The Nineteen Fifties

I eased into the new decade as a high school graduate, ready to leave the farm and my asthma problems behind and eager to land my first nonfarm job. Marvin Grant, a friend who had graduated a year ahead of me, was working at the Sears catalogue distribution center in Greensboro, North Carolina. On a visit home he told me it was a good place to work and the job paid very well. I hitchhiked the seventy miles to Greensboro, applied at Sears, and was hired immediately after my first interview. The job paid seventy-five cents an hour, which I believe was the minimum wage at that time. We still didn't have a phone at the farm, so I found a pay phone and called Mom at Chatham's to tell her the good news. She was disappointed that I had left the farm, but happy that I had found a good job in Greensboro. I rented a room in a very nice home and was ready to go. I rode the city bus to and from work.

At Sears, I worked as a postal clerk, weighing packages, putting on the proper postage, and adding that and the sales tax to the bill, which I stuffed into the package. The packages, containing all sorts of Sears' merchandise, were mailed out to destinations in North Carolina, South Carolina, and parts of Virginia, the area served by the distribution center.

Sears had a cafeteria where I would buy lunch tickets. We were paid every other Friday. When I received my first paycheck, I went to a Sears department store and bought Mom a floral print dress, which I delivered the next time I hitchhiked back to the farm. She loved it and cried when I gave it to her. On payday evenings, I played poker with some of my coworkers. I was seventeen, and they were in their thirties, forties, and fifties. I guess I had been about thirteen or fourteen when I started playing poker with some of the older men that hung around Dash Gaither's store, and I had become very good at it. With my coworkers, If I came out of a game a winner, I had enough money for some celebrating. If I lost, I still had enough cafeteria tickets for

one meal a day, lunch.

Sometimes when I hitchhiked back to Greensboro on Sunday afternoons, I got dropped off in the small town of Mocksville about fifteen miles from the farm. Or I would hitchhike to Mocksville and catch a Greyhound bus back to Greensboro. After I learned that a friend of mine was working the late shift at a factory in Statesville, I gave up hitchhiking to ride the bus to that town, twenty-one miles from the farm. I usually arrived in Statesville around 10:30 or 11:00 o'clock at night, and my friend would pick me up at the bus station when he got off work at midnight. We'd then go visit some of the late-night drive-in diners, drink a little white lightning, and flirt with the ladies. He would get me home sometime before the sun came up. Mom and Grandma didn't like it that much, but that's the way it was. I was out on my own and having fun.

Ken and I all dressed up for Sunday Church. Brown and white loafers were in style back then. Wish they were now. The building in the background was used to store wheat, oats and corn. The photo was taken in 1951 shortly before I joined the U.S. Air Force.

Mom eventually asked, "If I buy you a car, will you come home every weekend?" I said, "No, I'm not promising that, Mom. If you buy me a car, I'll appreciate it, but no, I'm not going to promise to come home every weekend." She bought me the car anyway. It was a used Chevrolet and I really did like having a car, since it gave me the chance to broaden my social life in Greensboro and drive home on the weekends of my choice.

I had been at Sears just over a year when I drove home one weekend and told Mom I was giving the car back to her. "Why are you doing that?" she asked. I replied, "Because I'm going into the Air Force." Her response was, "They won't take you. You've got asthma." "Mom," I said, "they will take me. We are at war in Korea. They need me, and I want to serve my country."

On June 25, 1950, North Korean Army units had crossed the 38th Parallel and

invaded South Korea. The North Koreans claimed they were responding to an attack by South Korea. That claim turned out to be bogus. Korea had been partitioned after the Japanese were defeated in World War II and the 38th Parallel became the dividing line between the two Koreas, which evolved as two completely different societies. North Korea became a Communist state supported by the USSR and Red China. South Korea was an ally of the United States.

Immediately after the 1950 invasion, the United Nations Security Council called for the cessation of hostilities and for North Korea to withdraw its forces, a demand that was ignored. Within a day President Truman ordered the U.S. Air Force and Navy to attack North Korean military targets in the south, and two days after the invasion the UN authorized member nations to give military aid to South Korea. The beleaguered South Korean military could do little to halt the advance of the Communist troops, and within days North Korean forces had occupied most of the south, including the capital, Seoul.

Only a week after the invasion, American ground forces arrived in South Korea to join with the contingents of other UN nations and begin to force the North Koreans back over the 38th Parallel. It was no surprise that the U.S. Army and Marines formed the bulk of the UN ground forces. There was plenty of fighting ahead. Americans would come to know the names of the sites of battles in Korea—Pork Chop Hill and Heartbreak Ridge.

It was against this backdrop that I became a member of the U.S. Air Force, although I was nearly rejected. While working at Sears I had thought about joining up, hoping to become a tail gunner on one of the big Air Force bombers. Each bomber had a turret machine gun in the nose, one under the belly, one in the tail, and one on top of the fuselage. Gunners in these positions warded off enemy fighter planes helping to prevent the bombers from being shot down as they made runs over enemy targets.

A fellow employee at Sears, one of my best friends, was drafted into the Army during the summer of 1951. He was trained as an infantryman and sent to Korea as soon as his training was completed. He had been there only a few short weeks before he was killed in action. This gave me another reason to join the Air Force. I was hurt and angry,

and I wanted to avenge his death.

In the Air Force recruiting office in Charlotte, North Carolina, I filled out the necessary enlistment paperwork and was sent to a doctor for the obligatory physical exam. Early in the process the doctor realized I was asthmatic. "Sorry," he told me, "we can't take you. You have asthma." I vigorously protested, "No, no, no, I do not have asthma." The doctor laughed. "Okay, maybe you don't have asthma, but you're underweight and we'll have to turn you down because of that." When I asked how much I was underweight, he said three or four pounds. I asked if he could weigh me later in the day. He laughed again. "Yes," he replied. "You're going to eat a lot for lunch?" I told him yes and left the office.

I found a store that sold bananas and I bought and ate four pounds of them. The bananas had red peels, the first bananas I had ever seen that weren't yellow, but they tasted good. I went back to the doctor's office and got weighed again. He chuckled. "Well, you've made it," he said. "You can join up."

The sergeant who was handling my Air Force enlistment told me to report back on September 5 to catch a plane to San Antonio, Texas. Lackland Air Force Base, where I would be processed and take my basic training, was just outside San Antonio. It was the largest of the Air Force Basic Training Centers, having been built in 1941 just before our entry into World War II. I drove home and told Mom, Grandma, Carl, and Auntie the news. Mom was stunned. She couldn't believe I had been accepted as a volunteer for military service. I told the family that I would be leaving on September 5. Carl congratulated me and wished me well. He had been a foot soldier in World War II.

On September 5, 1951, I was sworn into the Air Force at Charlotte. After the ceremony, along with several other recruits, I boarded a Lockheed Constellation four-engine passenger plane bound for Texas. I was excited. Except for a couple of rides in a Piper Cub, I had never been on a plane before.

Lackland was a huge facility when combined with Kelly Field next door, but the demands of the Korean War had it bursting at the seams. The base had a capacity of about 25,000 recruits in basic training, but in the early 1950s the base reached a peak

of 55,000 recruits, and the Air Force was hard pressed to provide enough housing. Because so many people were joining the Air Force, hundreds of tents and other temporary housing facilities had to be set up to supplement the existing standard barracks. At one point, 19,000 recruits, including me, were living in tent city. Today Lackland is the only basic training facility for U.S. Air Force recruits.

The first two weeks were a busy time. We were given uniforms and a military haircut, learned Air Force history and military procedure, took another physical (which I passed with no mention of asthma), received a series of shots, went to the dentist, and marched. All military services are big on marching, to teach teamwork and discipline. We marched to chow, we marched to medical facilities, we marched to supply, and we marched just for the sake of marching. It was during my first days in the Air Force that another airman tagged me with the nickname "Doc." During my early years, I had been known variously as Buck, Chuck, Charlie, Charles, and Croffard, my middle name. "Doc" would stay with me for the rest of my life, to the extent that I hardly ever use my given names.

"...tagged me with the nickname Doc."

Recruits were given tests to determine which jobs we would be trained for. I volunteered to be trained as a tail gunner on one of the Air Force's big bombers. After a couple of weeks at Lackland, our flight (class) was moved to Sheppard Air Force Base at Wichita Falls, Texas, to complete our basic training. Sheppard is another big base that was created in 1941 in the run-up to World War II. During the war, Sheppard units provided basic training, flight training, and training for aircraft mechanics and other specialties.

At Sheppard I got my first glimpse of the Boeing B-50 Superfortress strategic bomber—and, yes, it had a tail gunner position. The B-50 was the successor to the B-29 Superfortress, workhorse of the latter stages of World War II. The atomic bombs that ended the war with Japan were dropped by B-29s.

Basic training at Sheppard involved more marching, classroom work, and no tents. At the end of it all, I was one of ten airmen in my flight of seventy-six to be promoted

to private first class. My drill sergeant delivered the news just before we shipped out of Sheppard. "Hillbilly," he said, "I tried to break you but couldn't. You deserve this promotion, Good luck." I thought that if I ever saw that man again, I'd whip his butt. He was one mean man.

At about the same time, I was informed that I would not become a tail gunner. The Air Force had determined that I should be a clerk. In fact, the majority of the men in my flight were headed to clerical school, with the exception of a few who were assigned to military police school.

My next assignment was clerical school at the University of Oklahoma at Norman, which would turn out to be a great experience. The university was founded in 1890, several years before Oklahoma became a state. Oklahoma has long been known for its powerful football teams, but in academic circles the university is a highly rated public institution. Many of the buildings on the Norman campus were designed by Native Americans from area tribes. Noted architect Frank Lloyd Wright termed the style "Cherokee Gothic." During World War II, enrollment at Oklahoma declined by almost half to about five thousand students, but the loss was offset when a naval air station was built adjoining the campus where pilots received advanced flight training.

By the time I arrived, enrollment had rebounded and I became one of about twelve thousand students. The one hundred twenty members of the Air Force contingent were housed in our own dormitories. I and the other Air Force clerical students, dressed in our class A uniforms, still had to march around campus and in parades. However, we spent most of our time in classrooms, where we were taught by college professors. Upon graduation I was one of two promoted to corporal. I was promoted based on demonstrated leadership qualities; the other guy won his second stripe for academics. He could type one hundred twenty words a minute in a fifteen-minute test on a manual typewriter. I was happy to get up to eighty-five words per minute.

Our clerical training came to an end just before Christmas 1951, and I was granted leave before heading for my next assignment, in Germany. This would be my first trip out of the United States, and while I was a little disappointed that I was not being sent

to Korea, I looked forward to a new experience in a nation we had only recently defeated.

After Christmas at home, I reported to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, for processing before boarding the *USS General Eltinge* for the trip to Bremerhaven, Germany. This was about the time the *Flying Enterprise* ship went down in the North Atlantic. The first two days out were fairly calm, but on the third day we encountered heavy seas and storms. The *General Eltinge*, a World War II Liberty ship, was built to carry 3,500 troops and it was packed full. On that third day out, the seas were so rough that no one was allowed topside. The bow of the ship would plunge under a giant wave and the stern would come out of the water, with the single screw spinning free and shaking the ship so hard we worried it would split apart. Next, the stern would go under and the bow would rise out of the water. This lasted for three days, and although the seas calmed down somewhat, the rest of the trip was still rough. Eating was a challenge, since we had to eat standing up with our metal trays balanced on a chest-high metal table. Most of the meals consisted of boiled eggs and rice. It took us thirteen days to cross the Atlantic, including a brief stop in Iceland where some of the troops disembarked. I was assigned latrine duty for the entire trip. It was a messy, smelly, sickening job.

"...bow of ship would plunge under a giant wave..."

We arrived in Bremerhaven with about three thousand of us on board. After leaving the ship we were taken by bus to a nearby air base where we were herded into a huge aircraft hangar for a physical exam. Apparently the Air Force wanted to make sure none of us had become damaged goods during the rough crossing. We all had to undress for the exam and it was a hell of a sight to behold, three thousand guys naked as jaybirds being examined in this huge hangar. After the physical we split up and boarded trains to travel to our individual assignments.

Germany was still an occupied country, a legacy of World War II. I was sent to Landsberg Air Force Base in Bavaria in the U.S.-occupied section of Germany. The British, Russians, and French occupied other areas of the country. The base was located near the small Bavarian town of Landsberg am Lech. In the 1920s, a Nazi

This is downtown Landsberg am Lech where I spent many happy evenings dining and drinking great German beer.

This photo shows a bombed out airplane hanger/maintenance building at Landsberg AFB. When I arrived in Germany in January 1952 little repair had taken place on the buildings devastated during World War II bombing. The bahnhoff (train station) in Munchen looked a bit like this building except that it was much larger with a small portion of it restored to provide a ticket office and a small seating area. The best frankfurters in the world were served from carts at the train stations.

party dissident imprisoned there wrote an autobiographical and political book destined to share its author's later renown. The book: *Mein Kampf*. The author: Adolph Hitler.

Landsberg had been a Luftwaffe base during the war. The airstrip and hangars were destroyed in two raids by American B-17 Flying Fortresses, but the barracks were intact. In April 1945, a U.S. armored division swept into the area and occupied the base. U.S. Army engineers repaired it over the next two years, and it would remain a U.S. Air Force base throughout the Cold War.

I was assigned to the 501st Aircraft Control and Warning Group, later renamed the 501st Tactical Air Control Group. Our mission was to radar-monitor air traffic throughout Europe and on the eastern border of Germany, which was occupied by the Russians. The United States and our French and British allies were concerned that the USSR might mount a massive air attack, then send troops marching through the Fulda Gap to attack Western Europe.

At Landsberg I started out as a clerk-typist in the Public Information Office. Later, when my senior officer learned that I had a knack for writing, I retrained for another job, information technician. I was writing press releases, shepherding reporters around, and compiling histories of the activities of the air group and its squadrons.

Photo taken in 1952 at the Eibsee Hotel on Lake Eibsee near Landsberg am Lech, my first duty station in Germany. Since then, I've been back to the same hotel many times, most recently in 2003 with Paula, Andrea and Carl. The hotel is now back in civilian hands after having served as a hotel for enlisted men for nearly two decades after World War II.

While in Landsberg I discovered the beautiful resort area of Garmisch-Partenkirchen south of Munich. The region attracts visitors year-round but is known primarily for its great skiing. Garmisch was the site of the 1936 Winter Olympics. With fifty-cent-a-night rooms and free meals, my friends and I spent as many weekends there as we could. I still go back there every time I have the chance. When the Allied occupation of Germany ended in 1955, the ski resorts

and hotels went back into the hands of German proprietors.

Many years after being discharged from the Air Force, when I was visiting the Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, Tennessee, an exhibit reminded me that Johnny Cash was stationed at Landsberg at the same time I was. I recalled going to the service club and hearing him and his band, the Landsberg Barbarians, play and sing the popular tunes of the day.

I completed my tour at Landsberg and was reassigned to Kaiserslautern in the French-occupied sector of southwestern Germany. The area was believed to have been first settled around 800 B.C. and was named Kaiserslautern by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who ruled the Holy Roman Empire in the 1100s and maintained a hunting retreat in the area. Through the centuries Kaiserslautern and environs have weathered many conflicts and have been variously occupied by Swedes, Croatians, and Germans, and by the French several times.

In World War II, Allied bombs destroyed 60 percent of the city, including eleven thousand homes. In March of 1945, Kaiserslautern was liberated from the Germans without opposition by a U.S. Infantry unit attached to General Patton's Third Army.

On Maneuvers in 1953 near Vogelweh about 10 miles west of Kaiserslautern, Germany where I was stationed for more than two years with the 501st Tactical Control Group.

When I arrived, Kaiserslautern, called K-Town by many GIs, was on the way to becoming the largest U.S. military community outside the United States. I was in the 501st Tactical Control Group, headquarters for the 601st, 602nd, 603rd, and 604th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadrons, which were scattered around Germany. The 807th Tactical Air Control Squadron, part of the 501st, was also moved to Kaiserslautern.

Our wartime mission was to monitor air traffic through the radar sites that had been strategically located; we were watching the skies 24/7. The 807th was trained to work with

Army units by going beyond the front lines to direct air strikes against the enemy.

With a clearance for access to secret information, I occasionally visited the control room operated by the 501st. Radar reports were constantly coming in from all over Europe. Our Air Force in Germany did not have aircraft with night interception capabilities. We simply watched on radar as Russian planes flew out of Eastern Europe into Germany and all the way over to London. The Russian bombers owned the airspace over Germany at night, which was a major concern for our military brass.

On the other side of the world, the Korean "Conflict" raged on and remained a high priority for military resources. While it was commonly referred to as the Korean War, officially it was a police action since there had been no declaration of war by Congress. It was rumored that the 501st would be deployed to Korea to replace the 502nd, which would rotate back to the States, while the 503rd, headquartered in the States, would deploy to Germany. None of that happened. An armistice ending the fighting was agreed to in the summer of 1953.

At my desk in Kleber Kaserne, Kaiserslautern, Germany.

By this time, I was completely happy to remain in Germany since I loved Bavaria and the German people. Slowly, I was learning to speak their language and I was making civilian friends. The German rail system suffered severe war damage and had not been fully restored, but enough lines were operating to allow me to visit several German cities, including West Berlin.

In Kaiserslautern, we had two enlisted men's clubs with live music several nights a week and bingo once a week. One of the clubs was located near Kleber Kaserne where I lived and worked. The other was located in downtown Kaiserslautern. The downtown club was the club of choice for most of the black soldiers stationed in the area. Whites

and a few blacks chose the club near my barracks. Drinks were only twenty or twenty-five cents apiece, so it was a great place to hang out.

Race relations did not seem to be a problem, that is until one night when a friend of mine and I were out for an evening at the local bars and restaurants including my favorite, the Café Bauer. We'd spent most of the money we had with us and decided to catch the army bus back to our barracks. It was free.

When we got on the bus, we were the only two airmen and the only two whites on board. For some reason, unknown to me, I was suddenly grabbed from behind by two soldiers while another held a knife against my neck and started slapping me. The German bus driver turned to head for the military police station blowing his horn and driving very fast. Soon, one of the soldiers was trying to wrestle control of the bus from the driver. Fortunately, we got to the MP station. The driver opened the door, got out and called the MPs over. I was rescued.

Not long after that, my buddy and I were downtown one evening. It had started to snow about three hours earlier and there was now about two inches covering the streets and sidewalks. We were nearing a street light when I recognized my assailant as one of two black guys crossing the street. While much of the war rubble from WWII bombings had been cleaned up, there were still plenty of bricks piled along the sidewalks. I reached down, picked one up and began to sneak up on the guy who had slapped me around while holding a knife to my neck. My buddy said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to bash his head in." He said, "You can't do that, might kill him." I said, "Well, I think that's what he was about to do to me." At about that time he yelled, "Watch out, watch out!" The two turned and ran off. I felt like throwing the brick at my buddy.

One Sunday afternoon, I was in the club near my barracks with six or eight other patrons being entertained by a German band. When an Army sergeant, the club manager, joined us, I asked him, "Why don't you have anybody in here? The band's playing and they're doing a great job." He told me that Sundays were dead and the band was just practicing.

I talked with the German bandleader, who told me they came in every Sunday and practiced and that there were several other bands in the area that practiced in other clubs on Sundays. That gave me an idea. I asked him if we could get all the other bands to come to our club on Sundays. "You could have a jam session and call it practice," I told him. He thought it was a great idea, so I asked him what sort of inducements would attract them. "Oh, free beer and maybe some food, and I'll have six or eight bands here every Sunday."

I immediately took the idea to the sergeant/manager, who exclaimed, "Golly, that might work." He then asked me if I wanted a job. "I've got a job," I replied. "No, no, I mean a part-time job as my assistant manager," he replied. When I learned what it would pay, I took the job and became the assistant manager of the Enlisted Men's Club in my off-duty hours, usually after 5 P.M. on weekdays and anytime on weekends. Not too many weeks later we had 150 to 200 patrons crowding the club every Sunday afternoon. I also got the club renamed the Casbah Enlisted Men's Club. *(See Appendix I, E.M. Mustache Club.)*

"Dating the Fasching Ball Queen. The only American at the ball."

Before going to work at the club I dated Barbara, the daughter of the owner of Café Bauer, a former SS sergeant. He was not happy about his daughter dating an American. Nonetheless, we would meet secretly for a couple of hours once or twice a week. Her mother and I got along real well and with her mother's permission she invited me to the annual Fasching Ball which took place before Lent each year. That year Barbara had been chosen Fasching Queen. I showed up in my dress uniform with a white shirt and black bow tie making it formal attire. I was the only American there. Arm in arm, we walked onto the dance floor and opened the festivities with a waltz to the orchestra's wonderful rendition of the Blue Danube. As it turned out, her mom had not gotten permission from her father for me to be her escort to the ball. It was our last date.

It was at the Casbah Club that I met my future bride, Dene Grant, an Army clerk who came in one evening with three of her friends. It turned out that Dene and I had

something in common. She was a North Carolina native from Snow Hill, about 225 miles east of where I was born. It wasn't long before we were dating.

My extensive travels took me to Italy, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Portugal and London. On one of my visits to Venice I met a beautiful English model, Diana Gray, who invited me to visit her home in Bushy Heath, just outside London, for a few days. It was my first visit to London, and I was enthralled. Diana's father was a very wealthy manufacturer who was so well connected that Diana was able to invite me to Queen Elizabeth's coronation in June 1953.

I was excited and anxious to go, but a family emergency forced me to say no. Grandma was seriously ill back in the U.S., and she had requested that I come home to be with her. She feared she was dying. Through the good offices of the Red Cross, I went back to North Carolina for thirty days, which included the day Queen Elizabeth was crowned.

Grandma recovered and I returned to Germany, where Dene and I were married in April of 1954 by the Bürgermeister (mayor) of Wiesbaden in a required civil ceremony. The next day we were married by an Air Force chaplain.

We moved off base to a second floor apartment owned by Frau and Fritz Riley in the nearby village of Enkenbach. They were a great couple with a daughter and son-in-law living with them. They spoke no English. While we had toilet facilities in our apartment, we did not have a bathtub or a shower. We could go downstairs when we wanted to take bath, drop pfennings into a utility box which would trip a switch allowing us to draw hot water for the tub. After a few weeks, Frau Riley asked me why we bathed so frequently. It was their custom to bathe once a week. I guess we must have been bathing almost daily.

The Riley's had a large garden in back of their home where they grew almost all of the vegetables they ate.

By this time, my German was getting better and better. I could speak and understand enough to go with Fritz to his carpenters' union meetings and engage in conversation with his fellow union members about almost every subject on earth.

This is Diana Gray whom I met in Venice and dated for a while, long distance, Germany to London. She and her family invited me to attend the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

The end of the mustache. Celebrating the upcoming April 1954 wedding to Dene, members of the E.M. Mustache Club have fun shaving off my mustache lathered with beer foam. The picture was taken at the Casbar E.M. Club in Kaiserslautern where I was assistant manager. The sergeant with the razor was the manager.

April 1954, Dene and I emerge with Chaplain Miller from our second wedding ceremony. We were married the previous day by the Bürgermeister of Wiesbaden in a civil ceremony, a legal requirement of the Air Force and Germany.

The little bakery in Enkenbach would cook cheesecake on Fridays. After getting off work, Dene and I would stop at the bakery each Friday for a freshly baked cheesecake, still warm when we picked it up. Living on the German economy in a small village was very enjoyable. I was glad that there was not room enough for us to live in U.S. family housing near Kaiserslautern.

In January of 1955, Dene and I came home to North Carolina.

My next assignment was at Charleston Air Force Base in South Carolina. With Mom vouching for me at the local bank in Elkin, I was able to buy a barebones Ford sedan with no air conditioning. I drove down to the base after two weeks of leave time.

Charleston AFB dated back to 1928, when the City of Charleston started operating a small airfield while acquiring land and building a larger airport facility. After Pearl Harbor, Army Air Corps pursuit and antisubmarine squadrons moved onto the airport and the War Department took control. During the war, in addition to a coastal patrol mission, the base provided final-phase training for B-24 crews headed for Europe. Not long after the Japanese surrender, the government placed the base on surplus status and it was returned to the City of Charleston, which built a new air terminal.

In the 1950s, as a result of the Korean Conflict and the Cold War, the Air Force was back in Charleston with a troop carrier wing and military air transport wing, which shared the facility with commercial and private aircraft operations. For years afterward, Charleston was primarily an air transport base, although one fighter interceptor squadron shared the facility.

At Charleston I was placed in charge of the Information Services Office with six other enlisted personnel under my supervision. My immediate boss was a lieutenant who worked for the captain in charge of the entire office. It was a good assignment that I enjoyed a lot, except that Charleston was extremely hot and we had no air conditioning in the offices. The only air conditioning on the base was at the movie theater and the Officers' and NCO Clubs.

It was at Charleston that I got to meet Dwight Eisenhower, elected our 34th president in 1952 and the first Republican president in twenty years. He came for a visit to the

base, which was under the command of the Military Air Transport Service. We had a big parade for Ike, and part of my responsibilities was directing our base photographers as they took pictures of the events. This gave me the opportunity to get close to the president, who reached out and shook hands with me and one of the photographers.

Dene and I rented a little trailer in a trailer park just outside the main gate of the base. It was eight feet wide and about twenty-five feet long, very small and very hot with no air conditioning. Dene had a job across the street as a laundry clerk. Discomfort finally got the best of us, and we gave up on the trailer. We decided to splurge and rent a place on the Isle of Palms just across the river from the City of Charleston. We found a place we could barely afford four blocks from the beach. We had some good times on the beach and enjoyed living on the Isle with people we considered very, very rich.

"I decided to return to civilian life..."

Summer was winding down, along with my tour of duty, when I was asked to reenlist. However, with the Korean Conflict over, Air Force promotions were frozen. Since I had no chance of promotion from my rank of staff sergeant, I decided to return to civilian life and received my honorable discharge early in September.

Dene and I headed back to North Carolina and moved in with Mom and my stepfather, Carl, at their invitation. With so many servicemen being discharged as the Korean Conflict wound down, employment choices were limited, to say the least. Prospective employers would ask, "Where did you go to school?" and I would proudly answer, "Union Grove High School." Their response was, "No, where did you go to college?" I quickly learned that a high school diploma wasn't as valuable as it had been four years earlier.

I finally landed a job with a high school classmate who was selling Vitacraft cookware at hope-chest parties for single girls. I wasn't making a heck of a lot of money selling Vitacraft, and my territory was in Columbia, South Carolina, about 170 miles south of Elkin. That meant I had to be gone all week, living in motels and driving home on the weekends. Money was so tight that on one trip I pawned my spare tire to a gas station owner for enough gas to get back to Elkin. I planned to reclaim the tire the following

week but never made it back.

I had been a civilian for almost three months when I came to the realization that I wasn't going to be able to make it financially, so I reenlisted on the eighty-ninth day after my discharge. I was able to keep my rank, since I was within the ninety-day grace period for reenlistment. I got to choose where I would go for my next assignment and, since I had never been to Florida, I chose Palm Beach Air Force Base, which turned out to be another great assignment.

The base started out in January 1942 as Morrison Army Airfield, a base for aircraft flying anti-submarine patrols along the coast and units ferrying aircraft, personnel, and equipment to the Philippines in the wake of Pearl Harbor. Soon Morrison became a major port of embarkation for aircraft being ferried across the Atlantic to Africa and Europe. Morrison was placed in reserve status in mid-1947 and reactivated as Palm Beach Air Force Base in 1951 because of the Korean War and the Cold War. It was assigned to the Military Air Transport Service, becoming the primary base for training all Air Force personnel supporting and flying heavy transport aircraft. The MATS Weather Service also used Palm Beach AFB as a headquarters for hurricane research, flying the first WB-50D Superfortress Hurricane Hunter aircraft from the base in 1956. During this time, Palm Beach County operated a civilian terminal on the south side of the airfield. In the early 1960s, Air Force One was a frequent visitor, as President John F. Kennedy often spent weekends and vacations at the Kennedy compound in Palm Beach. When the Air Force ceased operations at the base in 1962, it became Palm Beach International Airport.

I arrived in Florida unaware that Palm Beach Air Force Base was located not in Palm Beach, but in West Palm Beach, a few miles away on the west side of the Intracoastal Waterway. My assignment was with the base Information Services Office. As in Charleston, it was very hot and neither the base nor our apartment had air conditioning. It had been hot on the farm in North Carolina in summer, but golly, I never dreamed that anyplace could be as hot as Florida. I'd sit at my manual typewriter writing columns and features with sweat literally dripping off my fingers. In spite of the weather,

Armed Forces Day at Palm Beach Air Force Base, 1956. One of the largest transport planes in the Military Air Force Transportation Service was the C-97; a refueling version of the plane was called the KC-97 which was used for in-flight refueling of other planes. Ascending the stairs for a look inside are Mom, Carl and Dene.

Here I am participating in a WJNO radio program along with other members of the armed forces stationed at Palm Beach Air Force Base, Florida, 1956. It was a weekly series which continued until the base was closed in 1962.

I fell in love with Florida and the Palm Beach area immediately. I loved the nightlife, the magic of the word "Florida," and the magic of the words "Palm Beach." To me, coming from the hills of North Carolina, it was all magic.

The Palm Beach area was not only hot, it was very pricey. So that we could afford an apartment, Dene took a job as a clerk in a local hospital and I got an evening job as a bartender at the Officers' Club. Dene later got a higher-paying job at Pratt-Whitney Aircraft in north Palm Beach County.

While at Palm Beach, I applied for and was sent to the Army Public Information School on Fort Slocum just north of New York City. It was in the fall of 1956, another great assignment. The Army instructors were very knowledgeable and well-versed in how to teach their subjects. In addition to writing features, columns and film scripts, we wrote radio and TV scripts. While there I got to go to several baseball games, watching the Brooklyn Dodgers and New York Yankees. Games included the 1956 World Series which was ultimately won by the Yankees.

On other weekends I spent time in the Adirondack Mountains watching autumn turn the hills into a blaze of yellow and red. The evenings were cool and the daytime temperatures at Fort Slocum were nowhere near as hot as Palm Beach. When it came time to leave, I was a little disappointed but happy to be headed back to my job at Palm Beach. *(See Appendix II, Army Information School at Fort Slocum, New York, "Island Outpost.")*

After returning from Fort Slocum, I joined an aero club, learned how to fly, and wrote a series of articles for the base paper about the experience. *(See Appendix III, I Fly.)*

I was at Palm Beach Air Force Base for less than two years when I got the disappointing news that I was being shipped overseas, this time to the 313th Air Division at Kadena Air Force Base on Okinawa. Dene couldn't go with me because there was no on-base housing for dependents and no off-base civilian housing.

In June 1957, I left Florida by bus for California, stopping over in El Paso, Texas, to visit my brother, Ken, who was stationed at Biggs Airfield. From California I took a military

flight to Tokyo with refueling stops in Hawaii and Guam. From Tokyo another military flight took me to Okinawa.

"Leave Palm Beach, assigned to Okinawa."

A coral island, Okinawa is the largest in the Ryukyu chain. It lies five hundred miles south of Japan and an equal distance from China and Taiwan. An island of peace-loving seafarers and traders, Okinawa had been under Japanese control since 1871. U.S. forces invaded the island in 1945 and commenced a three-month struggle to defeat the Japanese, one of the most savage engagements of World War II. Deaths of American and Japanese troops and Okinawan civilians numbered about 200,000. Most of the island's homes and buildings were destroyed in the fighting. When U.S. forces moved in, they captured what was little more than a bombed-out 4,600-foot runway that had been used by Japanese air forces.

That became Kadena Air Force Base, which has been one of our most important Pacific air bases ever since the war because of its proximity to Korea, Southeast Asia, China, and Taiwan. Various tactical and strategic Air Force units have called Kadena home and participated in operations in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

I wasn't exactly welcomed to Kadena with open arms. I arrived early one morning, ate breakfast in the mess hall, and then checked into my unit. "What are you doing here?" the captain in charge of the Information Services Office asked. "We don't need any more information specialists." My comeback was, "Well, sir, you can send me right back to Palm Beach Air Force Base. I'll be happy to go back." He replied, "It doesn't work that way. We've got to find a job for you here."

Not long after that meeting, something I had eaten for breakfast started working on me. I had contracted amoebic dysentery, an affliction the doctors couldn't do much about. It would be six weeks before dysentery gave up its grip on my stomach and intestines. By the time it was over, my weight had dropped from two hundred eighteen pounds to one hundred fifty-eight. It was a difficult time for me, since in the service you didn't get time off for being a little bit sick—you had to be damned near dead to be excused from work. So I toiled in misery.

I was so weak that I couldn't climb a flight of stairs without stopping to rest. The captain found me a job that required me to take my aching body to Naha Air Base, another former Japanese airfield on Okinawa. It was a temporary assignment with the historic 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing and a support group. The 51st had fought in China during the war, then spent several years at Naha before becoming one of the most important USAF units in Korea. Captain Joe McConnell, the Korean Conflict's top-scoring ace, flew with the 51st.

At Naha I was to temporarily replace the noncommissioned officer in charge, who was rotating back to the States in six weeks. He was supposed to train me to take over his job, but the day after I arrived he walked in and said, "I'm not coming back to work. I'm going to have a good time for the next six weeks." I bid him goodbye. I was told that a major would be coming to Naha in about five months to take over the office. In the meantime, Colonel Reed, the base commander, told me, "You are in charge."

I had three writers working for me—one for news, one for sports, and a historian—and a clerk who was the first black to work under my direction. Back in Germany, the one black airman assigned to the 501st and I had become very good friends.

The barracks at Naha were relatively new. I shared a room with another sergeant. At the entrance of the building there was a large "dayroom" with a black and white TV. There were enough overstuffed chairs to seat about twenty people. There was also a small kitchen with a refrigerator and a stove. It was run by an Okinawan nicknamed Charlie. We paid him to clean our rooms weekly. He made additional money by making sandwiches, selling soft drinks and coffee. He and I became very good friends. Within a few weeks after I arrived he invited me to his home one Saturday

to have the evening meal with him and his family.

He, his wife and two children shared a three-room thatch covered hut with dirt floors. Woven reed mats were used for mattresses and seats grouped around a table measuring about four feet square. Fourteen inch legs raised it above the dirt floor. When it came time to eat we sat down cross-legged on the mats with generous servings of seaweed, sake and sashimi. Sashimi was raw fish, something I had never eaten before. I dreaded taking my first bite after dipping it in soy sauce and a hot mustard sauce. To my surprise, I enjoyed it very much. During the eighteen months I was on Okinawa, I would be invited to eat with Charlie and his family another four or five times.

Another memorable dining experience came when I was invited by the editors of the Ryukyu Shimpo, the local Okinawa newspaper, to have dinner with them one evening. They wanted to show their appreciation to me for handling their press inquiries and making arrangements to interview the brass at the base.

As was the custom, I took my shoes off at the entrance to the "resutoran" and replaced them with a thong type sandal. Six men from the newspaper and a woman interpreter welcomed me and we sat down cross-legged at a long short-legged table. Behind each of the men was a geisha in her finest regalia. The lady interpreter did not have a geisha. It was the duty of the geishas to serve us. In front of each of us was a bottle of sake as well as bottles of vodka, bourbon and scotch. It wasn't necessary to order drinks from a waiter, it was all there in front of me waiting

No, it's not chewing gum. Part of my job as head of the Office of Information Services at Naha AFB was to work as a liaison with the press. Here, members of the Okinawan Press corps are preparing for a familiarization flight on board a C-130 troop carrier plane. The planes are extremely noisy in flight. To protect their eardrums against the noise, I was passing out earplugs made of cotton and a pink colored wax to stuff in their ears. Before I could explain, through an interpreter, the reporters were already popping the ear plugs into their mouths thinking it was chewing gum!

to be poured by my geisha. Three more geishas came out and entertained us with beautiful songs and stringed music.

I don't remember specifically what we ate but it included sashimi, now a favorite of mine, rice, sushi, seaweed, many kinds of fish and fish eggs. I think everything came from the sea. After we ate there was more entertainment. Dinner lasted for about five hours. I wish that someone had taken a photograph of the evening for me to share with the readers of this autobiography. But, it didn't happen and I rely on the pictures in my mind.

While on Okinawa, I used some of my spare time to write a short story for a contest being conducted by the 313th Air Division. It won first place. *(See Appendix IV, God Please Help Us.)*

When the major who was supposed to take over the office reported in at the 313th Air Division at Kadena, Personnel there called Colonel Reed. "We're sending down a major to take over your Information Services Office and sending Sergeant Dockery back to Kadena." The colonel replied, "I don't want the major. I want to keep Dockery." Informed that the job was a field grade officer's position, Colonel Reed held his ground. "I don't care. I want to keep Dockery. I don't care that he's a sergeant, I want to keep him." Colonel Reed got his way, and soon I was invited to attend all his staff meetings for the senior commissioned officers on the base.

Part of my work involved escorting members of the press visiting Naha, which included reporters and photographers for Life magazine and Newsweek. When the colonel learned that I had been entertaining the media at the Naha Noncommissioned Officers' Club, housed in a converted old fire station, he told me, "Enough of that. You're going to entertain them at the Officers' Club." He instructed the manager to charge all entertainment expenses for me and the visiting press to his account. Colonel Reed then turned to me and said, "Of course, Sergeant Dockery, you will need to dress in civilian clothes when you're entertaining here at the Officers' Club."

The situation turned out very well for me. I was having a lot of fun, I was writing speeches for two colonels, and I was preparing programs for upcoming war games.

Here I received a first place award in a short story writing contest. The title of the short story was "God Please Help Us", a fictionalized account of a young white boy and his friend, a colored boy, whose country school was to be integrated when they returned to classes in the fall. The small farming community in which they lived was torn apart by the order to desegregate their school. They came up with a disastrous plan to solve the problem. Other persons in the photograph were the judges in the contest.

In addition to writing for Colonel Reed, I was ghost-writing articles for Colonel Johnsen, commander of the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing, and writing his speeches as well.

The 1958 war games turned serious with the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis. In the wake of World War II, the Communist party head, Mao Tse-tung, had taken over as China's leader. The U.S. supported Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, who had fled with his forces to the island of Taiwan off the coast of the mainland and established the Republic of China (ROC). Chiang hoped one day to return to the mainland and regain control of China. The two sides exchanged artillery fire in the first crisis, and although the situation calmed down, tensions between the two sides and between the U.S. and China remained high. We had pledged to defend Taiwan if Mao's Communist forces ever attacked, but whether the U.S. would intervene in the event of an attack on Taiwan's offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu was unclear. Those islands quickly became the focal point of one of the most contentious periods of Cold War history. In 1958, Chiang Kai-shek shipped Nationalist troops to the islands and Mao retaliated by bombing Quemoy.

"The 1958 war games turned serious with the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis."

It looked like Mao was trying to take over Quemoy and Matsu, especially when he sent gunboats into the Taiwan Straits and started making incursions into the airspace over the islands—despite the U.S. batteries of Matador missiles on Taiwan that had the range to reach the mainland.

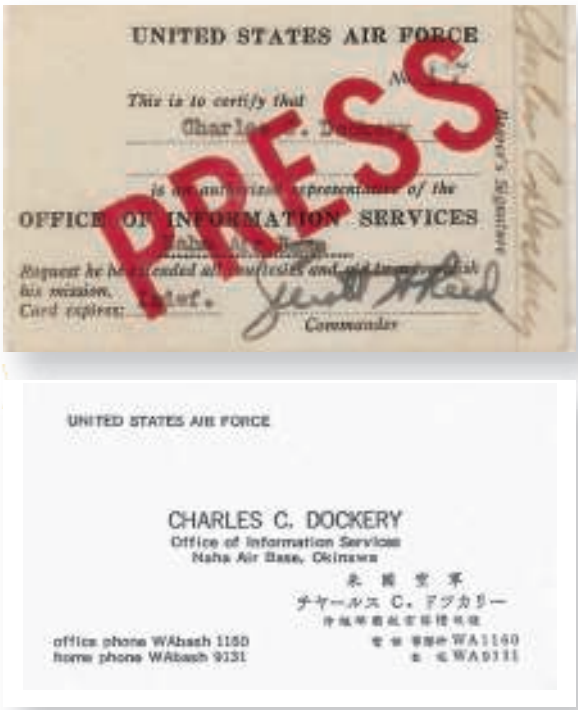
I was having lunch at the NCO Club when word came of the incursions. Colonel Reed sent someone to tell me that Colonel Johnsen, commander of the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing, had requested my immediate presence on Taiwan. I told the courier, "Yeah, after I finish lunch, I'll pack up and go." He replied, "You don't understand. This is an emergency situation and you have to come with me now." I left my lunch on the table, went to the barracks and packed uniforms, fatigues, and other essentials, boarded a C-130, and flew to Tainan Air Base on Taiwan. As the information officer, I was to coordinate the release of press information to the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing, the

313th Air Division, Fifth Air Force Headquarters, and ultimately to the Pentagon.

When I landed at Tainan, the F-86D fighter jets of the 51st had already flown several missions. That evening, two of the pilots came in over the airfield doing barrel rolls, an indication that they had scored an enemy kill. It was never announced that they had done so, but the guys from the 51st erected a totem pole and started cutting notches in it. Two notches were cut that day, and I guess it's never been revealed until now that the U.S. was shooting down Chinese aircraft in the Taiwan Straits.

Another secret not revealed until years later was that the U.S. Navy had armed the Nationalist Chinese on Taiwan with Sidewinder missiles, and the ROC pilots reportedly shot down ten Communist MIGs in one day. We were in a shooting war with China that day, a situation that never made the news, and Mao's forces backed off after two or three weeks. The fuss over Taiwan and the islands, including a third Taiwan Straits crisis, has continued through the years. Every once in a while, the Chinese will do a little saber rattling as though they're going to go in and take Taiwan by force.

A tent city had been erected at Tainan Air Base as the crisis unfolded, and I thought that would be my home for the next few weeks. However, the second day I was there I spotted a familiar face. It turned out to be a Taiwanese officer I had met at Palm Beach Air Force Base when he was there for air-sea rescue training in the SA-16 amphibious aircraft. Dene and I had invited him for dinner at our West Palm Beach home on several occasions, and we became



These are the business and press cards I used in Okinawa. No rank is shown on either. At the direction of my commander, I was instructed to wear civilian clothes when entertaining/escorting the media, local and international, so that I could entertain them on my commander's account in the officers' club. The position I held was normally occupied by a field grade officer. The officers' club was a very nice place in contrast to the non-commissioned officers' club, an old abandoned fire station which the colonel said was not appropriate for entertaining dignitaries.

very good friends. At Tainan, I raced over to him, stopped, and saluted. "Doc, is that you?" he asked. "Yes, sir," I replied.

After we exchanged pleasantries, he asked, "What are you doing living out here in tent city?" I told him, "This is where I've been assigned." He laughed and said, "No way. I'm going to get you a place in town." It turned out he knew Colonel Johnsen and so I got permission to live at a very nice hotel that the Taiwanese officer recommended. I was there for another two or three weeks and then was shipped back to Naha.

In January 1958, I learned that my grandma was dying of cancer and I was given leave time to go to her bedside. When it came time to return to Okinawa, she begged me not to go. She couldn't understand that I had to follow orders. It was a very tearful and sad farewell. She was holding on to me so tightly that I literally had to pry her fingers loose from my arms. She died about two weeks after I got back to Okinawa.

Busy at my desk in the Office of Information Services, Naha AFB. I was originally sent to Naha from Kadena AFB, twenty miles north of Naha, on temporary duty as the non-commissioned officer in charge. The assignment actually lasted the entire 18 months I was on Okinawa.

The next eleven months spent on Okinawa was an enjoyable tour of duty despite the fact that I missed Dene and being back in Florida. I made many new friends including the major who eventually came to Naha about a month before I left to transition into his role as information services officer. He and I got along extremely well. Hardly a week went by that he did not invite me to his officer's quarters for a drink.

Working for Colonel Reed and Colonel Johnsen was a delight. Colonel Reed was more on the serious side but Colonel Johnsen was always laughing and joking. Both men were well respected by the officers and men they commanded.

Usually military parades were stiff, formal events but Colonel Johnsen organized one that I'll always remember. He flew a couple of C-130s down to the Philippines

and picked up a band of aborigines and brought them back to march in our parade. The major who was replacing me had an old green '37 Ford. Colonel Johnsen had him drive it at the tail end of the parade behind the second flight of aborigines. The first flight led the parade.

While I was on Okinawa, I had an opportunity to spend a long weekend in Manila courtesy of the Air Force which flew fifteen or twenty of us down on a training mission.

On the way down, one of the crew whom I had met earlier was also a Dockery. After we were airborne and on our way to Manila he came back and asked me if I wanted to come up to the cockpit. I said, "Sure, delighted to." The cockpit area of the C-130 is huge. There are seats for the pilot, the co-pilot, a navigator and engineer and, still, there was room enough to walk around. After being there a few minutes, Captain Dockery asked me if I would like to try my hand at flying the C-130. He knew that I had learned to fly in an Aeronca Champion but this was no Aeronca Champ, the turbo prop workhorse of the Air Force. Today, it still fills that role.

With a little bit of trepidation, and at his invitation, I sat down in the pilot's seat. He asked me to take the controls and fly the plane straight and level at the altitude and compass heading he had given me. It took several minutes for me to get comfortable enough to keep the plane straight and level at altitude and on the course. Soon I was enjoying a thrill I never thought I would experience, flying a huge military multi-engine plane. I was so intent on what I was doing that I didn't pay much attention to the others in the cockpit but when I looked over to my right in the co-pilot's seat Captain Dockery was asleep. I turned and looked over my right shoulder and so was the engineer. This pretty much freaked me out. It wasn't long after that until I woke up Captain Dockery and told him I wanted to return to the back of the plane for a cup of coffee. He complimented me for my work in the cockpit and told me to come up again if I wanted to fly some more. I was content to drink my coffee in the rear of the plane but excited about what I had just done.

One of the things I missed most when I got back to Florida was the Saturday morning bathing routine. For a dollar and twenty-five cents I could visit a bathhouse

where I would disrobe and give myself over to a young Okinawan girl who would put me in a steam cabinet with just my head sticking out. After several minutes in that she would lead me out to a stool where I would sit while she slowly and gently lathered me with soap. Then she would pour buckets of water over my head, rinse me off. Next came a massage from my temples to my toes. She finished the massage off by walking up and down my back a couple of times. She was small, weighing only about a hundred pounds, but the first time it scared the Dickens out of me. After the massage I would sit in a warm tub of water then back to the stool to be rinsed off again. What a great way to start a Saturday morning!

In December 1958, I left Okinawa for an assignment at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina, which is very close to Dene's hometown of Snow Hill. For the first time, we thought, we would be able to take advantage of on-base housing and settle down in a nice home supplied and furnished by the government. It was not to be.

When I arrived in West Palm Beach to pick up Dene and our belongings, I received a telegram from General D.W. Hutchinson, commander of the Ninth Air Force headquartered at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina. It informed me that my previous orders had been rescinded and I was to report to Shaw instead.

I checked in at the headquarters squadron at Shaw, which provided administrative services for the entire base, including the Ninth Air Force. The NCO in charge read my telegram and told me I was in the wrong place and I should go directly to the general's office. There, a civilian secretary took me into an anteroom and offered me a drink. I figured she was talking about a glass of water, so I was rather shocked when she asked if I preferred scotch or bourbon. In the general's office in mid-afternoon I'm offered a shot of booze? "No, thank you," I answered. "I'll have a Coke."

General Hutchinson came out and invited me into his office, saying, "Bet you're wondering why you're here." That was an understatement. "Yes, sir, I am," I replied. "Would you rather be in Goldsboro?" He asked. "Well, sir, that's where my wife's parents are and we were looking forward to the assignment." The general replied, "I hope you don't mind

too much, because you're going to be staying here."

It turned out that Colonel Johnsen had called General Hutchinson from Okinawa singing my praises. "The colonel told me you were being assigned to one of my bases at Goldsboro, which is under Ninth Air Force jurisdiction," the general said. "He suggested you're a very good writer. That you had written speeches and ghostwritten articles for him, and he thought you should come to work for me." I replied, "Yes, sir, I'm flattered."

The assignment at Shaw AFB would turn out to be one of the best of my Air Force career. The base came into existence in 1941 just before the start of World War II with a mission of training cadets to fly. The base also housed a small contingent of German prisoners of war in 1945.

Writing speeches for General Hutchinson at Ninth Air Force Headquarters in South Carolina.

One of my principal jobs at Shaw was writing speeches for General Hutchinson and his deputy, General Jenkins. A few days after my arrival, General Hutchinson took me to a staff meeting, where I was the only enlisted person. "Sergeant Dockery is going to be handling my media relations and working on my speeches and magazine articles," he announced. "You all know Captain Olenburg, who is my good friend, but he can't write worth a damn." I was nominally assigned to Olenburg's office, but there was no doubt I was working directly for the general. He then told his staff, "If Sergeant Dockery calls you for support, you are to give it to him as if the request came from me. If he needs an airplane for transport, you assign him an airplane." I almost fell out of my chair.

Colonel Johnsen had told me on numerous occasions that I had done a good job, but this was really, really flattering. I was again a sergeant in a commissioned officer's slot. The next several months until my enlistment was up in September, I would be ghostwriting articles for the two generals and writing speeches for them. It was a great assignment

One of the speeches was for General Hutchinson to give at the dedication of a historic new school that would train airmen in the use of Cold War weaponry, the Mace and Matador missiles. He delivered it at Orlando Air Force Base in Florida. *(See*

Appendix V, Dedication of the Tactical Missile School.)

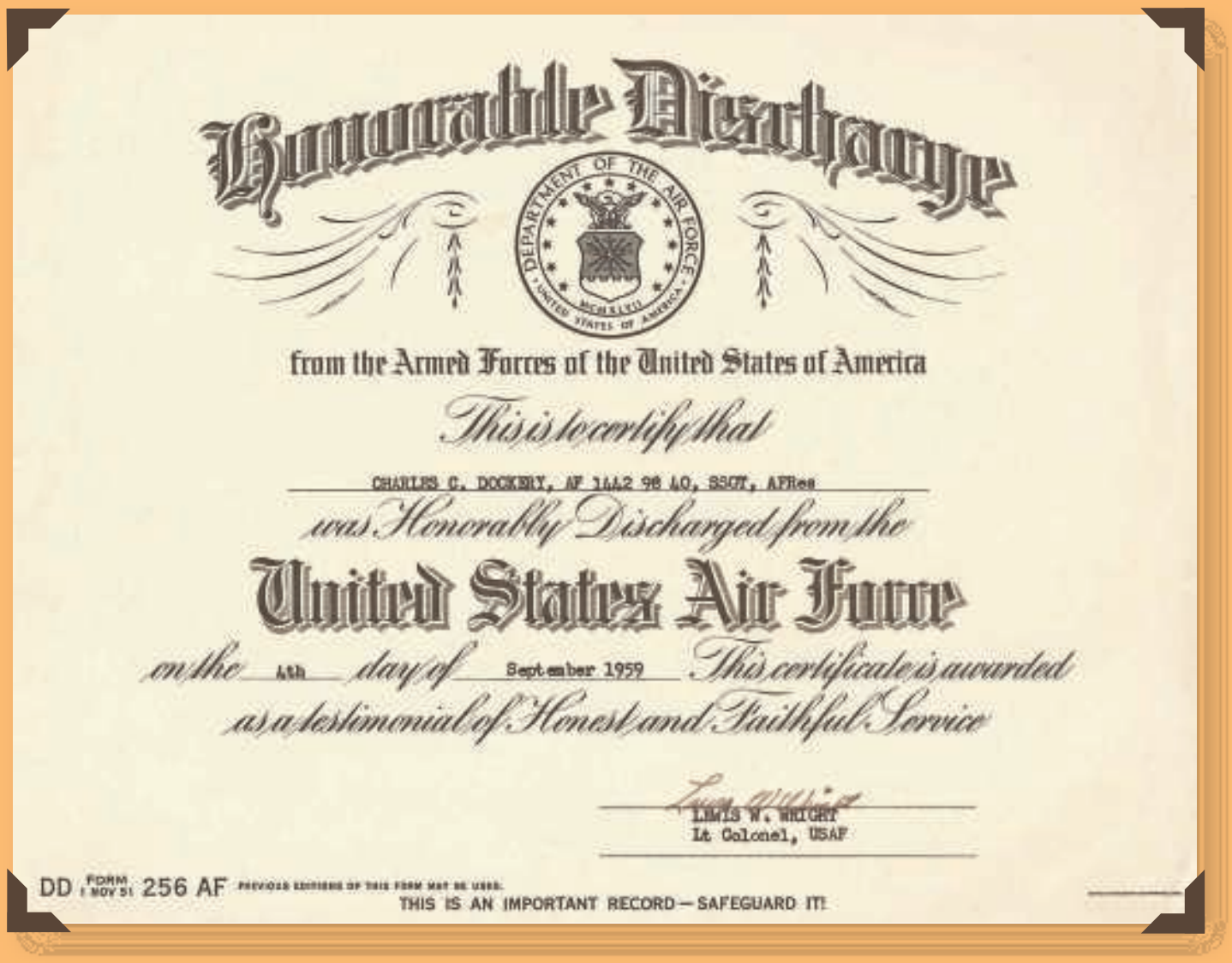
When General Hutchinson had told his staff that I could pick up the phone and order an aircraft whenever I needed one, he wasn't joking. I ordered transportation for me to travel with a captain and a colonel to Edwards Air Force Base in California to document an attempt to break a world speed record for a closed circuit course by an RF-101 McDonnell Voodoo reconnaissance jet.

"... flew his Voodoo at an average 818.27 mph to set new official world speed record..."

Edwards was a super-secret base at the time. It was amazing to look at aircraft I'd never seen before parked outside the hangars. Rumors were that there were even stranger aircraft hidden away inside. A few days after we arrived, Captain George E. Edward of Shaw's 132nd Tactical Wing flew his Voodoo at an average speed of 818.27 miles per hour to set the new official world speed record over a five hundred-kilometer course. An interesting aspect of the record run was that the takeoffs and landings were made not on a prepared airstrip, but on the parched lakebed of California's Muroc Dry Lake. This permitted the aircraft to take off in any direction. The sun-baked earth was so hard packed that it easily sustained the heavy load of a fully fueled airplane. *(See Appendix VI, VIEW-DO Film Narration.)*

Participating in joint maneuvers with the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force at North, South Carolina, 1959. The lady in the picture was a military reporter from the Washington Post newspaper. It was my "tough assignment" to be her liaison between the participating services. You can tell it's an Air Force operation by the Schlitz beer cans on the back of the table!

A few months before I was scheduled to leave the military, Captain Olenburg called me into his office and asked me if I planned to be discharged from the Air Force. I told him yes, because I wanted to finish my college education. A couple of days later he



Honorable Discharge

from the Armed Forces of the United States of America

This is to certify that

CHARLES C. DOCKERY, AF 1442 98 40, SSGT, AFRes

was Honorably Discharged from the

United States Air Force

on the 4th day of September 1959 This certificate is awarded

as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service

LEWIS W. WRIGHT
Lt Colonel, USAF

DD FORM 1 NOV 51 256 AF PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THIS FORM MAY BE USED.

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT RECORD — SAFEGUARD IT!

Honorable discharge from the U.S. Air Force after having served eight years in three states, Europe and the Pacific.

told me, "If you want to finish your college education, you can write for Generals Hutchinson and Jenkins at night and go to the nearby University of South Carolina during the day and finish your education there. We want you to reenlist."

I was still a staff sergeant, frozen in grade for more than five years. The war effort of the Korean years had by now been scaled way back, meaning that many officers, including majors, lieutenant colonels, and bird colonels, were being given the choice of leaving the Air Force or taking a reduction in rank to noncommissioned officer status and remaining on active duty until they retired after twenty years of service. Many officers took the reduction in rank, creating an overabundance of master sergeants and tech sergeants.

My next promotion would have been to tech sergeant, and there was now no room in that rank to promote NCOs like me, which meant no pay raises. Reenlistment for another four years was not for me, so in September 1959 I received my second honorable discharge from the U.S. Air Force.

During the final four years of my tour of duty with the Air Force, I had attended night classes wherever I could and took correspondence courses for college credit. A few weeks before being discharged, I sent records of my college coursework off to the University of Miami, the University of Florida at Gainesville, and Florida Southern College in Lakeland.

While stationed at West Palm Beach, I had taken night courses at a Florida Southern branch campus on the air base. Now Florida Southern evaluated my military experience, the training at the University of Oklahoma, and the correspondence courses and night classes and offered me two more credit hours than the other two colleges did. So I picked Florida Southern and applied for enrollment in the fall. Taking a heavy class load there would allow me to graduate in a year and a half. That's how I came to settle in Lakeland, the Polk County home of Florida Southern College, where I would spend the rest of my life.

If I had been looking for a place to call home forever, Lakeland probably would not have been my choice. Polk was a dry county and there was virtually no nightlife. We

In 1959, during my first semester at Florida Southern College (FSC), Lakeland, FL,
I was restricted to taking only twelve semester hours leaving me with some free time.
I joined a drama group at FSC called the Vagabonds. We were on stage in the
Frank Lloyd Wright designed theater–in-the-round, a setting I liked a lot.
In this photograph I am the fourth adult from the left, a member of the cast of Richard III.

could buy beer, but it was the 3.2 percent alcohol variety compared with the 5 or 6 percent of regular beer. I thought Lakeland was a dead town, an opinion colored by the fact that I was there by myself and had no money. Dene was still working in West Palm Beach, so I had rented a room from a family who lived on South Street just a few blocks from the college. During the first semester at Florida Southern, I lived on a food allotment of twenty-five cents a day—one pack of Nab crackers and one half-pint of milk—plus all the oranges I could eat. The campus in 1959 had plenty of orange trees scattered among the buildings.

I ate well most weekends because I would hitchhike to West Palm to see Dene on Saturday mornings after my eight o'clock class. Dene would have a six-pack of real beer waiting for me, and I could fill up on dinners of fried chicken, beans, and mashed potatoes and breakfasts of sausage, gravy, and eggs. I was able to take some of the uncertainty out of hitchhiking when I learned that an officer I had served with in West Palm, Lieutenant Colonel John Macinich, was also enrolled at Florida Southern. He usually left Lakeland on Friday afternoons to visit his family in Jupiter, just north of West Palm Beach. On Monday mornings I got up at 3:00 A.M. and Dene drove me to Jupiter, where I would hook up with John for a ride back to Lakeland.

I was so desperate for money that I enlisted in the Air Force Reserve and volunteered for a two-week tour of duty at the Orlando AFB over the 1959 Christmas and New Year's holidays. Part-time work was hard to find in Lakeland. Nearly every day I spent time in the college library poring over the classified ads in the *Lakeland Ledger.* One day I found something that sounded perfect. A public relations firm headed by Jack Pridgen (who would later help engineer the elections of Lawton Chiles to the Florida Legislature, U.S. Senate, and Florida governorship) and his wife were seeking a salesman to sell ads for the *Lakeland Ledger*, which was publishing a centennial edition for Polk County.

I got the job by telling a couple of fibs. The ad had specified experience as an ad salesman and the use or ownership of a car. I had neither, but I was confident that I could write good advertising copy and sell it. Lacking a car meant that I had to do a lot of walking around the city, which was about six miles from one side to the other.

The first day, I walked eight miles to two businesses and back to South Street. And I sold two ads!

I don't recall how many ads I later sold, but my efforts impressed Mr. Pridgen, who put in a good word for me with his friend Frank Wesley, who headed up two trade associations—the Roofing, Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors and the Florida Plumbing Association. Frank needed a part-timer, so I went to work for Wesley Associates writing for two magazines he published, *Plumbing Contractor* and *Florida Forum,* the publication for the Roofing and Sheet Metal Association.

A *Ledger* article about me many years later quoted Frank describing those days: "Doc was a lost ball in the weeds back then. He needed something to do and I was desperate. I needed help. He had drive and a built-in feeling that he's going to succeed at everything he tries, and he does."

I changed my opinion of Lakeland as time went by, and I'm happy that I stuck it out. Life was getting much better for me financially as I rolled into the 1960s.

The 1950s, for me, was a time of wonderful adventures. Looking back, I realize that the decade was one of the greatest I've known or even read about. It seems as though a lifetime of events, inventions, and discoveries was compressed into that one ten-year period, and many of them would influence the rest of our lives.

"The fifties... was a time of wonderful adventures."

The Korean War began, President Truman ordered construction of the first hydrogen bomb, the first modern credit card was introduced, and the first organ transplant took place. As the decade moved along, we saw the introduction of color television and car seatbelts and the creation of the polio vaccine. Princess Elizabeth became queen of England.

There was also the discovery of DNA, the launching of the U.S. Navy's first nuclear submarine, and the death of the USSR's Joseph Stalin. In 1954, school segregation was ruled illegal in the United States, and a year later Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat and move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. That same year Disneyland opened and McDonald's Corporation was founded. The year 1956 saw the

invention of the TV remote control, the introduction of Velcro, the Hungarian Revolution, and the Suez Canal crisis.

In 1957, the Soviet Union started the space race by launching Sputnik, and a year later our National Aeronautics and Space Administration was created. Rounding out the decade, the Cuban Revolution ousted Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro became Cuba's dictator.

It was one whopper of a decade.

A summer afternoon in 1959 at Dash Gaither's country store. His store and the mill on the banks of Hunting Creek were the only two businesses making up the Eagle Mills township. I was raised about a mile from the store. From left, me, Dash and Carl.