off of Hipps Road which is just to the east of Cecil.

Then we had hunters fall out of trees. We had the issue of "are there really nuclear weapons at Cecil Field?"

LYN-Are there nuclear weapons at Cecil Field?

KEVIN-There were, there's probably not any more. I got a chance to count those a couple of times. Let's see, what else, we had a large area at, within Cecil Field itself within the boundaries of Cecil Field a lot of old stuff that had been buried in the ground probably since World War II. These were some big issues back then when I was finally leaving active duty there was still going to be on-going for quite some time.

The Public Affairs guy who ran basically public affairs for the admiral at NAS Jacksonville was pretty much over all of that so most of that we let him, we let that group handle, those issues. He had been, he was a civilian guy and quite frankly I forget his name at this time but it would have been 1984, '84-time frame, but he was very adept at handling those things. He had been around the block many, many years in that particular arena and so but we had a lot of environmental issues and the concern, the big concern back then was the cost, was the cost of the clean-up. That was a big, big, big thing back then. The cost of the environmental clean-up, the cost of trying to extract the materials where ever they were, where ever they were found. We actually had some sort of incinerator that I'm not sure, I forget what property it was on, but it was some sort of mobile incinerator that they kept bringing the stuff to that was somewhere in the north part, not at Cecil itself I don't think but perhaps off the main base. I'm not sure if it was Yellow Water or maybe down some a little bit more toward 301, Highway 301.

I remember that there were issues involved with the burning and this mobile destroyer of toxins and exactly what the issue was but we had a problem with that. You know, I guess if I had had time I would have kind of looked some of these things up to refresh my mind about some of them.

It was a very lively time period. A lot of things going on at that time and I'm not sure if the environmental clean-up part of that had something to do with the BRAC Commission's decision. I'm not really sure about that because it seems to me that if that was that big of an issue then it would, it would be a big issue for both the state and the local as well as the federal government. No matter who owned the property you were still gonna have a clean-up.

LYN-Which has only been done in very small part. Am I correct?

KEVIN-I believe that's correct. I'm not positive about that because I haven't really been that tuned in in the last twenty or so years you know with that. But I can certainly tell you it was a very, very, very big issue back then.

LYN-So when the military decided they would approach the city about re-opening Cecil it did become again a very divisive subject in our city. How did you feel at that time about the potential of reopening?

KEVIN-When was that? Was that 2007?

LYN-I don't remember the year.

KEVIN-It was 2003 or 2007 or somewhere in that time frame. I was of course very much for it because I could see the military value, the strategic value, the strategic placement aspect of dispersing the assets and getting just out of the bottle neck of Norfolk, Virginia area and bringing them down here.

TAPE 3 SIDE A

KEVIN-The financial assets that the government had here, in other words it was, the amount of federal dollars that came into this area due to Cecil Field was very, very significant and if you will look at what has happened out there in that area on the, especially the east side, the town side of Cecil Field, now you do have some and some area some new homes and new smaller developments and things on that side but if you will look at what's happened between, a lot of what's happened between Cecil Field and 295, the crime has gone through the roof. It is probably the worst, crime-wise, the worst area in town, in Jacksonville. It keeps Zone 4 JSO people busy all the time. It's a nightmare. All that has to do with the fact with when Cecil left, or a lot had to do with the fact of when Cecil left, it just the infrastructure just basically crumbled and turned, was turned over into the hands that didn't care.

LYN-So, do you think there's potential for the return of Cecil Field?

KEVIN-My opinion is, you know you've got the Perot outfit out of Ft. Worth which is based out of Alliance Field and you know it's a fabulous group of people but they've got, their interests and there are other cooperations that have interest both on and off that air field. So, there's a lot of people who have heavily invested in that, in that area, commercial interests, and I every year that this goes by I would say, since it was closed, I would say that every year it gets drastically, there's a lower chance of the military coming back there. However, there's probably stipulations in turning over that property to the local government. There probably is a stipulation that if ever needed that it could revert back to the military or at least a portion of it could revert to the military. Hopefully there won't be that reason for that to happen but it certainly would not hurt the economy of this area to have the federal government in the form of the Navy or the Air Force or any other military operation use that air field.

LYN-We all hope that the area will develop a little faster. I would hope a little faster as a part of our city if it is not going to be military. We all have fond memories, and some hard memories, of Cecil Field. What we're doing with this oral history is putting on paper some memories of how it served this nation and how well it served the nation.

KEVIN-And that's, by the way, that is greatly appreciated. I know that you have other people you are working with on this project and please let them know that I and Councilman Love are greatly appreciative, both of us are former A-7 pilots, Navy pilots. We flew different things at different times. We've both were based at Cecil Field. That's where I first met Jim was at Cecil Field back in about '81, '82-time frame when he was going back through there.

Both of us kind of have part of our history is at Cecil Field and both of us know people that have had their careers there and probably have died there as well.

LYN-Many have died from Cecil Field. Thanks Kevin.