

Antarctic Deep Freeze Oral History Project
Interview with H. Kim Lett, Maj., USAF (Ret.)
conducted on December 31, 1998, by Dian O. Belanger

DOB: Today is December 31, 1998, New Year's Eve, and this is Dian Belanger and I'm speaking with Kim Lett about his experiences in Deep Freeze II.

Good morning, Kim. Thanks for talking with me and we'll look forward to getting started.

KL: Good morning, Dian, and thanks for giving me part of your New Year's Eve.

DOB: Tell me something about your background. Just briefly, where you grew up, where you went to school, what you decided to do with your life, and in particular anything that might suggest ending up in a place as exotic as Antarctica.

KL: Well, I grew up in east Tennessee in Knoxville, didn't complete high school. I left in my senior year and joined the Navy at seventeen years of age during the Korean War, 1953. And then shortly after I got in, the war was concluded.

I don't even know why I became a Seabee. It's just something that came up in boot camp. You had to go one direction or the other, and I did. And I was assigned for a couple of years in California at Point Mugu at the Naval Missile Test Center and then at Port Hueneme for a very short time with Mobile Construction Battalion 9, which I went to Kodiak, Alaska, for six months with that, which is rather interesting because in those days Alaska was not a state—it was a territory. I remember because they had one law enforcement officer on the island of Kodiak, and it was a Deputy U.S. Marshal. And we, of course, being young guys had run-ins with him every now and then. [Laughs]

And then I had had an officer that took an interest in me, and she convinced me to take a GED test and get a high school diploma when I was stationed at Point Mugu in California, so I did that. And then somehow or another she encouraged me to try for the Naval Academy. So when I was in Alaska, my tour up there was curtailed because I was assigned to go to the Naval Academy Preparatory School at Bainbridge, Maryland. I got there and failed the physical on my eyes, so there I was back to the old status again.

I went to Puerto Rico and I was assigned in a classified facility at Ramey Air Force Base down there—very highly classified—but in my spare time I used to moonlight. It was an Air Force base, but we had a hundred Navy people in a special installation down on the beach called Naval Facility, and I moonlighted at the Officers' Club there as a waiter and a bartender. I became sort of the headwaiter up at the club, and I got along pretty good with the base commander who was a colonel.

One day he asked me to take leave and work for about a week or so in the club full time, and he couldn't tell me what it was—it was classified. So I'm for always doing things a little differently, and I said, "Okay." So he said, "Well, I'll let you know when to start

leave," and he said, "I'll arrange for your commander to give you the leave and everything." I said, "Okay."

I walked in one morning and they handed me a letter, and I had to pick two other waiters to work with me. We were the only people on the base authorized to wear civilian clothes at that time because the Joint Chiefs of Staff with heavy security came down for a secret meeting and stayed there for quite a while, and then the Secretary of Defense Mr. Wilson came down, and they thought that the President was going to come, but he didn't.

And while there, I got pretty familiar with all the chiefs and the chairmen of the various branches of the service. Admiral Radford was the chairman of the JCS at that time and Admiral Burke was CNO, and they found out that I was Navy at an Air Force base and took an interest, and somehow or another this Deep Freeze thing came up.

We were not allowed to volunteer for things, this was a very classified program, and so I said, "Well, I'd like to go but I'm not allowed to volunteer for it." And Admiral Burke said, "Write your name and serial number down. When I get back to Washington, I'll see what I can do." And I was just young and dumb enough, I didn't even really realize who he was. But I did, I gave it to him, and two weeks later I was assigned. So that's how I got into Deep Freeze.

DOB: But you wanted to go.

KL: Oh yes, yes. I was eager. I was a volunteer.

DOB: Why?

KL: Well, I'd never been there, I guess. [Laughs] I really don't know why I wanted to go. I was ready to get out of the service. The fact is, I had to extend my enlistment for two years in order to go. But it was just something that appealed to me. I don't know, the adventure of it or whatever. So I did different things all the time and so that's why I went.

DOB: You ended up with a little bit of time in Greenland. Was that in preparation for Antarctica?

KL: Yes.

DOB: What did you do there?

KL: Well, there were a number of the drivers, we called them—we were the equipment operators. We ran all the construction equipment, bulldozers, etc. And the Army had an Arctic Engineering Task Force up above Thule, Greenland, on the Greenland Ice Cap.

It's called Camp Tuto, which was short for Thule Takeoff. Apparently there were only a couple of natural ramps that you could drive a wheeled vehicle up onto that ice cap. The rest of it is more like sheer cliff type and everything, and that was one, and they had some low ground pressure modified (wide tracks) bulldozers up there that they used on the ice similar to what we would be using in Antarctica. So they took us up there to train for about six weeks. We got about four days of training on them, but the rest of the time we bulldozed rock for them.

DOB: Well, I guess that's training.

KL: Yes, we were up there for about six weeks.

DOB: And then what?

KL: And then we came back to Davisville, Rhode Island, and that was pretty close to the time for the jumpoff, we called it, when we started departing. And people went out in various ways. Some on ships, and I was in a group that was flown down. I flew out of Quonset Point on a Navy R5D, which was called a C-54 in the Air Force—DC-4 in commercial. I don't remember how many passengers we had, probably forty or something like that. And it was a mixture. Some of us were wintering over and some were what they call summer help, that came down just to help in the summer, and basically all Seabees as far as I recall.

DOB: Did you have anything to do at Davisville?

KL: Well, Davisville was more of a—it was a gathering point, and when we were originally chosen for Deep Freeze II, if I'm correct in my figures, there were about five thousand people who volunteered that met the criteria. You had to have a certain specialty and a certain status of record, I guess, or something like that, and all the records were hand-screened, and from the five thousand, five hundred were picked.

And five hundred—I may be a little off on the numbers but they're roughly this—were sent to Davisville, and from there we went through three days of psychiatric testing with a group from Bethesda, I think, from the Naval Hospital over here. That's the way I recall it, anyway, and various ones were eliminated for psychiatric or other reasons there until we were down to about a hundred and fifty military. And then we were divided out into the seven scientific stations that would be in Antarctica.

DOB: Did you have any say or knowledge about where you would go or were you just—

KL: No, as I recall I don't remember that there was any knowledge about where we went. I don't think I had any choice in it at all. I was selected for Little America V, probably because I was so young and dumb, because I think they looked for some strong backs and

weak minds that in a lot of cases young guys, you know, because it was physically tough down there—it really was. While we were there we did some training.

DOB: You didn't have anything to do with preparing the equipment?

KL: No, I really didn't. One thing I did do, though, is I did load the equipment, the moving stock on the ships. They, the ship's crew, weren't allowed to operate it, and I was qualified to operate all the equipment. So I used to go down every time the ship would be loading—usually at night because the last thing we'd put on would be the rolling stock because we put it on top of other cargo and stuff like this—and I'd go down and put the equipment in, drive it inside the holds of the ship and everything, and get it where they could tie it down and do all that.

But as far as prepping for that, no. There were other people—I was pretty young. I was twenty years old at the time [laughs] so I just pretty well did what I was told.

DOB: What did you know about Antarctica before you went there?

KL: Not a lot. Really not a lot. I knew where it was and I knew that no one lived there and I knew it was pretty cold. I knew about penguins and things of that nature, but—I learned a lot.

At Davisville we got some training and some exposure, and we were told about Admiral Byrd and things like that, and I probably read a couple of the books and things while I was at Davisville because I've always been a heavy reader. Then we trained on cold-weather gear and how to handle yourself in the cold weather and that sort of thing. I don't remember what the rest of the training was. A lot of it was lectures.

I used to drive a truck up to Natick, Massachusetts, to the Army Quartermaster Depot, and they did the R&D for the polar clothing that we wore. And I used to go up and pick up some of that and bring it back down, and then it would be put into the supply system and I guess allocated out to the various stations and the ships it would be shipped on.

Our boots . . . I want to call the boots something and I can't think of the name of them—but we had a white rubber polar boot that had an air valve in it, and it was developed at Natick.

DOB: Bunny boots?

KL: No, the bunny boots were a felt boot. And the bunny boots were a real problem because if they ever got wet, they were no good whatsoever at that point, and if you were in and out, they're going to get wet. If you stayed out all the time, they would stay dry basically in the real cold weather. But if you got inside where it would start to thaw, the bunny boots would get wet. These boots were rubber, and they had an air valve in them

so they could be worn in an airplane and you could loosen the valve and change the pressure inside of the boot as your altitude in the cabin of the airplane changed. I did fly on a couple of airplanes while I was down there, so I guess that was a good feature.

They were pretty good but you couldn't stand around in them—we couldn't stand around. You had to learn to work at a certain pace. You didn't want to crack a sweat because that would just break down all your insulation of your clothing and everything. But you had to work hard enough to generate heat.

But the boots were pretty good. I wore them through—I think the coldest I ever worked outside was about eighty-seven below zero, and I spent almost all day out there.

DOB: Did you get frostbite?

KL: Oh yes. That happened. You'd get it on the tip of your nose or your cheek or something. We always tried to have at least one other person and you did buddy checks, look at each other's face. We wore beards and you couldn't see a lot of that, too, at least I did. Most of the people did that worked outside.

DOB: Let's back up a little. You said you flew down on an R5D. Tell me about that flight. Where did you go and—

KL: Okay. I don't remember the exact number of days, but we left Quonset Point, Rhode Island, and we flew at about 200 mph to Alameda Naval Air Station in San Francisco, in Oakland, and that was for crew rest because we had one crew and it was really to put the crew to bed—it wasn't for our rest.

And then basically we stayed there eighteen hours or something and then we pressed on to Hawaii and we went to Barbers Point. We spent at least one night there. I don't think I had that in my diary, I'm not sure. I can look at it in a little bit. Because I know I got liberty downtown into Honolulu there, the infamous Hotel Street. We talked about getting a tattoo of a penguin or something like this, but we didn't do it.

And then we went from Honolulu, from Barbers Point Naval Air Station to Canton Island, and that was a refueling point. We were there for about an hour-and-a-half.

DOB: Where is that?

KL: It's in the Pacific, pretty close to the equator, and it's west, southwest, of Hawaii. It's not a very large island. It's sort of a donut-shaped coral atoll out there. In fact, you could see old ships sunk out there from the war (WWII). You could see them in the water as you flew in, the water was so clear.

The station was maintained by Pan American. Pan American used to run little stations in odd places all over the world supporting their operations, but a lot of other people would use their support and get refueled and some servicing, minor mechanical work, they'd have some capability there.

That was a scheduled stop and we refueled at Canton, and we went from Canton to Nandi in the Fiji Islands. Suva, I believe, is the capital of the Fijis, if I remember correctly. Nandi, though, had an airstrip and Suva didn't and they weren't that close to each other. I don't know, it wasn't a thirty-minute ride to get from one to the other. That's all I do recall in telling you we were there. But we did spend a night there. Got into a little trouble there, I guess. There was an incident that happened there that became a political incident.

DOB: What kind of trouble?

KL: Well, there was one pretty good size hotel in town, and it had grounds with palm trees and things like this on it. And it was run by a big British fellow with a sort of an arrogant type attitude which got him crossways with some of us young guys, because we'd do something and he'd say, "Typical Yanks" or something like that and look down his nose.

And they had a barracks behind the hotel where their staff—the women who worked in the hotel who were maids and whatever, and a lot of them were young Fiji girls. I remember there was some Polynesian woman sort of like the dean of the dormitory or something like that.

And anyway, some of the girls came out and—this was planned by the hotel—they'd put on a little dance show for us out there with native dancing and things like this. And the guys were drinking a little beer and so forth, and apparently someone had made an appointment to see one of the girls later that night, but they had a curfew in this barracks.

And somehow or another, someone—now I didn't see this so it's what I recall of it—peeked into the barracks and scared one of the women and she screamed. And when she screamed—apparently at this time I think it was Admiral Dufek's aide was with us. I think he was on the flight with us, I'm pretty sure that was it. We had a Navy full commander flying the airplane, I know that, but then Admiral Dufek's aide, I believe, was with us. And he was talking with the hotel manager apparently, and when they heard this scream, they came running around the side of the hotel—and it was dark at this time, a few lights here and there—and I guess what happened was the hotel manager grabbed one of the guys and when he did, the fellow hauled off and hit him and knocked him down.

So then, that was it, and the next thing we knew, the Fiji police showed up, and they were tall. They were big guys. They were all like six-one, six-two, and it was sort of ironic.

They had the big what we would call Afros now, but it was their hairdo, we called it fuzzy-wuzzies, you know, big hair like that. And they wore blue tunics and blue skirts and sandals with no socks. They were big fellows. But they did, they wore skirts. That's the way they dressed. And they surrounded the hotel that night. We were put under house arrest—the whole group, regardless of whether you were involved in the incident or not.

Apparently the plane commander tried to apologize for it, and the British consul was at the airport in the morning, because the Fijis at that time were a British colony. Apparently the apology was not accepted. And we got on the airplane and we headed for Christchurch, New Zealand, and when we arrived, we were put under ship's arrest—the whole passenger crew. And we were put on the icebreaker *Glacier* in Lyttelton harbor at Christchurch. They bussed us from the airfield down. That was a grass field in those days, too.

DOB: So you didn't fly all the way to Antarctica, you just went—

KL: No.

DOB: Okay. All right. So now you're on the *Glacier*.

KL: Yes. So now we're on the *Glacier* and we're under ship's arrest.

DOB: How many of you?

KL: There were about forty, I think, roughly. We knew who hit the hotel manager, and it was one of the summer help. It wasn't any of the wintering-over party. And then we all said, "Well what are they going to do with us? Send us to Antarctica?" [Laughs] We were kind of flip about it, but we didn't like being locked on the ship.

They kept us on there for about three days, and finally they gave it up. We had a little talk with the fellow who did the hitting, and we said, "Enough's enough here. Now we're going to not squeal on you, but we want to get off this ship." And he finally agreed that if we were on there one more day, he'd go ahead and confess it was him, but they gave it up.

So then we were allowed to go into Christchurch on liberty, which is really nice. New Zealand is a very nice country, and they were very nice to us. And we were all in uniforms; we had no civilian clothes or anything. We'd rent bikes and ride bikes down there. Everyone rode bikes and things like that. We had a little trouble with that left-hand traffic, though.

And we could go to the pubs, and if I remember correctly, the New Zealand—well, I guess it was British pound sterling. Sterling was the currency there, I know that. And

it was twenty shillings to the pound, and I think in those days the pound was like four dollars and forty or four dollars and eighty cents U.S. Because it went down to like two forty for a long, long time and then in the past few years there's been a lot of currency fluctuations. It's lower than that now.

But the way I remember it is a shilling was twenty-four cents and there were twenty shillings to the pound. That's the way we equated it, and we thought it was great because we could go to a pub there and we could get a whiskey for one shilling or we could get a glass of beer for sixpence (12 cents), which is a half of a shilling because it was twelve pence to a shilling. And we thought that was pretty good. We could even afford that.

I only made about eighty bucks a month or something at that time, so I didn't have a whole lot of money, but it didn't matter because you couldn't drink up your pound sterling. You'd be literally bombed, and most of the time you didn't get to pay for it anyway. The New Zealanders (kiwis) would buy all the drinks for everyone—the Yanks. They treated us very well.

DOB: So you got on the ship then, and how long did it take you from Christchurch to Little America?

KL: Well, we stayed in Christchurch—let me just see if I do have this recorded. It would be in December, so I've got the dates I left Christchurch. Yes, I do. I have it recorded here.

"December the 3rd we left Nandi, no meals, no food on the airplane, good flight, arrived at Christchurch, at 1700 [hours] and boarded the USS *Glacier* AGB4 at 1900. The British consul's report in Nandi was awaiting us. We were restricted to the ship that night."

And that was December the 3rd, and then we stayed in Christchurch on the ship until December the 7th, really, and for some reason or another they wanted to go to Wellington, New Zealand, and they took the ship and we went to Wellington.

And the *Arneb*, which was one of our cargo ships, was there, and I was able to get off of the *Glacier*, and some of the guys that I knew from Davisville, who were on the *Arneb* going to wherever that went, to their station down in Antarctica, were on it, and so I went over and visited with them. I notice that, and then we turned around, we got in there at 0930 and at 1700 we got under way and went back to Christchurch.

And then they gave us our last liberty, that was December the 9th, and it says, "the 10th, left Christchurch bound for Antarctica," and then the next day we rendezvoused with the *Atka*, the *Northwind*, the *Arneb*, and the *Merrell* at about four-thirty in the morning, in

calm weather going south. And then I've got down here we did twelve knots in calm seas south, ever south under way.

And then I saw my first piece of ice about four days south out of New Zealand—polar ice. The temperature was thirty-three degrees then.

Then that evening we arrived at the ice pack and went parallel to it to rendezvous with the *Nespelen*. It was a tanker, if I recall correctly. So I guess it had to join up because we were the one icebreaker that was going to lead the ships in. We started in the ice pack on December the 16th, or eight hundred fifty miles from McMurdo.

DOB: Did you go to McMurdo first?

KL: Yes. And then we left the convoy and we went with the *Northwind*, which was a Coast Guard breaker, I think, and the *Arneb*. Oh, and then we went over and picked up Captain Ketchum who was task force flag, Task Force 43, and then we went back to the rest of the convoy.

This was an interesting incident, I thought. We were going through—and I remember the weather was pretty well overcast, the seas weren't bad and it was cold, and the ships were in two lines abreast of each other going down, and I know that the crew knew this, but we didn't know it—we were just passengers. And all of a sudden, three Japanese whalers went right down in the middle of us. We caught them poaching. They were in restricted waters.

DOB: Well, tell me, I don't care about the details too much because I can look those up, but I'm interested in what you thought about what you were seeing as you arrived in Antarctica. What it looked like and—

KL: Well, I wasn't bored. I just thought this was all fantastic. And when we were breaking ice on that breaker, you couldn't sleep anyway because they gave us the compartments up in the bow of the ship, and that ice was crunching down through there at all hours. We broke a lot of ice.

DOB: So would it take you days to get through the ice pack?

KL: Well, we went into the ice on December the 15th, and then we broke through the pack at a point on December the 19th. We got into some open water, but then we went back into ice later. And then we spotted Mt. Erebus on the 20th, so five days roughly.

We ran into a lot of seals—we started seeing that. And then penguins, we started seeing them.

DOB: So you went from McMurdo first and then over to Little America.

KL: Yes. Went to McMurdo We had to wait out there even after we got Mt. Erebus in sight. We were in McMurdo Sound but we couldn't get off. The ice was ten feet thick and it had us just about dead stopped, and the *Nespelen*, the tanker, was caught in the ice. And then we had to wait for the wind to move the ice, so we sat out there for two days, but we did do some work on the—we started unloading some stuff out on the ice out there.

I worked all night. We laid ten miles of flexible fuel line across the bay ice. That's what we were doing. And that was the start of the real hard work, and that was Christmas Eve and we had a little beer party on the bay ice on Christmas Day.

We left on December the 27th for Little America. The convoy included the *Greenville Victory*, the *Northwind*, the *Atka*, the *Arneb*, and the *Merrell*. And we had open water—just about eight hours out of McMurdo we were in open water. Nineteen degrees above zero, the temperature was. So that's the 27th, and it took us two days to get to Kainan Bay.

DOB: So then did you unload at the ice shelf then at Kainan Bay?

KL: Well, it says, "We can't tie up yet. The water's getting rough." We couldn't get in against the barrier for some reason or another. And then December the 31st . . . so we got there the 29th and as of December the 31st we still weren't tied up.

DOB: I'm going to stop for just a minute.

[Pause in recording]

DOB: I want to ask you about your arrival at Little America. By the time you got there in December of 1956, Deep Freeze I had been completed and that wintering-over party was ready to leave then on the ships that you came with? Is that true?

KL: Well, not quite. There was a planned overlap, and the fact is I think they were probably—when we first got in there, they may have been out with the tractor train coming back from Marie Byrd Land. They'd made one trek out there, and then we made one a little later in that summer, just before the winter. After they left, we ran another tractor train out to Marie Byrd Land.

DOB: Did you go?

KL: No, I didn't go on that one.

DOB: What did you think of this place, Little America? Did you think, well, this is home for a year?

KL: Well, there were a lot of mixed emotions with that one and it progresses. We had three or four cargo ships that we had to get offloaded, and it was rather difficult because the barrier was higher than the ships. I'm going to say the barrier was like a hundred feet above the water. The Ross Ice Shelf—we called it the barrier.

And they had some small (about 50 feet long) landing craft—we called them LCMs or Mike boats—that were stored on the hatches of the cargo ships. There were two of them that had hatches covered, and we had to use a D-8 Caterpillar with what we called an A-frame which was sort of like a crane arm attached to it—and ran a highline from the ship's cargo booms up to the D-8 and had to actually drag those boats up onto the ice shelf so we could get into the hatches. That wasn't as bad as later when we couldn't get them back down, so they stayed—they didn't go out with the ships.

And we dragged them up to camp behind the D-8s, and we used one, if I recall—I think we took two of them, it may have been only one, but I know for sure we took one—and then we put a little chicken wire and burlap and a two-by-four frame over the top of it and stored all of the beer. Thirty-eight thousand cases of beer, if I recall correctly, were stored in that. That became the repository for all of the beer.

But then we worked just twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours a day continually trying to get those ships offloaded. They had to pull out because the weather got rough and then they'd come back in.

And then I got involved in a project to blow the barrier down there. We had a demolition project that got started.

DOB: Tell me about that.

KL: That was rather interesting. I can't remember exactly how long we went. We went something between forty-eight and seventy-two hours of continuous work with no sleep. We had to get the barrier blown.

What had happened was that the waves had eroded part of the ice shelf and there was a projection under water that was sticking out twenty feet, thirty feet out and wouldn't let the ships next to the barrier because of that, and we were trying to cut that ice off at the bottom. We were using C-4 plastic underwater demolition packages for it.

And we had an Army major down there who was summer-type polar expert or something, I don't recall, but he was a demolition guy, too, and he was basically in charge of the group. There were about five or six of us. Chief Gudmundson was down on the barrier with it, I was there, I don't recall who the other two or three people were.

But we were manual labor hauling these forty-pound packs of explosives out onto this bad ice because the ice was all cracked up and everything. And then we would lower it down into the water with a rope, and then detonate it after we moved back from there.

Well, the problem was we didn't get completely off of that bad ice, and it started trying to break up with us on it. And we were roped together, we had safety lines tying us all together, and all the ships were out. They could see us from the bay.

I understood, I never saw it, but I heard that Disney had a film of that—had a photographer out in the bay and that they showed it back here in the USA on TV or something, but I've never seen it, so I don't know.

But anyway, you'd try to move, because this ice was trembling with us out there. And it would open up like small crevasses and I went down to my armpits, and it just like opened up and I went down like this. We had the safety line between each other and finally got off the ice and got back to the solid barrier, and very shortly after we did that—and I don't know how many minutes it was—the whole thing turned upside down.

That was when we did one of our last charges on it. We did a double pack and everything like that so I think we had eighty-eight pounds down there or something like that. I don't really remember. I think one pack was ten kilos, and we were tying two packs together, and I think we finally went to four.

But it was a lot of effort to get it done, and in that snow and no sleep, we were going around the clock. They even had a doctor down there with us at the last part just to try to make sure that we weren't so physically exhausted that we did the wrong thing, because if you're fooling around with explosives and you're that tired, you know.

The tractor train was out at that particular point. I think they had already gone out to Marie Byrd Land so that's why I was down with the demolition project.

DOB: Did you have any background for demolition work?

KL: I had worked some demolition when I had been in Alaska, but I wasn't really a demolition expert. The major did all the fusing and stuff like that. I was just a mule.
[Laughs]

DOB: Did it work? Did you create the proper barrier access?

KL: Oh yes. Once that thing turned, we were able then to get the ships in once we broke it off. Then they could nudge it out with a ship that could move that chunk out of the way. So yes, and then they were able to get back in.

And it was necessary because there was a big storm coming; they had to get the ships out.

They were afraid they were going to get frozen in. There was a lot of pressure, and a lot of the details I didn't really know because here again, I sort of did what I was told. I didn't have any management authority at that time.

DOB: Well I understand that in the period—in the summer when the ships arrived, in late December usually, that it was a very hectic time in the camps because there are now twice as many people. Tell me about that.

KL: They were hot-bunking basically. We didn't have enough beds or places. We had beds but we kept sleeping bags that we slept in, and you'd wait till some guy got up and then you would go get in his bed. [Laughs] And that's really what you had to do. We even did that later the following summer down at McMurdo. We hot-bunked down there, too.

I had a little different background in the respect that I went to three stations there. I served at three different stations. I wintered at Little America, but then on the first ever early flight, we took an R4D and flew down to McMurdo.

They had had some accidents, they had a driver or so injured, they had a bulldozer—one burned up in a fire in a garage, things like this. And they needed help to get the summer runway open at McMurdo, so I volunteered to go.

And we went—I don't remember the date, it's in here, it probably is right here—but we went down and it was like fifty some below zero when we left. It was the coldest (-55 degrees) and earliest flight they'd ever done at that time. We spent days just digging the airplanes out of the snow up at Little America. I think we took two airplanes in case one went down. So we had two, I believe that was what it was.

So I went to McMurdo in . . . it must've been September or something, August-September time frame. I could look the date up, but—[it was September 3, 1957].

DOB: I think I read it as October.

KL: Yes, it could've been, I'm not exactly sure. But I worked down there through about December helping to get the runway open and just becoming an additional heavy-equipment operator for them down there.

And as it turns out, we got the runway opened, and I mean we just pushed snow on that bay ice out there. We had to have I think we were about sixteen feet thick or as deep as we could core it anyway, so we had to have something like fourteen feet to support the big C-124 Globemasters and all this that came in.

And then that was the time (October 15) when they flew the first ever commercial flight.

They flew a Pan Am Clipper in, and that was into my—I called it my runway because at one point I was the only equipment operator we had with the flu and everything else.

The first plane that came in brought the flu with it, and we had not been exposed to anything and no resistance whatsoever, and the whole camp was down with the flu. I was running about a hundred and two temperature, and I was in the best shape of anyone so I was—we had a storm come in right after that and the wind blew a foot of snow across the runway, and it had to be cleaned off before we could bring any more airplanes in, and I was the only equipment operator we had. So out I went, and I'd go work as long as I could.

Skipper Flynn would drive his little Jeep out, because we'd cut the road down to ice and he could run on the ice with that Jeep, and he'd bring his Jeep out and bring a little brown bag full of medicinal whiskey. And he'd get in my dozer with me and then I'd hook up something like a snow plane for him just to drag because he could make the dozer go forward. He wasn't skillful at operating it, but he could do that much. So he would drive the dozer up and down the strip smoothing it out with that snow plane thing, and I'd take his Jeep and go up to camp and get a bite to eat and then come back down, and then he would leave me.

And then when you got tired, when I couldn't do it anymore, I'd go up to camp and sleep until I woke up, and then get up and go back down there and do it. I worked sixteen, eighteen—I got caught in a storm with 80 mph winds out there once and had to stay out there for something like forty-eight hours in the little control tower shack that we had. I couldn't get back into camp—couldn't see it to get back. We were out four or five miles out from camp out on the bay ice.

So I took pride in that runway. That was my runway. I practically built it.

I wish I—and I never thought to bring this. I do have something that would be of interest. I don't know if you saw it in Denver or not. I was flying probably about fifteen years ago, something like that, someplace—I don't even remember where I was going—but I was on Pan American and I was flying first class.

I was working international so I was always overseas someplace, and the stewardess came by and gave me a menu in flight. And I happened to glance at the cover of it, and lo and behold, this is a copy of a painting of the Pan Am Clipper sitting at McMurdo. And apparently what they did was that Pan Am had commissioned and had twelve oils done of historic events in Pan Am's history, and this was one of the twelve. And in that picture was my bulldozer because I did the refueling sled. I pulled the fuel sled for the plane and all that.

And it turned out that was the only one of these that they had on the airplane, they were all different things, and no one else on that airplane would've had any sense about it at all, but when I saw that, they didn't get it back. I kept it.

And the fact is I have a friend who is a . . . I don't know if he's a curator or something like that, of the American Airlines museum in Dallas. Ben's a retired American captain, and Ben has been saying he thinks we can find that painting. If I can get them together with my black and white photos of my dozer and that airplane and that menu, it might—

DOB: They'd like it, yes. Let's go back to Little America a little bit, and . . . or we can talk about McMurdo, too, but I'm interested in your work as a Seabee and principally I believe you were called a construction driver?

KL: Yes.

DOB: And I'm interested in the vehicles that you drove. Tell me about them and why these particular types of equipment were on the ice and why they were good for what they did, or were they.

KL: Oh yes, they were. We had primarily three different types of moving vehicles. We had the D-8 bulldozers—I know I saw in this film that Doc Aldrich has got I saw D-4s there, but I don't remember us using the D-4s for anything during the winter. We used D-8s, at least I did, and I really don't recall the D-4s being there.

DOB: What were they?

KL: D-4—it's a smaller bulldozer. Doc Aldrich showed this film thing he had when they were building Little America. He showed it back in the hospitality room up there, and the tractors they used there, most of them were D-4s. So I don't know if that was the original thing with Deep Freeze I or not when they went down, but anyway, we brought in D-8s, and they're much bigger.

I don't remember the weight of the D-4, but these modified D-8s weighed fifty thousand pounds, twenty-five tons, and the tracks on them were—if you see one around here, and you see a lot of D-8s and D-9s around here in construction projects, you don't know what you're looking at, I mean types. I think their normal track is like thirteen inches wide, with the steel plates that go on to the chain that goes around the sprocket wheel. The modified low-ground-pressure D-8s that we had were fifty-six inches wide.

DOB: Each of the two tracks was fifty-six—

KL: Each of the two tracks was fifty-six inches wide, and this necessitated building a catwalk out from the driver's seat out over the tracks with an actual ladder that went down on the outside—there was no way to get up otherwise—and it was a steel catwalk. And then

we had a cab on them with a heater, and it was a gasoline heater, and they had this little ceramic rod that had something like a thermostat to do with it. They were always broken, so most of the time we ended up we had to keep the doors open in the cabs to keep the windows from freezing up so we could see.

So that was the one piece of equipment. Now the D-8 on a tractor train typically pulled two twenty-ton sleds behind it.

DOB: Are these the kinds of tractors that they used to go to Marie Byrd Land?

KL: Yes, they're the ones that went to Marie Byrd Land. The numbers that I remember for that trip was roughly thirteen hundred miles round trip, and they averaged three-and-a-half miles per hour. They would drive twelve hours and then stop to change drivers. They had two drivers for each dozer in the group, and the only time they stopped was to change drivers and at the same time they'd refuel, and that's the way they kept going.

So the D-4s pulled two twenty-ton sleds.

DOB: D-4s or D-8s?

KL: D-8s. Excuse me. The D-8s did. And then we used it for dozing snow for the snow melters and things because we'd go outside of the camp a little ways to be sure we got clean snow, and then we'd do it with a twenty-ton sled and doze it just as full of snow as you could get, and then drag it up to the snow melter area unhooked from the dozer. And that was one of my main jobs all winter long was snow melter.

DOB: How much time would that take?

KL: Well, I had kind of a shift. In the winter we'd cut back to six days a week and we'd cut back to about ten hours a day, six days a week instead of the twelve hours seven days a week and all that that we did when we were just getting the camp started and before it got dark and all of that.

On a, say, a ten-hour shift, as snow melter you had several duties. One was fire watch, and only the junior guys got this. And you were around camp at midnight, and two o'clock and three o'clock in the morning we'd go in and check all the buildings to make sure that there was no problem. And then we'd also take diesel fuel in and fill up their stoves. We had little stoves in each of the buildings and the guys would be sleeping when we were doing this. Had a little wagon we drug up and down through the tunnels. I don't know where this little red wagon came from, but we had a little red wagon.

DOB: A real little red wagon.

KL: Yes, a little red wagon. And since the tunnels had boards for floors—although they got icy once we got any melt or anything—you could drag that up and back. We'd be hauling these five-gallon jerry cans of diesel fuel.

So we did that, and then we'd have to go out a couple times during the shift at least to check them and try to fill up the melter and keep the snow going in—

[End Side A, Tape 1]

[Begin Side B, Tape 1]

KL: So anyway, when you'd shovel snow into the melter, and I don't know—do you want me to describe the melter, because it was a special deal.

DOB: Sure.

KL: We had a power plant, a room where we kept our diesel generators for electricity for the camp, and that was also another job that I had. I was the primary one to handle all the fuel for the camp, so I'd have to keep our fuel tanks in the generator room full, and I used to go out—

[Interruption]

DOB: All right. Let's continue.

KL: Anyway, the snow melter—here again, I don't remember the capacity of it, but it was a metal tank that was open on top. Let's say it's six feet by six feet by six feet. It may have been a little bit larger—I don't remember the exact dimensions. And we ran pipes through the bottom of it that were hooked to the manifolds of the diesel engines for the diesel generators, and the heat from those manifolds was what we ran through the snow melter. That's what melted the snow.

And of course if you filled it up with snow, when it melted down, you were lucky if it was a third full. There was probably a standard percentage of water you'd get, but that snow was very dry snow. So you'd have to go back at various times to try to get the water level up to the top, and you never wanted it to run down because if you had very little water in it, it really was hard to get enough melt going. It took a long time to get the water up in there, so you always tried to keep it from going down too far. We just had a hatch outside the camp, and we got to where we were shoveling down into it because the snow kept building up.

And I kept a fire ax in addition to the scoop. I had a coal shovel out there, a coal scoop, but I had a fire ax, too, because sometimes the snow was just solid and you'd have to

break it apart into chunks, and I used to use the ax. So that's the way the snow melter worked.

We had restrictions like one shower a week, I think, and I don't remember, probably if we did laundry it was once a week. I don't remember. We wore a lot of stuff for a long time down there.

[Laughter]

KL: The guys complained on the tractor train about how they slept in that confined wanigan sled out there, and they finally started sleeping on top of the sled, in -30 degree temperatures, in their sleeping bags because it got kind of ripe. But you had to make do with what you had.

But we had a fuel dump down near the barrier. Little America, when I first got there, was about five miles back from the Ross Ice Shelf, and we had a valley that dipped down a couple hundred feet which we named Crevasse Valley. I don't know if it was named that when I got there, but during Deep Freeze II we called it Crevasse Valley because there was a major crevasse that ran through it.

And it was a continual thing all winter long because we had some of the scientists who went down to the barrier and put holes through the ice and did little experiments of some sort that they were out there for, and then usually it was me, I pretty well ran the petroleum dump down there. And we had barrels, fifty-gallon drums, just stacked and getting buried in the snow. And that was another chore because you had to uncover them. And we found out that you just could not dig them out. I don't know what they do anymore, but—

DOB: So what did you do?

KL: Well, you dig enough of them to see them, and then I got hold of a pickax we had—I don't know why we had a pickax—and the steelworker guy who was our welder—he was called a steelworker by profession—we cut that thing down till it was about three, four inches long, and made a point of it, and it was just big enough that if you hit the barrel right, it would knock the hole big enough (two-plus inches).

I had a little fifty-gallon-per-minute aluminum Marine-type assault pump they called it—it was done for the Marines—and I had a two-inch-wide standpipe, what we called it, hooked to the hose, and I could stick that down in and then run the pump and suck the fuel out up into—I had three six-hundred-gallon tanks on my sled, and I would fill those up.

So basically, you're talking twelve to the tank, and so thirty-six barrels I'd have to knock holes in to get out. But we started out trying to dig them out and that just became

physically impossible. So usually I'd have one guy with me, because we didn't like to have you out by yourself totally away from camp. We usually had a buddy system going because it was too easy to get in trouble. And I guess those barrels all went to sea later. That's all I can tell you. [Laughs]

DOB: You must've been acutely aware of the weather because so much of your work was outdoors.

KL: Well, I had the temperatures for every day and everything recorded right here.

DOB: Tell me about the best and the worst of it.

KL: Well, the weather—

DOB: How bad did it have to get to keep you inside?

KL: It had to be a blizzard, basically. We did close the camp and wouldn't allow anyone outside under certain storm conditions, and it was when the wind came up. The snowfall itself is not heavy. We got a lot of snow but it was horizontal snow blown by the wind, and since we had buildings there it would pile up against it. Those buildings hadn't been there very long, and now they're in a snow bowl. After two years or a year-and-a-half, the snow is up above the buildings all the way around it and we're pushing it out with dozers trying to keep it out but now the camp's becoming a sort of a bowl.

But I did, I worked outside almost every day. It was a big problem because to get the equipment to operate, I had to preheat three to four hours the—they had an auxiliary engine that we called a pony engine, gasoline engine on the bulldozer. That's what you used to turn over the big diesel engine to start it with. And I had to preheat that engine for three to four or five hours with what we called a Herman Nelson heater. We had these heaters that put out pretty high heat with a long flexible orange tube. You've probably seen them around manholes. When you see the telephone company down there working, they're pumping heat down in off of those things, and we had them on little banana sleds so you could pull them around. And that was one of the big problems we had.

And once I got it started, then I could go—if I need to go to the barrier, you know, and all of that, I might spend six or eight hours down at the barrier getting fuel or whatever it was.

I didn't mind the weather. I had learned to live with it and dress for it, but when the wind came up it was impossible. But the wind didn't come up when it was thirty, forty, fifty below zero. Not normally at thirty below or sixty below or seventy below. You just had to watch for frostbite then. But that was easier to handle. You could keep

enough heat generated in your body at those lower temperatures if you worked. But when the wind came up, that meant that the temperature had warmed up to maybe ten below, fifteen below zero, maybe zero, and that's when you knew you had a storm coming in. And then you couldn't stay warm. No way. We had some sort of wind suits that went over everything, but they still didn't do the trick. The wind stripped away the thin layer of air that kept your face from freezing, and it got in between the layers of your clothing.

DOB: Tell me, did you have to do maintenance on the equipment that you used?

KL: Yes. We had a garage that we could take the dozers inside of, but only one—only room enough for one. But we had mechanics that also did that some. I didn't really do a lot of the maintenance on them at that time. I did it when I went to McMurdo.

DOB: Were they reliable, your Cats?

KL: Yes. I had a couple of incidents happen where I picked up sort of a nickname down there. My first name, which I don't use, is Hector. I go by my middle name. But down there, when we were first offloading the ships—and I was still pretty novice at driving this equipment and everything like that so I certainly wasn't the best driver that there was—we were trying to get POL away from the barrier, the fuel drums, and so we were running the tractors and loading them up with two sleds, and filling them up each with drums and moving them up to another dump to get them away from the barrier edge because we knew that would eventually shelf off and go to sea as an iceberg.

And the snow had varying consistencies down there. It really was, and I got into some snow that was like talcum powder. Nothing was wet. It was very dry and fluffy-like and I got stuck in there with this D-8 bulldozer and those two sleds.

And I finally couldn't even get the dozer out and I had to get towed out and it was kind of embarrassing. I had to disconnect the sleds and everything else, but once I lost the traction and started digging myself in—and I think that was the only time I ever got stuck down there.

And then I had another incident which they blamed on me, which I swear was not my fault, but I was blamed for it. One of the engines, the pony engine on the dozer, someone went out and found out that it threw a rod or had a major piston malfunction in it, and they claimed I didn't preheat it enough, which I knew I did, but the chief wasn't going to listen to that. He had me for the scapegoat, and I was called Hardluck Hector.

[Laughter]

So that was sort of the nickname that I had down there. But other than that, those were the only two real bad incidents.

DOB: Well there were serious, even fatal accidents involving various vehicles on the ice. Did you brood about this at all?

KL: No. Well, we watched Crevasse Valley very closely, and whenever—I didn't make the decision, that was made by I imagine our Officer in Charge. I don't know who would make the decision, but I would have to go down to Crevasse Valley probably more than anyone else.

But then periodically we would go down and take a couple or three different bulldozers down and some demolition charges and blow these bridges over the crevasses down in that valley and then push enough snow to fill them in. But then of course they'd separate and they'd have to be done again, some a few weeks after that. But that periodically had to be done. This reminded us that we were living on a moving glacier.

I don't know, I never did really worry about it. If you thought that there was any danger in the area you were in, one thing you always did, you left your cab doors open so that maybe you could get out. But other than that, you just went ahead and did it. Tried not to do the bad things or the dumb things about it.

In addition to the dozers, by the way, we had Weasels which were old World War II amphibious small track vehicles made by Studebaker, I think. But they worked pretty good. You could get three or four people inside of them. And they were pretty simple to operate, and they didn't dig in or anything like that. They were fairly lightweight and they went right across the surface of the snow without any big problem. We used them more as a personnel mover, you know, just mobility.

And then we had the Tucker Sno-Cats. They stood up quite tall, and they had four pontoon tracks—two in the front and two in the rear—and when you turned the front ones right, the rear ones went left.

DOB: Interesting. [Pause] I had to visualize that.

KL: Yes, so they turned pretty quick. And they had real sharp claws, sort of, about an inch high on them and they'd just climb right up the side of an ice cliff or anything like that up very steep.

They were built with the idea that they were very lightweight, aluminum body, and the fifth wheels, which is what those tracks pivot on, were made of aluminum which became a major problem in that case. And that was where I did get into maintenance on that because in the cold weather, those aluminum fifth wheels were maybe two inches thick or so of solid aluminum. They would snap.

We had a few spares, but no one had anticipated that many failures so I helped our steelworker guy—and I learned quite a bit about welding with it—to try to weld this

aluminum. That's a real trick. It was in those days, anyway. We had to build a firebrick oven and everything to try to keep the heat in because this aluminum, as soon as you'd get a torch on it, it would start to run like a river, and it's really hard to do. But we had to do what we had to do.

So those were primarily the three vehicles we started out with.

DOB: You were also a ham radio operator.

KL: Yes. I didn't do it at Little America. I did it over at Cape Hallett.

DOB: I see. Were you a licensed ham?

KL: No. We had an authorization from whomever released that or controlled it. I don't know who that would've been—FCC or who it is I'm not sure. But down there we could operate under the single station call sign—we didn't have to have our own call sign. And so the ham radio calls were KC4USA was Little America, and KC4USH—we called it King Charlie 4 Uncle Sam's Hotel—that was Cape Hallett. I don't know what the others were, but I remember those and I think they were basically related to the name of the station, though. That last letter, KC4US whatever. But I did operate quite a bit over at Cape Hallett.

DOB: And the purpose of that was—

KL: Some of it was time killer, and it was interesting. And we'd get phone calls to some of our relatives and things. We had a lot of cooperation from hams around the country if we could find one pretty close where there wasn't a big toll call or something involved, and they'd patch us in and we'd get to talk to our relatives.

DOB: Did you have regulars that you would speak with in the states?

KL: Yes. We had a fellow, Harry Winston, I think. I'm not positive that's his last name now and maybe here again that may be in my book. He was a captain with American Airlines in Dallas, and we got his signal very strong. Some of them just came in a lot better. In fact, I went to visit him in Ft. Worth, I guess is where he lived—it was Dallas or Ft. Worth anyway.

And we had a guy in San Francisco or Oakland. I don't remember what his name was now. I know I had a date the first night I was back from that one. I talked to this girl on ham radio. And we came back into the states, and so anyway, we stayed in San Francisco for a couple of days.

We had another one we worked in New Jersey, and it was a young kid. I want to say his handle was Jules, and he was one of the first ham radio operators to pick up Sputnik, the

signal off of Sputnik. He talked to us a lot. He was pretty young, too—twelve, thirteen years old, something like that.

See, Sputnik was launched during Deep Freeze II, and we didn't even know what a Sputnik was. But we got a message if we were outside we were supposed to look for a Sputnik. And it turns out it wasn't even in the orbit to go over us, but when I was outside I'd always see if I could see a Sputnik but didn't know what it was.

The other thing that was associated with my snow melter duties and all that, too at night, was I had to work with Peter Schoeck, the . . . what'd they call him? Astrophysicist? He was from the University of Minnesota, and he ran the aurora program down there for the aurora australis. We had one hut in camp that was built a little higher than the others with two or three Plexiglas domes on it, and he had light-sensitive cameras in there and it would take pictures during the aurora activity. And in the middle of the night I used to go up and make observations and draw pictures in his book for him of the different waves, shapes, and all of this sort of thing, in the high aurora activity.

DOB: That was interesting.

KL: Yes. That was the one scientific project I probably really got really deeply involved in was that one.

DOB: Very beautiful, isn't it?

KL: Oh yes.

DOB: Tell me what the aurora is like.

KL: The aurora australis is what you have over Antarctica as opposed to the aurora borealis in the Arctic, and the aurora borealis has lots of color to it—various colors, the colors of the rainbow. But you don't have that in Antarctica. It's white or green, basically, but the wave patterns will cover half the sky sometimes, and they dance and shimmer. It's really very interesting.

I don't know when it comes out or what causes it, but it's just amazing. You can look up and it's just really—it's gorgeous.

DOB: Did it happen during the long night—

KL: During the long night.

DOB: —anytime of day or just during certain hours?

KL: Well, I don't really know because I worked the nights a lot and that's when I saw it most of the time. But I don't think it was limited to it. I think it probably was anytime when it was dark enough to see it and everything like that. It's ionospheric activity, and I know that when we had the so-called sunspot times and things like that, it seemed to get pretty intense at those times, too. We had some communication problems during that, but I'm not educated enough on communications to really comment on that. You'd have to get someone who was in the radio business down there.

DOB: Let's talk about the winter night. Did it have an effect on you?

KL: Oh yes. I think we all went a little nuts for a brief period of time to one degree or another. I think everyone did one way or another. It got to you, and the twenty-four hours of total darkness and everything I think I may have stabilized a little more than others because I worked outside all the time. I was busy, and I didn't have a lot of loose time on my hands when I was there. Some people did, and I think that maybe it bothered them more. That's just a feeling that I have.

DOB: Did the winter night have an effect on what you could do outside and how you did it?

KL: Well, it just made it more difficult if you needed a flashlight or anything. And the problem was flashlights wouldn't work very well anyway. Within five minutes of going outside, they're frozen. The batteries would die on them.

DOB: How did you see?

KL: Lamps off the vehicles, headlights of the vehicles and everything like that. We did take flashlights, but as I say, that was for such a short duration it was hardly worth carrying because the batteries would freeze. And they'd never operate more than five minutes with a brand new set of batteries. They'd be dead.

DOB: How much light would you get from the moon and the stars?

KL: The moon you got quite a bit of light from. You know, I can't even really much remember the moon, come to think of it. I remember the aurora, that's what I do remember, and the stars at night. But . . . you know, since we didn't see the sun, I don't know if we saw the moon. I'm not sure if there was a moon. That's a good question. I haven't thought of that.

DOB: There was. There are photographs of the moon.

KL: During the winter night?

DOB: Yes.

KL: Okay. Well, then I don't remember it. If it was there, it was probably very bright, though, I would think. And anything we'd get like that would reflect off of the snow so we'd get double light out of it. I don't really remember the moon. I don't know, maybe I was so awed by the aurora maybe that's why I didn't think too much of the moon, because the aurora was really something to see.

DOB: Okay. But by the time you left for McMurdo then, this would've been in September of '57—I have it written from your notes—so the light would be returning then. Is that right or was it dark?

KL: Yes, we had some daylight. I don't remember how much, but we did have some daylight at the time. The flight was made during the day.

DOB: Okay. So you'd have to time it to arrive at a—

KL: Yes. That was up to the pilots. I was just a passenger, here again. I think we probably had six or seven hours of daylight then.

DOB: It must've been a nice change.

KL: Oh yes. It made things a little easier. But it was still cold. It was very definitely still cold. And the biggest problem with that was digging those planes out of the snow. I mean they were buried, and we just had like the tip of the tail of the Gooney Birds (R4D) [showing], and a lot of that had to be hand done. The fact is I just downloaded the pilot's book, *The Flight of the Puckered Penguin*.

DOB: Oh yes. I've read it, too.

KL: I downloaded it off the Internet. He talks about that. He remembers it slightly different than I do. My memory's a little different than his in some areas of that.

DOB: Jim Waldron.

KL: Yes. Jim Waldron.

DOB: Did you help do that digging?

KL: Oh yes. The fact is we used a lot of my D-8 out there to do that, but we had to be real careful because with big chunks of snow you might have ten-foot-long blocks that were still sort of frozen together you could crush the airplane. That's when we had to get into a lot of hand work. Yes, there was hand work, there definitely was, and he talks about that in there.

DOB: So you went to McMurdo then. How was McMurdo Station the same or different from LA 5?

KL: They had a few more people, plus it was built on land which was different. We didn't have a rock or a bush or anything in sight at LA 5 where we were. Nothing but ice as far as you could see.

DOB: You were on the ice shelf.

KL: Yes, we were on the ice shelf, which is a moving glacier. But when we got to McMurdo, there we've got Mt. Erebus sticking up over there, the smoking volcano, and the buildings were all built on rock and land, and that's a big difference right there. Plus there were features. There were mountains and things you could see. At Little America there was nothing. I mean it was just flat as it could be for as far as you could see, unless you got on the other side of the Ross Ice Shelf.

Now that is another thing I'd forgotten about. We had mirages on occasion. I had never seen one before Antarctica, but I remember specifically because one day the light conditions got such a way that we got an inversion, and I could actually see the seaward side of the Ross Ice Shelf sort of hanging above down there. It was really the strangest thing I've ever seen, and I don't know how to explain it. I'm sure there's an explanation for it, but I don't know how to explain it. But there are such things as mirages and that was a mirage. And somehow or another with the light inversion and refractions, you could see the seaward side. Even though I'm standing back inland or should I say insnow, I could see the front of that Ross Ice Shelf.

DOB: Very strange.

KL: Yes it was. It was very, very strange. Because you see the other thing was whiteouts. Now most people don't understand a whiteout. You hear people around here talk about whiteouts where it gets foggy or you get snow blowing; that's not a whiteout. A whiteout is a point when the surface becomes the same color as the horizon—as the sky.

And what happens—and I've seen it up in Greenland when we were up there, too—is that you lose all features and depth perception in it. You can see for a long way. You may be able to see ten miles, but something may look like it's a hundred yards away and it's really a mile away. You lose depth perception. I walked into snowdrifts and not even see them walking along and find my knees up in my face all of a sudden, you know, because you don't even see them. All of a sudden there you are.

DOB: Well, then, on Halloween, in fact, in 1957 you flew to Hallett Station.

KL: Was it Halloween?

DOB: Yes. Well that's what you said.

KL: Yes, well, then I pulled it out of here so that's right.

DOB: And you called that a pretty challenging flight.

KL: Yes. It was the first time any airplane had ever landed over there. That was to be considered purely as an emergency runway. They had a frozen bay. This was the smallest station in Antarctica at fourteen people as opposed to the Pole station which had eighteen. You're right. It was Halloween because I do have it written down here.

But we went over, and it was a single airplane. And no one had ever landed over there before, and they didn't know how thick the ice was. They had no coring capability at Hallett. They had dug and burned with maybe some sort of acid or something like this or powder or something into the ice to about, I think the guys told me, three or three-and-a-half feet, and they couldn't go any deeper into it. So they didn't know how thick this ice was.

I was the only passenger that was staying, but I was bringing with me a big hydraulic press affair which we used to pull sprocket wheels which was the big tooth wheel that drives the chain, the track on a bulldozer off of the rear of it, because they had a tractor that was broken. We had to get one off and do some welding work and put it back on.

DOB: Is that why you went there?

KL: Yes, that's why I went. They had one mechanic, and I had to bring that puller with me and that was the primary reason for the trip. They also wanted to know if anyone could land in there, but they wouldn't let the 124s go into that place. They'd take all kinds of chances because it was open enough, but no one knew how thick the ice was and what it would hold.

It turned out to be really strange, too, because that frozen bay was located sort of in a cove and it was fairly long—ten miles wide and at least ten miles down to what we called Football Mountain. There was an area down at the end of it that had a dark area that didn't have snow on it and it was sort of shaped like a football. This thing was maybe ten miles away. We called it Football Mountain.

But this ice had all snow blown off of it. The winds would roar out through there in excess of a hundred miles an hour. They told me that, I think, they went up around a hundred and fifty or sixty miles an hour in the winter over there.

And the buildings, because the land—there was a hundred and forty acres of land there. It was the only flat place they could find along the coast—it was supposed to have been at Cape Adare but they couldn't build on it. There wasn't any place to build on, and they

changed locations—I think we were about two hundred miles physically from Cape Adare. And it's a hundred and forty acres of flat land and the camp, which consisted of four or five buildings, took up one acre of the land, and the rest was an actual Adelie penguin rookery and a skua gull rookery on top of that. But they weren't there all year, just in the summertime.

But there were pebbles and rock there, and the wind would pick up these rocks and it broke windows out of their Weasel and sandblasted the sides of their buildings. Their buildings were painted all bright international orange and all that. They were sandblasted, the sides of the buildings were bare whenever that wind came through.

But that ice out there where the runway was was polished, and even in our polar boots you couldn't stand out there. It would slide you along the ice. And you had to stay close to a vehicle where you get could hold of it or something or you might go to sea wherever sea was, however far out the ice went. It was the slickest thing I've ever seen. I always took "crampons" with me to the ice.

I think Lt. Comdr. Harvey Speed was flying that airplane, and he had a lot of close calls down there. The guys that I knew, in our opinion, he was probably the premiere flyer that we had down there. Harvey Speed—anyway, whoever was flying it, when they got ready to take off, the wind was blowing fifteen, twenty miles an hour or something right down the runway, and it had changed direction a little, and they had to take off—I guess it was blowing in from the sea, but it was at an angle, and they wanted to take off the open way out so they didn't have to climb over any mountains.

Now the sea ice may have gone five hundred miles out. I don't know how far the ice went out, but when they tried to take off, he's on skis, and as he would turn the airplane around, and he was having to do it with his propellers because there was no braking traction, it was just so slick. I mean this is really slick ice, just like a really bad ice storm makes streets, like when I was driving to North Carolina last week, the fact is.

When he would get lined up the way he wanted to go, the wind was at an angle and he couldn't stop it, and it would swing him right on by the nose. And he made several attempts to get lined up that way. So finally what they did—and I wasn't on the airplane, I was standing there watching it—finally as they swung through the line of the runway, when they hit the direction he wanted to go, they fired the JATO bottles, and that straightened him out and away they went. And then I think there was one other flight that came over while I was there. So my flight and the one other one, that's all that I ever know of going in there.

DOB: Tell me about Cape Hallett. The pictures seem very beautiful.

KL: It was. It was a joint base that we had; the only one that we had down there. A joint American-New Zealand base, and we had three New Zealanders that wintered down there.

I said I was the only passenger. I take that back. I think there was—well, we had a British guy show up there, and I don't remember if he came over with me or if he came over on that second flight. But they did some manhaul sledging and did some stuff like that, these guys did, and he was involved in that.

But Cape Hallett, it turned out—this is also, I think, a little interesting—with the few number of people we had down there and a small station like that, it turned out that three of us at Cape Hallett were from the same home town, from Knoxville. The driver, the plumber, and me—no, the mechanic, the plumber and me.

And then we had a Seabee electrician, Pappy [Harry] King. He was from Samoa, and I think he was a retired civil service and came into the Navy somehow or other into the Seabees.

But anyway, we had a professor from the University of Kentucky, Dr. Jim Shear, and he was really a nice fellow.

Lt. Juan Tur was the only officer we had, and he was a doctor. He just came on active duty and came on DF II. He had no military training or anything. He was about the least military person you'd ever see, and he spoke with a real strong accent. He was from Puerto Rico.

I haven't seen Juan. I just found out where he is recently, and it's a shame because I think I lived within seventy-five miles of him for about six or eight years and didn't know it or I would've looked him up. He's down in Fresno or someplace like that, I think. And he was a weightlifter type. He was a real husky fellow and all that.

And we had one cook. His name was Roy. I don't know whether that was his first or last name. But he and Juan Tur got into a couple of fights. That was the one problem we really had down there. The fact is they got in it a lot worse than what I understood it to be. I didn't know how bad it was.

But we had a meteorologist, and he was at Denver, the fact is, and he and I have had three or four chance encounters over the years. He was asleep when the plane that I came in on landed there, and he walked into the mess building and here I stand, and it scared him. He hadn't seen a stranger for eight or ten months.

[Laughter]

KL: He tells me about that, though. And then I bumped into him in Saudi Arabia one night. He was over there afterwards after he got out of the service, and I was over there. I bumped into him at the airport over there. And I bumped into him once—I was flying an Air Force airplane through Midway Island and he was stationed on Midway, and I

went in to get my weather briefing and he was the weather guy. And then I saw him at Denver was the next time I saw him.

DOB: So what were you doing for two-and-a-half months?

KL: I did whatever was necessary around the camp. We spent a lot of time working on that bulldozer. It was a major chore because this hydraulic piece of equipment I brought with me would pull the sprocket off, but there was something wrong with it. It would not force it back on, so we had to take a nut, for the axle, about eight or ten inches in diameter, we had a great big three-foot-long wrench that fit on that nut, and we'd put a six-foot piece of pipe on the end of that and it'd take both our weights to force that sprocket back on. We didn't get it all the way, but we got it enough to where we could run. That took a lot of our days.

I also would handle the water for the camp. We had a neat deal on that. The camp was near the coast on one side, and then on the other side of the rookery there was a big glacier up above on a sort of a mountain there and the lower part of it was volcanic rock.

Hallett wasn't as cold as the other places, and when I went over there I'm in the summertime. Now I wouldn't say it ever got above freezing, but at five to ten degrees above zero, I could fill a five-hundred-gallon tank of water off of that glacier in about five minutes.

We had a little natural trough coming down, and the ice would get heated by the sun. The rock would absorb the heat and it would melt the ice up above, and it would slowly start a little stream down. And then we put a—actually a clean garbage can over there, cut a hole in the bottom of it, and welded a two-inch rubber hose on that. And we built a little wooden trough to funnel the water into the garbage can and into that hose, and I had the hose down at the bottom of the hill, and I'd take a Weasel and I had a little water-tank trailer—I think it was five hundred gallons—and I towed that over to the base of the mountain, put the hose in there, and filled it up. And in five minutes we had fresh water for the camp.

DOB: Sounds much easier than at Little America.

KL: Yes. And then there was fuel and ordinary maintenance. I just helped out with whatever was necessary to be done, but we didn't have that heavy a schedule over there. I spent a lot of time playing with penguins. Oh yes. I could always go out there; I never tired of that.

DOB: Tell me about penguins.

KL: They were so interesting. I used to watch them, and I was there during the egg-laying cycle and when they were raising their chicks, and their chicks were getting pretty large by the time I left.

And then I hated the skuas. The skua gulls preyed on the penguins, and they would go in and steal their eggs when they could, and they would divert a penguin off the nest or something like that. They were the biggest thieves in the world.

This place was nothing but pebbles. There was no grass or anything to make a nest out of, but they made nests out of pebbles, and they would steal from each other all the time, you know, and they'd grab a pebble.

And then when they were courting, they would stand with their heads straight up and just make all these funny sounds and rub up and everything, and they were really characters to watch. And the way they would steal the rocks from each other, and it was just a continual thing going on.

They never laid more than two eggs, some only got one, but then when the eggs hatched, then the skuas would try to get the chicks. And they'd come in and they could get pretty good-sized chicks. And of course they'd peck them pretty quick and they were gone.

DOB: You are the first Deep Freeze pioneer that I talked with who spent time at three stations.

KL: Yes. That's kind of unusual.

DOB: How did they compare in your mind?

KL: Well, Little America was a pure survival thing up there really. We had a certain amount of work to do just to survive on that ice and all that. McMurdo wasn't as hard on survival. They had solid base rock under them and all, but yet it was frantic from a sense of when I was there because my job was to get that runway open. That's what I was sent down there for and then try to keep it open through subsequent blizzards and all that.

DOB: They had their own crew to do that, didn't they?

KL: They did but they'd had some accidents. Someone had a broken arm or something, one of the drivers, and they had a chief driver who burned himself real bad—he made chief down there, I think. I can't even remember his name. But he was running one of the dozers. And it started to overheat on him or something, and he went out—and the radiator caps on these things were threaded down on a very large cylinder, which was probably two to three inches long with lots of threads on it. And you threaded that thing down, and one of the reasons is so you didn't blow that cap off. And he cracked the cap, and he should've been smarter than this but he wasn't, and he spun the cap when he did, and that thing was pretty well machined. And when it was spun, it blew all this hot coolant out and burned both of his hands really bad. So he couldn't work.

And there was one other guy, and I don't remember his name now, and he and I were the primary ones that were left. Then when the crew came in with the flu, he was too sick to work, so that left me.

DOB: Okay. I interrupted you. I interrupted my own question. I was asking about the three stations and how they compared.

KL: Well, at McMurdo there was more to do there, and it was more scenic with Erebus out there and the other mountains around. Plus the fact of the proximity to the New Zealand station. Sir Edmund Hillary was the scientific leader over there. I used to drive Skipper Flynn over during the—at night we'd do it because we were still in a split daylight and then dark while I was there, and we'd go over and visit with Sir Edmund and drink a little grog with his boys and all that. And then they'd come over to our camp on occasion. So you had visitors coming in and things like that.

And of course in summer operation, too, after we got our first airplane in, there were a lot of people and activity going on. I think our population increased from 110 to 400 people. And it was busy, and you could get dirty there because you were around earth and rock and everything like that.

When you get over to Hallett, Hallett was a very small station. They had very little experiments running, whatever they did, and they really set up to do stuff in the summer. They did a manhaul sledge thing with some people where they—the fact is I went over to get them—we had a little sled hooked on behind our Weasels and we could haul quite a bit of equipment around. And we'd take the Weasels out on the bay, on the ice, and we had to cross the bay to where they wanted to go. And they had these harnesses—they were what they call Norwegian manhaul sledges, and that's what they did—it was with skis and they'd haul these sledges behind them with their equipment. We had a radio set up and then they called in when they wanted to come back, and we'd go over there and get them again.

I almost lost it over there though because there was a break between the ice and the shore, and it got a little bit difficult. I almost went in on that one.

But other than that, we really didn't have a heavy routine. That's when I ran a lot of ham radio. We had a party like at Christmas and New Year's. Messed around with the penguins a lot. Oh, and we had a little boat with an outboard motor there, too, so when the ice started breaking up, I used to go out and run the motorboat around out in the ice and stuff like that.

Then if we got really bad, we'd take the flare pistol and shoot at the skua gulls. [Laughs] That's not supposed to go in there. There were a lot of things that we did then that you can't do down there from what I've heard. But we didn't hurt anything.

DOB: The IGY began halfway through your tour.

KL: Well, it was a calendar year in '57, and I was on the ice the full year of '57.

DOB: IGY officially began on July 1st.

KL: Did it? I thought it was the calendar year of '57. Is it the fiscal year then?

DOB: Yes, through all of calendar '57—or '58, I mean. Were there differences once the IGY officially got under way, or I guess you're telling me no, that—

KL: Not really. We were there to support the scientific party, and I don't know that our workload went up at all. They were running their own things. But what we did, we kept the housekeeping facilities up. We kept the camp alive and kept it fueled and with electricity and heat and water and food.

DOB: How did the Navy and the civilian people get along with each other?

KL: I think they got along pretty good. I don't even really remember any of the civilian people from McMurdo. And at Hallett there was no problem at all. The New Zealanders did live together in their own hut, but everyone seemed to be quite amiable. The only conflict was between Dr. Tur and the cook.

But now at Little America, we lower-ranking enlisted men lived in our own huts and we were separated and the officers were wherever they were and the civilians, I guess they shared with the officers. We seemed to get along.

Everyone had their own duties, though, and I used to go in with the weather people and chat with them a lot since I was always going outside and everything.

And the Russian, we had a Russian there as an exchange at Little America—Vladimir Rastorguev. I'm probably not pronouncing that correctly, but that's it. And he and I got along pretty good. His English wasn't the greatest, but we formed a singing quartet for our parties. We had a party every Saturday night during the winter.

The fact is—you may know about this, and I have it recorded in my diary—the weather people told me at the time it was the lowest ever barometer recorded on earth in a storm we had—twenty-seven point three inches of mercury.

DOB: At Little America?

KL: Yes.

DOB: That's pretty low.

KL: It was on August the 31st. Twenty-seven point three inches of mercury. And I wonder if I'm an inch off on that. I don't know.

DOB: I haven't heard that.

KL: We had this storm that went on for several days, and the camp was buried. I think even our anemometer broke. I don't think we got a good wind speed on it, but it was really high. And we were totally buried in. We had to dig our way out the roofs of camp and everything. The weathermen told me that the barometer did go to twenty-seven point three and I'm sure that's what they said. I've watched some of these hurricanes and they don't get down that low in these big hurricanes. They get down around twenty-eight, but not to twenty-seven point three.

DOB: The military no longer has an important role on the ice. What do you think—what difference will that make do you think?

KL: Well, the conditions today are totally different than what we had. That was one thing. I mean a commercial operation, they couldn't have run it without the military to get in and out of there with the icebreakers and the cargo ships and everything. But now they've got different airlift capability. Everything is just a lot different. I don't know everything they're doing down there. I'd love to go back just to see it. You know, I wouldn't want to go through another winter, but I wouldn't mind going back down for a summer.

[End Side B, Tape 1]

[Begin Side A, Tape 2]

DOB: We were talking about the changing role of the military.

KL: They're not pushing the frontiers like we did when we went down there. Now they seem to be pretty settled into their operations and they're operating what, only two stations now? McMurdo and the Pole?

DOB: And Palmer.

KL: Palmer is open? Okay. Well, that's the banana belt anyway. That's outside the Antarctic Circle, isn't it?

DOB: I don't know.

KL: I think it is.

DOB: Just about.

KL: It's pretty close.

DOB: On the peninsula.

KL: Yes, we called that the banana belt out there. That's not the real Antarctic. [Laughs] When you get down and get inside of 80° south, now you're there.

But if I understand it now, they don't—we were building those stations and just getting them set up to run. People had not *lived* there over the winter like we were doing before, and we didn't have the kind of equipment they've got now.

We didn't have the airlift capability, we didn't have the communications capability. We were blacked out lots of times down there when we didn't have communications for a week or more. We didn't have the satellites. We didn't have the weather forecasting capability, you see. Lots of that. So that's a totally different picture. Plus the fact that they don't have to stay as long. And they also get resupplied. They get fresh things.

And I guess McMurdo can sustain air operations all winter. I think so. I'm not sure it's a steady schedule, but they can fly in and out with C-130s during the winter, and the C-141s can even go down there.

Now we had old C-124 Globemasters, four-engine piston. It was the largest airplane in the world at that time, and it only came in the summer. And as I say I ended up—that was my first operational airplane after I got my wings in the Air Force. I never thought about that at that time.

DOB: You were at three stations. Tell me what you thought of the leadership at those stations. Was there anybody in particular that stood out to you as either particularly fine or unfortunate?

KL: I thought very highly of Captain Dickey at Little America.

DOB: What was his title? Was he the Officer in Charge?

KL: Yes, he was of all of the stations actually, but he was based at Little America. He was a Navy full captain, the only one that was down there—well, I think over at . . . where was Finn Ronne?

DOB: Ellsworth.

KL: Ellsworth, yes. That may have been a little different story, but I think that Captain Dickey was commander of Antarctic support operations during the winter, which included all of the stations. I think that was the title. I've got a letter someplace that's got his title on it. I've got a little commendation letter with that on it.

At McMurdo, Skipper (Comdr.) Flynn because we were the Seabees and we reported to our guys. We sort of ignored the airdales, the aviation people. I mean we worked a different project and everything else, and we had our own officers.

I had a Lieutenant White and he was fine, at Little America. I didn't like my main chief up there. He and I did not get along, and that was a real problem.

DOB: Was this at Little America?

KL: Yes. Chief Darter. I felt that he picked on me a lot. Whether that was right or not, I don't know, but I had a little run-in with him. It wasn't a physical thing, but . . .

Then at McMurdo, Skipper Flynn—just a super guy. I don't even really remember any of the other officers that I got to—I knew them by sight or something, but I really didn't get to know them well. But Skipper Flynn was my boss, so, you know.

And at Hallett, we didn't have any leadership at Hallett. I mean Juan Tur, he was a doctor right out of med school, you know. We had a chief radio operator, and he technically was probably the ranking military chief petty officer, and he was a radioman.

The guys were—I mean we were hand picked. We weren't troublemakers and all that stuff, so if they had something to do, they got it done. We just did it.

DOB: Was there someone or more than one person that you met on the ice that you were just particularly glad was there, either because they provided leadership or friendship or a role model?

KL: I had a lot of respect for Captain Dickey. And our chiefs, Chief Gudmundson was good, and Chief Camp.

DOB: Why were they good?

KL: Well, I thought they were fair. They told us what you had to do and they let you do your job, and they gave you an "attaboy" if you did well.

And other than that, I guess that's about it. I didn't have any incidents that really—with the exception of this conflict I had with Chief Darter—that really made me really want anyone around. I mean, you know, my jobs were pretty straightforward, and so you go out and you do them. So I can't really say that there was anything like that.

I did admire Captain Dickey, though. I don't know why that is, but I did.

DOB: Were you ever truly scared? I know you've had some close calls, but were you just not—

KL: Yes, I was scared when we were blowing that ice down there on the barrier. Yes, I got scared down there. When that surface started opening up and you knew you had to get off of it but yet you didn't know where to put your foot because it was opening up, that was scary. And I did get scared there.

But other than that, I don't really think there was a time when I was scared.

DOB: What was your best memory? If somebody asks you at a party "Oh, what did you do?" what's the story you want to tell?

KL: That's interesting. Well, I think both of the flights that I made from Little America to McMurdo and then McMurdo over to Hallett, they were very strong memories. The first arrival down there and getting to Little America was something that I had thought a lot about.

I know one thing. We were glad to get the summer people out. I remember that.
[Laughs] That was memorable.

DOB: Why?

KL: We were hot-bunking it and everything else. We wanted them to get out of there and go leave us alone. Bye! And then there was some talk of people trying not to winter right when the ships were getting ready to go out. There may have been one or two people that did actually get on the ships and leave that were supposed to have wintered with us. I can't recall exactly.

And then I was glad to see the ship come in over at Hallett to take us out of there.

DOB: Did you leave directly from Hallett?

KL: Yes. By ship.

DOB: Which one? Do you remember?

KL: It's written down here, but . . . I'll look it up while we're talking. It was a cargo ship, and we rode it up to Christchurch, and that was late January or early . . . let's see.

Anyway, we almost capsized in that ship. We left January the 16th on the *Towle*; had the *Atka* going with us. And then we got into a big storm going out of there and almost capsized that ship. It was empty. The water line was twenty feet out of the water, it

had our old broken-down D-4 Caterpillar in the hold and that's all it had for cargo. And going to Christchurch we got into that fifties and sixties latitudes up there, and we took I think it was a fifty-six-degree roll and they said fifty-seven was capsizing. Broke every coffee cup and everything on the ship. But it was a merchant ship, and we were just passengers and we sat there and did nothing but watch movies for four days, or whatever it was.

DOB: While you were there, this was in the 1950s and a lot of things were different than they are today. And I'm gathering that one thing you didn't worry a lot about was litter and pollution and messing up the environment. What did you do with your garbage and your waste?

KL: Well, let's see. What did we do? You know, I don't remember what we did with it. We didn't have a dump, did we? I think we probably burned it—most of it if it was burnable. The rest of it was probably buried under snow. That was one thing. You didn't see it very long—it got covered up.

But at Little America, I can't recall what we really did with the garbage. We must've had a place that we dumped, but I don't remember where it was. That apparently was one detail I didn't get.

DOB: Were you concerned with what was going on in the rest of the world while you were down there?

KL: Not really. We didn't have a lot of info coming in anyway. We got a little concerned that we didn't know what a Sputnik was, but it didn't really worry us. And we were pretty well at peace at that particular time.

DOB: Well, the cold war was serious.

KL: Yes, but this was after the Korean War, and I probably didn't know enough about the cold war to worry about it at that time.

DOB: What effect, if any, did your polar experiences have on what you did with the rest of your life?

KL: Oh, I think it's . . . geez, I don't know. It opened my eyes up to a lot of things because it was an experience I'll never forget. I wouldn't take a million dollars for it and wouldn't give you a nickel to repeat it. [Laughs] And I know people who went back for second winters and stuff. But one was enough. That's the way I did most things—one time. I'll do just about anything once, but . . .

[Interruption]

KL: Well, anyway, as far as the impact on my life, it's always had an impact because I've always had an interest in it and I can always talk to people about it. And it's probably helped me establish relationships just by my experiences from that, you know. It's something that's very unique and not a lot of people have done it, and under the conditions we did it, darn few have done it.

When I think back on it, we were under pretty primitive conditions. It was tough. We worked real hard to survive. At Hallett I don't think they did, but at Little America out there on that ice cap, we did. And I know they did at the Pole. I was told by Mel Havener, my friend who was up there, that when they wintered there that they did not know if they could survive that winter at the Pole station the first winter. They didn't know if they could live up there. So it was real hairy to start out with. [Mel was the mechanic and he kept the generators running and this allowed the Pole crew to live. Mel reached twenty-one years of age at the South Pole. Awesome responsibilities at his age.]

DOB: Nobody had ever done it.

KL: Yes.

DOB: If you were an artist and you could paint one canvas of Antarctica and the essence of what this was, what would you do?

KL: Well, Cape Hallett was very scenic like McMurdo in the sense that it had a lot of mountains that stuck up and things like that. And you could go up on this glacier area behind the camp and you could get several hundred feet up, and when the days were clear they were just beautiful. The sun was bright and no wind, and I could go out there with my shirt off and it's only ten degrees, you know, but no wind or anything. And if you were around the rock, you could get some radiant heat from that.

And that view of that whole bay and everything out there with icebergs stuck out and frozen in the ice pack out there, and then the mountains around and all the snow and the little camp down below, that would be one right there.

The other would probably be the aurora at night, you know, when it's dark over Little America because there's no lights to impact you around the horizon. We tried to cut camp lights off outside, or as many as possible, so it wouldn't interfere with Peter's cameras. Some of the guys used to go out there and play pranks on him and shine flashlights up, trick his cameras and stuff.

He was a funny guy. He was a German, and he had been a U-boat sailor in World War II in the Germany navy. He was very arrogant, and I think he had been an olympic skier. He used to get out and try to ski out there, but the snow was like concrete. It was abrasive. I guess if you had the right waxes or something you could do it, but it

almost was impossible to ski because it was so cold and so hard that the skis didn't slide very well on it.

But Peter was a little bit arrogant, so some of these guys would pick on him a little bit every now and then. The fact is he got hurt real bad right after I left there. He fell in a crevasse, I think. Broke a rib, punctured a lung or something like that.

DOB: You didn't put yourself on a Cat in your painting.

KL: No, I don't know. You see, I have the one painting on the cover of that in-flight menu with Pan Am, and I didn't think about that. Well, I've never run bulldozers since then either. I went on to other things.

DOB: Paul Siple wrote that the Antarctic yields just a profound effect on personality and character and practically nobody who goes to the ice comes away the same. Would you think that's true?

KL: I think that probably—not necessarily about—yes, I don't think you come back the same. I really don't.

DOB: How were you different?

KL: Well, I was more mature. I was just a kid when I went down there, you know, and much more world traveled, shall we say, by the time I came out. And confident in myself. I knew I could handle myself, and I came out of there with that sort of confidence, if I didn't have it already. But that I knew that I could handle just about anything that would come along because I'd handled it down there. So self-confidence, I guess. I hadn't really thought about that before.

DOB: Well, what haven't I asked you that I should have that you'd like to include in our story?

KL: I don't know. Let's see . . . you'll get all the things about people getting hurt and things like that. This is probably not for the book, but I just saw one thing here.

One of the guys, he was about my age, and we had this recreation hut at Little America. We'd go in there after work and we'd bought our own beer, buy a case at a time or something and keep it—there was no problem with refrigeration, just put it on the floor and leave it there because the floor would get ice on it. And he was jawing at me for something in this recreation room at Little America—I don't even know what it was, I don't remember at all.

And I had a friend standing there. He was a little senior to me in rank and a little bit older—not much, but he was also from Tennessee, but not the same town. And this guy

said something to me that my friend thought was offensive to me, and he just hauled off and hit him and broke his jaw. It wasn't me that hit him.

[Laughter]

KL: And I just . . . I don't know.

Chief Gudmundson got hurt down there, too, and I don't remember what that was. I'd have to go back in the book on that.

Then one of our mechanics burned himself pretty bad in the middle of the winter. His name was Molla. He worked in the shop. He didn't go outside a whole lot, but he worked on the dozers and things in the shop. And he wore his wind pants all the time, for some reason or other, as an outer pants. He eventually got oil and grease on them, and then he got around some sort of a welding torch or something, and a spark caught him and his pants caught on fire and he got burned really bad in the legs and everything. He was kept in the dispensary for two or three weeks at least on a special burn treatment. I don't know whatever happened with him because then I left and went to McMurdo, and I lost track of all those people after that. Until Mel Havener found me. He found me five or six years ago because I left the service—I got out of the Navy, went back to college, came back in the Air Force, and with the exception of that one meteorologist I bumped into, I saw one other guy, our dog handler at McMurdo. I bumped into him when I was over checking one of my facilities in Saudi Arabia. I had a couple of teams of engineers over there.

DOB: Who was that?

KL: Oh boy, I can't remember his name. I'll try to remember his name. [John Yeckley]

DOB: Not Dave Baker?

KL: No. He was the dog handler for Deep Freeze II at McMurdo. But anyway, I'm standing there with my people, and the base fire marshal—because we're on a Saudi Air Force base—walks in and it's him. He's the base fire marshal.

DOB: I didn't ask you about what you did for fun.

KL: For fun, well, we played pinochle, we drank beer, we did a little singing and stuff on Saturday nights at our parties. We had a fellow that was a radio operator on the airdales, Bill Cumby. He was a pretty good guitar player. And then Chaplain Zoller at Little America, he made a bass fiddle out of a washtub and a broomstick and a string. He used to play that, and . . . did someone have an accordion? I think they did, and a harmonica. Yes. So we'd do that and do a little songfest and stuff.

That was pretty close to it. We worked a lot, and that was probably good. A lot of people who lived inside all the time didn't work a lot. The radio people, they sat in their radio shack or something like that, and the cooks did their thing. The cooks worked pretty hard because they had to feed all these people.

DOB: Did you find that the time went by quickly?

KL: Yes. I say yes, but not really. There were times in the middle of winter when I thought it would never end. And then at Hallett I wasn't as busy. I worked real hard at McMurdo keeping that runway going, or getting it started and open and then keeping it up after that. But at Hallett I had more time on my hands there because we had some work to do, we did what we would need to do, but we just didn't really—we didn't run any expeditions out of the camps or anything like that, so it was just basically housekeeping to support any scientific efforts. And it was much easier housekeeping at Hallett than it was at the other places.

DOB: Anything else?

KL: No, not really. I can't think of anything.

DOB: Well, I just want to thank you very much for a really interesting morning and I appreciate your talking with me.

KL: Okay. We lost some sled dogs in a crevasse over there, I just saw that. I don't know how many were killed. I remember that.

Then one day I saw that same R4D that I flew in, that Gooney Bird, almost crash one day. This is probably in the book someplace.

DOB: Where?

KL: At McMurdo. I was out at the runway, and there was a cook who lived in my hut, and we were establishing a station up on the Beardmore Glacier as an en route weather station. We were going to leave three or four people there for the summer air operations as a weather reporting point and everything. And so this cook—all I remember his name was Ski, I don't know what the rest of his name was—but he was kind of a funny guy anyway, and he didn't like flying. He was afraid of flying, but he had to go up there to cook for that little camp. And I knew he was on this airplane because he said he was going up that day to Beardmore, and so we saw that R4D taxi out on the runway, and he took off and when he took off—we were watching it—and it was a beautiful, clear day, he took off, he fired his JATO, and as he did, one wing tilted down. What happened was that an engine failed just at liftoff, and he was just off of the surface, and he hit the wingtip into the ice. And he was still flying and we saw it come back up, and then it went down and hit the other wingtip. And the last we saw of him there was a pressure

ridge down two or three miles from where the end of the runway was, or something like that, and he went out of sight behind that. He still wasn't twenty, thirty feet at the most in this pressure—I don't know how tall the pressure ridge was, it was quite a ways, but it blocked him from view. We thought he crashed, but we didn't see anything. The next thing we know we see him coming around, he's about a hundred feet, and he's dumping fuel, and both wingtips were flapping. They landed it, and I think they had to replace eight feet of wingtip—broke both wings.

DOB: But got back okay.

KL: Got back okay, yes.

DOB: With the cook on board.

KL: With the cook on board. Well, the radio operator was Bill Cumby. He always flew with Harvey Speed, and this was Harvey Speed and Harvey had a couple of forced landings on the glaciers and things like this. Harvey was an ex-enlisted man, too. Maybe that's why we kind of liked him. He was always doing stuff like that. He had been a chief petty officer at one time. And Bill Cumby, his radio operator, quit flying after that. He wouldn't fly anymore. He had to give his wings up and everything else, his air crew wings and all that. But he said that's enough with him, and he quit.

DOB: Well, thank you again.

[End of interview]