

Veteran: Kent E. Myers, Korean Conflict Veteran

Interview Date: July 26,2007

Interviewer: Alex E. Jolley

Int: Please state and spell your full name.

Vet: Kent E. Myers.

Int: Thanks. Where do you currently reside, in the city and state?

Vet: I reside in Cedar City, Utah. Do you want the full address, or just Cedar City?

Int: Just Cedar City's probably good. Is this the same area where you resided when you were drafted or when you enlisted?

Vet: Yes, sort of. I finished ROTC training at BYU in March of 1953 and then came back to Cedar City. In May of 1954, I was called to active duty.

Int: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

Vet: I enlisted, sort of. I agreed to serve if they trained me as an officer.

Int: In which branch of the service did you serve?

Vet: United States Air Force.

Int: Were you full-time or were you in a reserve?

Vet: That's a good question. I was full-time for the first two years. I was called directly to Korea. The Korean War was still going on. After I completed a two year assignment, I was released but I stayed in the active reserve for another 26 years. So I have 28 years all together.

Int: Where was your headquarters located?

Vet: In my first unit, I served at what was called K20. It was in Suwan, Korea. It was an air base there. I was a member of the 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Bomber Wing. Then, when the war ended, our wing, the 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Bomber Wing, was pulled out of Korea, and we went to Itazuke, Japan. That's where I served the remainder of my full-time active-duty.

Int: During what years did you serve?

Vet: I think I said that, but I'll repeat it. I served from 1954 until; it would have been 1990, time I got all of it in, Okay.

Int: What was the highest rank you achieved?

Vet: Lieutenant Colonel.

Int: Did you have any specific duties to that?

Vet: I did. While I was in the active-duty, I was an education and public relations officer. I did things like run the base newspaper, the base radio station, and base photography unit, that kind of thing. Also, I had charge of the library and other things like that that had a public relations kind of thing. And I also served on a, while I was in Japan, I served on an off base organization with all the government officials in Kyushu, that's the big island in Japan. It was called a providence unit of the governors of each of the providences, and I represented our base on that. So there was kind of a hodge-podge of duties, but most of it had to do with our relationships with, not only within the air base itself-with air men, officers and their families, but also the Japanese government.

Int: Were you ever decorated for your service?

Vet: I didn't receive any of the biggies, you know, like Silver Star and things of that type, but I did receive some unit citations for outstanding performance while I was in both Korea and Japan.

Int: Do you mind telling us why you got those?

Vet: Most of them were just for being there. You know, you served so long, you got that citation. A couple of them were really unusual. They were for extraordinary valor on the part of the whole unit. One of them came as a result of the last actually big air battle of the Korean War. Our fighter bomber unit went up along the Korean coast to the Yalu River. Normally they were just patrolling, but for some reason the Chinese launched a strike against them. They shot down nine of the MIGs, and you know, it was one of those unusual air victories. Of course, every one received a citation. I did receive a commendation from Nathan Twining. He was the Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman in Washington. When I left, just before I left Itazuke, I wrote a history of the 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Bomber Wing. I might have said the 5<sup>th</sup> earlier, but it's the 8<sup>th</sup> Fighter Bomber Wing, and it was published by the Air Force. I got a letter of commendation from him, and he was a four star general. So it was kind of nifty. That was probably, if you had a big one, that was probably it.

Int: Did you serve in a combat or non-combat position?

Vet: My position basically was non-combat. I didn't ever, well, the only combat related things I had was we were redeployed from Suwan down to Pusan on a training exercise, and we actually did get into a little combat threat, OK. But, I never was really under fire. So it was basically non-combat.

Int: Were there any people of your acquaintance who have become prominent historical figures?

Vet: That's a good question. One of the men that I served under, although I was only a First Lieutenant when I went into the Air Force full-time, one of the men that I served with was a man named William Momeyer. He was called 'Wild Bill' Momeyer. He was a two star general, and he went on to become fairly famous. He was one of the – well, he had become famous before I met him, but he went on politically to state. He led a flight of B-24 bombers off an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean in World War II, and you might remember that Doolittle did the same thing in a raid over Tokyo. Here he was on the other side of the world almost, and they hadn't ever practiced flying off of an aircraft carrier, but they were able to get there in the Mediterranean by using the aircraft carrier and they flew off and bombed the German forces that were in the desert there in North Africa during that time. The ground people that were working with them took the base at Tunisia and they were able to land the planes on land, so it had to be very well coordinated. That's how he got his name, by the way, 'Wild Bill', was because of that flight off the aircraft carrier.

Int: What was your relationship with him?

Vet: With 'Wild Bill'? I worked for him. He was my commanding officer. I was going to tell you that just a minute ago. As a first lieutenant you rarely get to serve with the uppities, you know, with the general officers, but because I was the base public relations officer I served on the wing staff so I was directly – he was my direct boss. There was nobody in between me and him. But I was also the junior officer. I was the only lieutenant in the whole bunch. Everybody else was majors, lieutenant colonels, colonels. But it was a great assignment.

Int: When you reflect on your military service, what is the most vivid memory of your service?

Vet: While I was in Itazuke, I was called up to Far East Air Force Headquarters in Tokyo. I don't know how many people remember this, but in 1955 the Russians shot down a B-29 over the Sea of Japan. We expected that they would say, Okay, they flew into Russian airspace. We knew exactly where the B-29 was, and so we immediately – this doesn't happen very often in military. Immediately they started sending out over the wire, then they didn't have the great communications, but they did have a telegraph wire and a teletype machine. I got to write one of the stories about that event. It was sent to Washington by teletype to be cleared and then sent back on AP. So, while I was still writing the story it was coming back as a release about this incident. It was king of a PR plus for us, because we got everything on the air and out in the world before the Russians had a chance to comment. Only one of the airmen survived the crash. He came back and confirmed the story that we had written. So it was probably the military highlight. Some of my family highlights were really better. If we have time I'll tell you about some of those.

Int: Were there particular moments of religious or spiritual experience during your service?

Vet: Yeah, a couple. Let's see, first of all, as a Latter-Day Saint, when I arrived at Suwan at K20. They all had a K20; all the bases had a number. The man I replaced happened to be a

Latter-Day Saint. He was from Logan; a man named Jerry—that doesn't sound quite right. I guess it was Terry, Terry Hansen. So he introduced me to the few Latter-Day Saints that were on the base at that time. There were only four of us. There were 2500 men there serving on that base. We had this little unit. I remember what a nice feeling it was to have those LDS men to meet with. Prior to that, on the way over, I went over on a troop ship, the first Sunday that we were out on the Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, I heard this announcement that there would be a Sunday service for Mormons, for LDS, in the nursery of the ship. Of course they had a nursery because they carried dependents to and from Japan as well as servicemen. So I went down there, and there was an old seaman there. He'd been in the service I guess most of his adult life. Anyway, he said, "I'm not active Mormon. I am a Mormon, but I'm not active. But I always like to see that Mormons have a place to meet when we're out to sea". He and I were the only ones. But I held the Priesthood and so we had the Sacrament together and had a little Sacrament Meeting; a little ten minute Sacrament Meeting. So that was kind of an interesting, one-time kind of experience also.

Int: Tell of your family life while serving.

Vet: In the active-duty part, that was a tough part for us. We'd expected that when I was called to active-duty that I'd be sent to a base in the United States for more training, but I was called immediately and sent to Korea just after I was commissioned. I didn't go to any other base for any other training except to Parks Air Force Base in California for a couple weeks to have all the shots and all the physical stuff to get ready to go. Cherie, my wife, and Ann, our oldest daughter, she was the only one that'd been born by then, they came to see me off. Her parents brought them down to Oakland where we loaded up on the ship. It was because it was in a war zone; of course dependents were not allowed to travel or to be with us. In October of that year, the war ended – well, the war ended prior to that, but in October of that year, we were moved to Japan. I made arrangements through the Air Force for Cherie and Ann to be brought to Japan, because we could then have quarters for families, and they came. One of the great moments was, we went to Yokohama to meet the ship. That was about 400 miles from Itazuke. When that ship pulled into the dock, here were all these servicemen waiting for their dependents to come. Here were all these dependents up on the rail of the ship; hundreds of each. You wondered, well, will you see, you know, will you know? Well, sure enough, after a few minutes Cherie and Ann saw me, and I saw them. It was kind of a grand reunion. It was special; a real highlight.

Int: What were your experiences of joy and sorrow during your service?

Vet: Well, I guess joy, for a lot, we did, of course there's always, whenever you're in a war zone there's always gonna be death. Of course, we lost some fighter pilots. Some of them I knew personally. You get this feeling, you know, you know that that's gonna happen, okay. When you leave to go into the service, especially in a time of war, you know that there's going to be death. That first time that I had to help with gathering the effects of one of the pilots who'd been killed to send to his folks, it was, it was kind of a bad moment. I suppose that the

highlights, the great joys were much more than the down part. It was exciting for me, and when Cherie and Ann came, exciting for them. We had never been overseas, never been to a foreign country. It opened up a whole new world for us. We got to know a lot of Japanese, and they became good friends with us. I was called to serve as an LDS group leader at Itazuke, sort of like a Branch President, or a Bishop—that same kind of calling. We had about 35 members in Itazuke. Some great experiences; I played football, that's an unusual thing that happened to me. When I got back to Itazuke, I became aware, because of my relationship over the library and over the physical facilities for dependents, which included the gymnasium, that they had a football team. When I got looking into it, they had eleven bases in Japan-- Air Force, Army, Navy, and every one of them had a football team. So there was a football league. The coach of that, and after we talked a little while, said, "Well, how come I don't have your records? Almost everybody that's played football, I get their records so I can talk to them." I said, "Well, I don't know why you haven't got 'em." He said, "Well, when'd you play"? And I told him, and he said, "Well I'd like you to come and dress us down and play with us – try out". So I went and tried out. I played with some great football players from all over the United States. Nick Rayhall, who was a great linebacker from Syracuse, and I ended up playing linebacker on the same team. Lo, and behold, and the end of the season, he and I were chosen to play in an all-star game up at Michie Stadium in Tokyo. The Air Force had a team against all the other combined services. We won that game, and I got a little silver cup that said team all-star, whatever. It was an interesting time. So you do, that was another thing that would probably have never happened to me had I not gone and served. Nick and I stayed in touch for a long time. We've lost touch now, but it was interesting. I made some great friends on that football team. They were all on that base, and I made some great friends.

Int: Describe your feelings of support from home.

Vet: We wrote letters. I don't know whether you'd know, most of the people watching this tape might, but they still do have a little air mail fold-up letter, and that was our basic means of communication was mail. You couldn't hook up your cell phone and call home. I've kept those letters. Cherie kept the ones that I sent to her. They've become an important history. My mother also kept the ones that I wrote to her. We wrote usually on a weekly basis, and oftener if necessary. When Cherie was preparing to come to Japan, there was a delay. I couldn't figure out, you know, you can't have instant communication, so a ham operator on the base arranged for me by him sending a radio signal to someone in San Francisco, and then on to somewhere else, I was actually able to talk to Cherie on that ham radio and ironed out the difficulties. She was able to get to Oakland on time to catch the boat. That was a kind of a fun.

Int: What were the physical conditions under which you served, like jungle, or desert, or?

Vet: Korea was a war torn country. When I got there, that was the thing that shocked me the most, was the devastation from all the fighting that had gone up and down the peninsula. Very few houses left, the villages had all been really badly damaged. The conditions there, we lived in

transit huts, eight officers in an open bay. We did have bathroom facilities a hundred yards away. It was not easy, but it wasn't really tough either, it wasn't that difficult. It's a kind of a sub-tropical country, and the heat, and humidity, and heavy rains, and it was, we had some tough times, okay, but not a lot.

Int: Are there any regrets about your service?

Vet: No. In fact I came very close to making a full-time career. When Bill Momeyer left, a colonel, a full colonel named Raymond came and took over his position. He asked me if I would consider staying in the service, and I said, "Yeah, I really would consider it". He said, "Well", I went in with a reserve assignment, he said, "I'll make a formal request to have to get a regular commission, and that would be your commission". And I said, "Yes, I want to go to West Point, or someplace". Of course that has advantages in promotion later down the line. But, the nine months that Cherie and I were apart, as a family, was kind a determining factor. As we looked down through the future we could see that happening fairly frequently. I wanted to maintain my service connection, because I really did love what I was doing. The service, the Air Force, was a great organization to work for and serve. The men were great, good leadership. We finally decided that we would get out of the service but maintain a connection with the Air Force through the reserve. That's what I did. Later on I became the commander of a reserve unit, and also served for about, almost 20 years as a liaison officer with the Air Force Academy out of Colorado Springs, Colorado. I interviewed and counseled young men and young women who were trying to get into the Academy to be trained. It was a great reserve assignment. I kept that up. In 1990, there comes a point when if you don't get promoted you're gonna have to leave the service; in 1990 there were only three full colonel positions in the United States for Air Force Reservists, and there were about 300 of us that were eligible. I made it through the first two or three cuts, but I didn't make it to the last three, so I was actually required, I suppose required, I would've been retired no matter what. That was the year that I retired from the university here, Southern Utah University. So it worked out beautifully. I took a one year assignment down in Irvine, California. While I was there, a sergeant over at LAX, where they had a Air Force Unit, called me and said, "Are you Lieutenant Colonel Myers"? And I said, "Yes". And he said, "I'm Sergeant Masterson, and I have your retirement papers here. I'd like you to come over". So, I actually retired while we were living in Irvine, California. It's been very good for me, the retirement.

Int: What is the single most positive experience of your service?

Vet: Oh, that is tough. Let's see. I don't know where to start on that one. I'll tell, maybe I'll tell you one little one in Japan, okay, well actually in Korea. There was no printing presses where we could have a newspaper printed in Korea during the war, so I flew to Japan to establish a printing contract at Itazuke, by the way. It was the closest base to where we lived, in the city of Fukuoka, and set up a contract with them, the printer there, to print our newspaper so that we'd have a weekly paper on the base. It was interesting. We would get the stories and put it all

together, as a newspaper all together, and one of my airmen would take it to Japan. They would typeset it and print it. He'd wait there and load it back up on the airplane and bring it back from Japan. So, that was a kind of a nice PR highlight. Probably the one in Japan that was the highlight, that provincial organization that I worked with, the government officials I worked with, when I left, they wrote me a wonderful letter of commendation and brought it to the air base and presented it to me, had a big dinner, took me downtown, Cherie and I, and had a big seven course Japanese meal. So, that was the highlight. We kept that, it was put on a beautiful scroll, we had that framed. So that was a great highlight. In the reserve unit, I think probably my work with the young men right here in the high schools around us that went into the service by going to the Air Force Academy. It's amazing, but some of those now are retired from the Air Force, got their 30 years in.

Int: How has your service colored your current political, social, or religious views?

Vet: It's strengthened all of those. Alex, that's a good question. I was suddenly moved into an arena that I'd never been in before; foreign country, a new job, but an Air Force Commissioned Officer. When I took the oath to go into the Air Force, it touched me that I was making a commitment to defend the United States and the Constitution. It made a difference in my life. My service in the Air Force was a remarkable time for me and my family. The continuation in the reserves also meant a lot to me. Socially, of course, we met a lot of people of different cultures, different backgrounds, and that was really good for us. Politically it made me realize just how great the United States is. When you're on the firing line, you know, although I was not in combat, I could've been, they could've attacked our base, in fact we did have an alert once as I told you before that didn't turn into anything that caused me serious harm. I suspect that religiously it had made a tremendous difference. Back here, back here in Cedar City, we had all these other Mormons around us to support us. In Japan and Korea, there were five of us. That was an interesting difference, you know. People watched you carefully, you know. Were you living your religion, was one of the most common questions we got asked, because we didn't drink and other things like that. But it kind of set us apart. They wanted to know why, and it made a difference, changed me, made me more determined to kind of live my standards. Any others?

Int: If you could give advice to the service men and women of today, what would it be?

Vet: Know that you're serving a just cause. Sometimes we get into situations like Vietnam and now even Iraq, and some people say we shouldn't be there, and I won't debate that issue, but once were there, once were committed, you know, we need to do the best we can to help those we've been called to help. I would say that to them. When you become a member of the armed forces, you need to realize that you have made that commitment that you will in fact try to do all you can to serve others, including people who are not free like we are. I mean, you hear the stories of how our freedom was secured and kept because of the services of men and women who fought. I've had that feeling. In Korea it was really there. You knew that something really

important was happening. There needed to be a free people. If you look at South Korea today, you can realize how important it was for those millions of people. If you compare it with North Korea, those that didn't, did not have the free society, it's just amazing. You have to realize how much good you can do as a military and armed forces person.

Int: How do you feel about the current conflict in Iraq?

Vet: I'm a little ambivalent. Of course, I always hate it when someone I that I know, or a friend of someone I know is killed or maimed, but I think the same things I've just explained. It's a high risk situation there because we're dealing with a new kind of threat in the world. Terrorism has become the mode of war. There was a little bit of that with some elements in Korea, that kind of commando kind of things that happen, but nothing like it is now. It's a new world we're in; being able to manage the threat from terrorists around the whole world is a tough job. Countries who are free, who have governments that could guarantee your freedom, are aware of how great the threat is. September 11<sup>th</sup> proved that it was real to all of us. You remember probably the fervor of patriotic behavior for the next four or five years after that, that's kind of slipped away because the threat doesn't seem quite as real to us. You only have to read the newspapers about what happened in Glasgow just in the last little while, terrorists running the car into the airport, knowing that it's still real. I think the service men face a tremendous burden right now, because they're fighting in a theater of operations sort of like Korea, a long ways from home. They're realizing that it's hard, a difficult task to maintain freedom no matter where you are in the world. We are so fortunate to have a government that's based on a constitution where individual freedom is the most important thing that we have. I cherish that.

Int: That's all I have. Thanks.

Vet: You're welcome.