

INTERVIEW WITH
Colonel Lawrence McKay
on
July 1, 1976
for
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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Lawrence F. McKay
Donor

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This interview is being conducted with Col. Lawrence McKay in the office of Will K. Jones, museum curator at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Museum. Present for the interview Col. McKay, Mr. Jones and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff. The interview is being done on July 1, 1976.

DR. BURG: Now Colonel, from what I have been able to find out, you were one of the first, if not the first Army pilot assigned to White House duty?

COL. MCKAY: That's right.

DR. BURG: Could you tell me, before we proceed with that, may I ask--where were you born and raised?

COL. MCKAY: I was born in Hannibal, Missouri.

DR. BURG: Yes, and educated there?

COL. MCKAY: Educated there.

DR. BURG: Did you receive college or university training in the state of Missouri?

COL. MCKAY: Yes, I went to Hannibal Grange College and also attended Missouri University, but did not graduate.

DR. BURG: Yes. What was the date of your birth, sir?

COL. MCKAY: May 16, 1917.

DR. BURG: Yes. And you did not finish your training at the University?



McKAY: No.

BURG: Was it the war that broke you away from that?

McKAY: No, it was lack of money, really.

BURG: Depression times?

McKAY: It was depression time, and I had to go to work.

BURG: Right. What was the year that this occurred?

McKAY: 1936.

BURG: Yes. A vintage year for no money.

McKAY: Well, actually it didn't occur in 1936--it was about 1938 I guess when I quit school at Missouri University.

BURG: Did you then go into private business, or did you--

McKAY: Went to work for my brother in a drugstore. He owned a drugstore in Edina, Missouri, and I went to work for him.

BURG: How long did you stay with that line of work?

McKAY: Until about 1939. Then I went to work in a plant in Hannibal, Missouri, International Rubber Company, and I got married at that time. And then the war started breaking out, and then I was a pilot. I had taken flying lessons and everything and--



BURG: I see.

McKAY: --so I went into the service in 1942.

BURG: You had a private, a light plane kind of license.

McKAY: I had a commercial license when I went in. I went in as an instructor.

BURG: Oh, you did?

McKAY: Army Air Corps, at Randolph Field.



BURG: I see. I see. Commissioned? When you went in?

McKAY: As a flight officer. Which is the same as a warrant--I don't think they have flight officers any more. I think they possibly did away with them at the end of World War II.

BURG: Yes, I think perhaps you're right. I recall the insignia was an interesting kind of insignia--color--

McKAY: Well, it was a warrant officer bar only it was blue. And my wings had an "S" on them for Service Pilot, because I had been a pilot before the war and was not trained by the Army. Just went in and started instructing, teaching cadets to fly.

BURG: Yes. Did you stay on that kind of duty then throughout the war?

McKAY: No. I went with the ATC and was with the Ferry Command down at Memphis.

BURG: ATC is Army Transport Command?

McKAY: Army Transport Command. I was with them about a year at Memphis, ferrying airplanes various places, all over the world in fact. And eventually ended up flying the "Hump" from India to China.

BURG: In C-47s?

McKAY: No, in C-109s which was a converted B-24. They converted it into a gas tanker. They took all the armament off of it and filled it with collapsible gas tanks, and we flew gas over the "Hump" for the B-29s who would leave and fly their mission over Japan, come back into China, have to refuel to get back to India. And our mission was to keep gasoline supplied in the Kunming area and the Chengtu area.

BURG: Kunming. And what was the second area?

McKAY: Chengtu.

BURG: Chengtu.

McKAY: Yes. It was the northern part of China.



BURG: When had you picked up your four-engine rating? Was that while you were at Randolph?

McKAY: No, I picked that up while I was at Memphis at ATC.

BURG: So you were qualified say by 1945 to fly single-engine and multi-engine aircraft?

McKAY: By '43 I was qualified.

BURG: Really.

McKAY: Yes.

BURG: And your ferrying experience had been to, say for example over the United Kingdom--

McKAY: Never to England. It was always down in the south, down in--well, India, North Africa and Italy is where I made most of my deliveries.

BURG: And flying as pilot on these affairs.

McKAY: Right.

BURG: And you were on that "Hump" run then when the war ended.

McKAY: Right. I was there when the war ended.

BURG: What happened to you next? Were you brought back to the United States?



McKAY: Came back to the United States and was separated from the service about, it was in '46 I was separated, and I took a job at my hometown as a pilot until about 1949. I was with the Durasteel Company, and they had a big jurisdictional strike, and they went bankrupt, at which time I went back into the service.

BURG: When you left the Army Air Corps what was your rank?

McKAY: I was still a flight officer. That was a frozen rank.

BURG: I see.

McKAY: And you didn't get promoted from it. And when I went back in in '50, I went back as a second lieutenant, and it seemed like no sooner than I got in, the Korean War broke out, and away I went to Korea. And I spent my time over there as a pilot with the Army flying small liaison aircraft.

BURG: L-5s, L-4s--

McKAY: Right. L-19s and so on. And then when I came out of Korea I went to the Armored School down at Fort Knox. When I graduated there I was assigned to Fort Belvoir, Davison Field, and that's where I got into the White House section.

BURG: So this is a little unusual, isn't it? The U.S. Air Force has been created, but your assignment in Korea was still with the aircraft assigned to the Army and artillery spotting duties and this kind of thing.



McKAY: Well, I think it was '47 that the Army Air Corps broke away from the Army and became the Air Force. Well, I was in a reserve unit which was Army, so I just stayed in the Army. I didn't go into the Air Force; I stayed in the Army part. And so the Air Force became a separate branch altogether; I stayed with the Army.

BURG: And when you got back from Korea, the armored training, that was liaison with tank formations?

McKAY: It was actually ground duty assignment, going through the school. I went through the advanced armored class is what I went through, for tactics and so on. Then I went right back to a flying job at Davison Field.

BURG: Had there been a particular reason for putting you through that particular training at Fort Knox, Colonel?

McKAY: Well, all officers in the Army that are pilots should be branch qualified. At that time my branch was armor.

BURG: I see.

McKAY: And they want you qualified in the basic branch. So that's why I went through that school. Now after I got to Fort Belvoir, that being the home of the engineers, they talked me into changing my branch to engineers, which I did. Then I



had to go through the advanced engineer school to be branch qualified there. And every so often a pilot, an Army pilot, has to serve ground duty. He has to take a ground assignment, of which I had two. Two ground duty assignments in my whole career. I had twenty-eight years of service, and I only served twice on a ground duty assignment. I was a company commander at one time; then I had one year in Korea, I had a combat engineer batallion. That was in '65. That was the only two times I've served on ground duty.

BURG: I see.

McKAY: All the rest of the time's been flight duty.

BURG: Now your White House assignment came while you were at Belvoir.

McKAY: While I was at Belvoir, President Eisenhower had designated the Army, provided they could provide the qualified personnel. The purpose of it was to fly his brother, Dr. Eisenhower, Dr. Milton Eisenhower, from State College, Pennsylvania to Washington. At that time I think he was the chief of the advisory committee for the President, and if you know State College, Pennsylvania--it's very difficult to get in and out of that place. It takes a small airplane to get in and out, so he thought that the Army could do it, if they had the qualified personnel. So Colonel Bill Draper, who was the



Air Force One pilot, called for all our records of the pilots at Davison Field. At that time there were only eight pilots. Well, fortunately, I had a lot of time, and a lot of experience from my Army Air Corps days flying the "Hump" and so on, and I was one of the two that were chosen. Myself and Colonel Rutherford. Colonel Rutherford's retired now; he's at Beech Aircraft. We were the first two that took the mission.

BURG: Were your backgrounds somewhat similar? Were you about the same age and with similar flying experience?

McKAY: Well, no. I'm about four years older than Bill, I guess, and quite a bit more experienced in flying at that time than Bill.

BURG: And Colonel Draper was the one who made the decision as to picking the two of you?

McKAY: He and--it was Colonel Schulz at that time, he's now General Schulz.

BURG: Bob. Bob Schulz.

McKAY: Bob Schulz made the decision. And they called us up and had us come to the White House for an interview and--

BURG: Can you tell us the date when this occurred?

McKAY: Ah, that's going to be hard to do.



BURG: Even an approximation.

McKAY: I could say it was in the spring of '53. That's about as close as I can get to it; as far as pinpointing the month, I don't think I could do that.

BURG: So within two or three months of the inauguration, which would have occurred in January. January the 20th of '53.

McKAY: Possibly. Well, it was in the spring, as I recall, in the spring of '53.

BURG: So just several months after. Now when you were called to the White House, who did the interviewing?

McKAY: General Schulz.



BURG: By himself.

McKAY: He was the one that talked to me, yes. And Captain Streiff was there; it's Colonel Streiff now.

BURG: Yes, Richard W. Streiff.

McKAY: Right. And also John Hays who is deceased.

BURG: Hays I don't know, Colonel. I don't recognize that name.

McKAY: Well, he was a very prominent member of the staff. He was a warrant officer.

BURG: I see. U.S. Air Force or--?

McKAY: No, he was Army.

BURG: He was Army.

McKAY: Right.



BURG: May I ask you if you can recollect, when you were called in to see then Colonel Schulz, what did he talk with you about?

McKAY: The mission. The important thing was flying to and from State College, Pennsylvania, and how important it was, and that we'd be flying various members of the cabinet and the staff at the White House. And the one thing that I definitely remember, and he does, too, because we see each other frequently, because we live very close to each other, right now. And we laugh about it now. Is the fact he says, "Now listen, when you tell me you can make this mission, I expect you to make it. If you say, 'no', you can't because of the weather or some reason, no questions will be asked." He says, "If you say you can make it, you better make it." Now that's putting it pretty strong, and fortunately all the time we flew for the White House, Bill and I as a team, I don't know of any time that we said we could that we didn't. We always made it on every mission.

BURG: Did you find Colonel Schulz a relatively easy man to get along with?

McKAY: Very good man. Very good man.

BURG: He was not demanding more of either one of you than you could deliver.

McKAY: Never, never. Never pushed us at all. It's just like I say--if he said, if you say you can, you better do it. And we did.

BURG: So he held to that promise.

McKAY: He held to that very much. And I think he's today one of my best friends and dearest friends.

BURG: Did anything else come up in that conversation that was of interest?

McKAY: No.



BURG: Now--

McKAY: Well, we talked about how you conducted yourself around the various dignitaries, but being military we pretty well knew protocol, and we stuck to that very much.

BURG: There was a particular kind of attitude that you would take when you were dealing with men of Dr. Eisenhower's position or cabinet members.

McKAY: Definitely, right.

BURG: Now that interests me--one gets the impression at first that your run is going to be from State College, Pennsylvania into Washington, DC.

McKAY: That was an important part of it, yes. That was the number one mission.

BURG: I see. But other--

McKAY: We made that at least, I would say on the average of twice a week. To and from. Or we would fly the committee from Washington to Dr. Eisenhower's place at State College.

BURG: I see.



McKAY: Now as I recall the members that I used to fly up there were Nelson Rockefeller, and Ivan Flemming, and I think his name is Gimball? Mr. Gimball? Were the three important people that I used to fly up to State College when they'd have their meetings at Dr. Eisenhower's house.

JONES: When you say it was considered a fairly difficult run up there because of the conditions, what did they assign you to fly up there?

McKAY: Well, we had a twin-engine Beechcraft.

JONES: Did they ever assign you the Aero Commander?

McKAY: We had the Aero Commander; we were the first to have it. We had an Aero Commander, and then we got a brand new, got three brand new Aero Commanders because of this mission. And I got to pick out exactly the instrumentation I wanted on that airplane, so it would be an all-weather airplane, right up-to-date.

JONES: Did they send you to Oklahoma City to the plant to pick it out?

McKAY: Oh, yes, I was down to the plant and was checked out in the airplane and watched them put it together, practically.

JONES: What did you think of the Aero Commander?

McKAY: I thought it was an outstanding airplane, I really did.

BURG: What was the seating capacity on the Aero Commander?

McKAY: It was five place.

BURG: Would hold five. You had it fitted out with on-board radar--

McKAY: We didn't have radar at that time.

BURG: None.

McKAY: No.

BURG: They couldn't give you that for an aircraft of that size.



McKAY: We didn't get radar until the '60s, that is weather radar. That's what you're speaking of.

BURG: Yes. Well, what then, would be the standard and up-to-date navigational aids that you would carry in 1953 or so?

McKAY: Well, we had automatic direction finder, and we had the OMNI set and that was about it as far as the up-to-date. And at that time there were very few OMNI stations. They were just coming in at that time.

JONES: Did the Army provide a station at College Station to make sure you had--

McKAY: No. They had an airfield, an old grass airstrip that cost us ten dollars every time we landed. And the nearest thing to the State College in case there was weather was Phillipsburg. Now they had an OMNI station; they had an approach for instrument weather getting real bad. But if there were any doubt about the weather, of us getting in, we'd go up the night before to pick up Dr. Eisenhower, because we could always fly out in the weather, because all we had to do was take off and get up and make radio contact and fly on into Washington without any problem. But to land at State College, Pennsylvania in weather, you couldn't do it. It was just impossible.



JONES: So there were no special arrangements, no mobile stations or mobile equipment sent out to College Station to be there to help you come in?

McKAY: Not a thing.

BURG: So you just used whatever facilities were available at a small, commercial field.

McKAY: That's right. It was a privately owned airfield there at State College at that time.

BURG: Were there even runways on it of any kind?

McKAY: No runways, just a level field was about all it was.

BURG: Good Lord. Now wasn't that Aero Commander a tricycle deal?

McKAY: Right.

BURG: It must have a little hairy putting it down on--

McKAY: No, it wasn't too bad. It was a very good airplane to handle. It was very easy to fly, and it had very good characteristics. Its short-field take off procedure was very simple, and you could land it very short. No problem.

BURG: Now the field--since you mentioned short-field take off capacity--the field itself, was it of sufficient size? That is it was not marginal for that particular aircraft?



McKAY: No. No, if it was marginal, we wouldn't have used it.

BURG: Right.

McKAY: No, it was--we checked it out thoroughly, and there was no problem.

BURG: Were you based at Davison Field then?

McKAY: Right. Right.

BURG: Your Aero Commander then, later on you had several of them, were based there.

McKAY: All based at Davison.



BURG: How far is that from Washington, DC?

McKAY: Well, in miles it's about fourteen, about fourteen miles. But we made all our pickups at Washington National Airport.

BURG: I see.

McKAY: And we'd take off and [snap of the fingers] that quick we'd be into National. The minute you'd take off from Davison, we'd contact the Washington tower, and they'd direct you right in for a landing. And we'd always be there an hour ahead of time to make sure that everything was all right. Weather was checked and everything, and we'd take off.

BURG: So you got your weather data from the personnel at National.

McKAY: Personnel at National and also from State College, Pennsylvania. They had a meteorologist there that was as good as anybody in the country, Mr. Hester.

BURG: Hester?

McKAY: Hester. And I had a direct line to him. And I'd call him every day that I'd go up there and talk with him about the weather. Because the mountain weather was very peculiar, and there'd be a front come in, and the weather people at National would say it's going to be here tomorrow--it'd stop right over the mountains. Well, Hester knew all the peculiarities up there, and he was the guy we relied on on weather.

BURG: Do you remember his first name?

McKAY: No, I don't.

BURG: Or how he spelled the last name? One "s" or two?

McKAY: I think it was one "s". Now Dr. Milton Eisenhower could tell you because we were in close arrangements with him, really believed in him. Because he checked the weather as much as I did, believe me.

BURG: Was Hester FAA or--?



McKAY: No. No, he was a professor of meteorology at the college.

BURG: Oh, at the college itself!

McKAY: Yes.

BURG: I see. So what he was giving you was just on the basis of his own instrumentation at the college and his own experience in that area.

McKAY: Right. Which was very good. About as good as you could find.

BURG: Right, I see. May I ask what kind of livery did your aircraft carry? Were they painted in Army colors or--

McKAY: There was o.d. [olive drab] and white.

BURG: O.d. and white.

JONES: When did they change to the white and blue?

McKAY: That's Air Force.

JONES: Did the Air Force have Aero Commanders assigned to them also?

McKAY: They--after we got one, they got one.

JONES: I see.



McKAY: They wasn't going to be out-done, so they got one.

BURG: Okay. Now just out of curiosity, in case we ever need to have the data, the o.d. and white color scheme--was the aircraft basically an over-all o.d. with white bottom or white wings or--do you remember how that color was distributed?

McKAY: Well, it had a white stripe down the side, and it had an o.d. top and a white bottom was what it was.

BURG: I see.

McKAY: And the wings, as I recall, were white.

BURG: Okay. Now did it carry a particular insignia on wings or fuselage?

McKAY: Just said U.S. Army, U.S.A.

BURG: I see. On the wings, too?

McKAY: Right.

BURG: I see.

McKAY: Not on the wings, just on the--

BURG: Just on the fuselage.

McKAY: Right.

BURG: So no insignia as such was common in--



McKAY: No. No insignias.

BURG: --the second World War.

McKAY: No. No insignias.

BURG: When you pulled into National, you were going to pick up your passengers there, was there a particular area assigned to you?

McKAY: Oh, yes. We went into MATS, MATS terminal.

BURG: Military Air Transport Service.

McKAY: Right.

BURG: All right.

McKAY: That's where the Columbine was hangared and that's where Colonel Draper's office was and, in the MATS terminal. And that's where we made our pick-ups.

JONES: Colonel, do you know when they switched from National to Andrews as the place to base Air Force One or the Columbine, or the President's plane?

McKAY: I think it's when they got the 747, I'm not sure, but I think that's when they switched.

BURG: Not 747, 707?



McKAY: 707, 707, yes.

BURG: Right.

McKAY: When they went into jets, I think, is when they switched over to Andrews.

BURG: Yes. Now you had support, your mechanics I would assume, and support of this kind at Davison.

McKAY: Oh, yes. They were hand-picked. The mechanics on the Aero Commander group were hand-picked.

BURG: From Army--

McKAY: Army personnel. And we had some civilian mechanics on the Aero Commanders.

BURG: Were you part of a unit--that is, with this very special kind of duty and flying as you've suggested twice a week was not unusual, was that the entire job that you and Colonel Rutherford carried out?

McKAY: That was our main job, right. Flying for the White House. Now when we weren't flying for the White House, we'd take short trips within the vicinity, but--

BURG: More on engineer--

McKAY: Right.



BURG: Army engineer business.

McKAY: Right. Something where they could get a hold of us right away in case we had a White House mission.

BURG: Yes. Now did you receive any additional support from that MATS unit at National? None from there, so all aircraft maintenance and repair, including work on your radio, on navigational instruments--

McKAY: All done at Davison Field.

BURG: All at Davison.

McKAY: Yes.

BURG: May I ask you, now what would be the routine? You don't seem to have had a regular schedule. Sounds like you might have had the approximation of a schedule each week. Did the White House contact you then at Davison?

McKAY: We had a direct, what we called the White House telephone in our office at Davison Field. It was a hot line, straight to the White House, and our missions were called direct from that to us.

BURG: And who usually made that call, sir? Was it--

McKAY: It was either Bob Schulz or Captain Streiff or from John Hays, one of the three of them called us. Or maybe his secretary in their office.



BURG: About how much advance warning would you have? Do you remember?

McKAY: Normally, at least an hour on most flights, or more. Normally a flight, unless it was an emergency-type deal, we'd have a couple of days notice. But we have had some that was within an hour. I know one time that we had Dr. Eisenhower at Wisconsin, and we'd just sat down for lunch and the phone rang, and the President wanted him down to Washington immediately to go to Canada with him, I think it was. We didn't even finish our lunch. The three of us got up and left right away. The Doctor, and Joe Rutherford, and myself jumped in the airplane, flew him straight to Washington.

BURG: From Wisconsin.



McKAY: From Wisconsin, and in fact the President had to wait for us to get there. We had some pretty bad weather that morning, too, as I recall. It was [inaudible].

BURG: Let's ask, since it's an appropriate spot, what kind of a passenger was Dr. Eisenhower?

McKAY: One of the finest. Absolutely one of the finest, he's one of the finest men I've ever known in my life. Now he didn't particularly like flying. And we knew that, and--because he told us. He told us about some of the experiences he had had during

World War II flying with various pilots, because he's been an adviser to I don't know how many Presidents. And we knew that, and also that he had a bad back, and rough weather and things like that would maybe hurt his back, and we took extra precaution to make every flight for him as smooth and good as possible. Took no chances whatsoever. Never would I take a chance with a passenger like Dr. Eisenhower.

BURG: So you swung clear of weather fronts and--

McKAY: Wherever possible. I think in only about two or three times to my knowledge that I can think of that we got trapped and had to go through some severe weather. But I always could tell him prior to hitting it to prepare him, and I wouldn't go through it, if I didn't think I could. Because I'm in that airplane, too.

BURG: Yes, yes.

JONES: Did you ever have any incidents where you thought, "We're really in trouble," when you were flying?

McKAY: No. Not once with flying the Doctor. But I have had incidents during my flying career.

BURG: Yes, but not with him. I was going to ask you: You remarked that on the Wisconsin flight, both you and Rutherford were present. Was that because of the length of that flight, or was it your standard procedure?



McKAY: No, we always flew--both of us flew together.

BURG: Both of you flew together.

McKAY: Right. We'd always have a co-pilot on a flight like that.

BURG: Yes. It would make sense to do that.

McKAY: And we didn't treat each other as pilot and co-pilot. I mean we have a very good relationship, and we always have had. I've known Bill since the Korean War. We were over there together. And we're still the best of friends; we live fairly close to each other now. We play golf together a lot. And it wasn't a pilot, co-pilot relationship at all. It was just pilot relationship. I mean he flew the airplane as much as I did.

BURG: Right. Co-equals and you just traded off--



McKAY: Right. That's the way it was.

BURG: --the pilot's seat. Now was the procedure the same, Colonel McKay, if Dr. Eisenhower had to get from his position in Pennsylvania down to Washington, DC--did he call you or did the White House call?

McKAY: The White House called, White House would call. Everything was handled through Bob Schulz's office. Everything. All flights.

BURG: And the costs of this operation? Were they borne by the Army or did the White House handle that?

McKAY: It was a mission handed down by the President to the Army.

BURG: So I assume that that would be White House budget that would--

McKAY: That I couldn't tell you. I wouldn't know that. All I know is that the President directed the Army this mission, and we took it from there.

JONES: I'm interested in another aspect of your mission, if we can sort of change a little--

BURG: Sure.



JONES: --from here. I'm interested in your mission flying objects from Washington to Schilling Air Force Base that were on their way over here to the museum. You were telling me when we were talking earlier.

McKAY: We landed right here at Abilene.

JONES: Oh, you landed here at Abilene. I thought you were landing at Schilling.

McKAY: No. We landed the Aero Commander right here.

JONES: You were flying the objects out in the Aero Commander.

McKAY: Right.

JONES: Could you tell me about the procedure on that? How that started, how you started out in Washington, where the material--

McKAY: Came right out of General Schulz's office, and they would send the objects to Washington National Airport and load them on the airplane, and we'd bring them out here and be met by a truck here and that was it.

BURG: Was that during the White House period or was this--

McKAY: Yes. It was during the White House period.

JONES: Was this in conjunction--

[Interruption]

JONES: You were doing this at the same time or in conjunction with your flights up to College Station and back.

McKAY: Right, right. In other words our job was to fly missions out of the White House staff office that was run by Bob Schulz. Any mission for the White House came right through his office, and he more or less put the priorities on them and we'd fly them. But our number one priority was flying Dr. Eisenhower. Of course, he knew Dr. Eisenhower's schedule; he knew when he would be flying unless it was an emergency and--



JONES: Can you recall when your first trip out to Abilene with a load of material occurred?

McKAY: As near as I can recall, it was either '55 or '56. It's hard to remember back that far, but I was met by Mr. [J. Earl] Endacott and Emmett Graham, I believe his name was.

JONES: Right.

BURG: That's right.



McKAY: And Mr. Graham and his wife royally entertained Bill Rutherford and myself. They had a buffet dinner at their home and had friends in, introduced us around. The following day Mr. Endacott took us personally through the house, the Eisenhower home, gave each of us a slip of this spider plant that Mrs. Eisenhower had and gave us a bunch of little souvenirs, little knife and a few things in memory of the museum, and personally conducted us through the museum. And we were here two days; then we went back.

JONES: How many subsequent trips did you make? Do you recall?

McKAY: As I recall I think it was three. But at that time I didn't come into the museum; I just landed at the airfield and was met and unloaded the material and departed.

JONES: How long--would that be just out and back in a day?
Out of Washington, here, and then back to Washington in a day?

McKAY: Right.

JONES: I see. What kind of procedures took place here when you turned the material over to this person that was driving the truck or the truck driver. Did you have hand receipts that you had them sign for the material?

McKAY: No, they knew what was coming, and there it was in the airplane. Nobody signed anything.

JONES: I see.

BURG: Any special packing procedures ever necessary, Colonel?

McKAY: I didn't do the packing. I don't know.

BURG: You just received boxes or crates.



McKAY: I just received it and brought it out here and unloaded it.

JONES: You mentioned the Russian Order of Victory. It was--it is probably one of our premier pieces in the collection, and you did fly it from Washington out here on the Aero Commander--

McKAY: Right. That's right. And I didn't know it was on there until I got here.

JONES: Which flight, do you remember what flight?

McKAY: I think it was the first flight. I'm not sure.

JONES: On the '55 or '56 flight.

McKAY: It was in the '50s I know, and Mr. Endacott said, "Let me show you what you brought out." And he showed it to me, and it scared me to death.

JONES: Was that the only thing you brought out, or were there other things in that--

McKAY: No. No, I had a lot of other things; lot of boxes about, oh, maybe foot and a half by foot and a half square. And I don't know what was in them, except this one he said he couldn't wait to get to it, and he got to it and opened it up, said, "Here's what you brought out this time." And it was quite a thrill to see it.

BURG: Was it the value, the presumed assessed value of that piece that bothered you?

McKAY: Yes, and the fact that I think it was only five people in the world has ever received that. Very few. And--

BURG: Yes, very few people.

McKAY: --I knew it was quite an honor.



BURG: Would it be necessary on that trip coming from Washington National to Abilene for you to refuel en route?

McKAY: Sometimes, depending on the winds.

BURG: Would you pull into an Army field?

McKAY: If possible, but not necessarily. We did a lot of our refueling at civilian fields.

BURG: I wondered if you had on that trip and--

McKAY: I think we did. I think as I recall we stopped at Quincy, Illinois, because that's right close to my home, and I knew the operator of the airfield there, and John Hays was with me on that flight incidently.

BURG: As well as Colonel Rutherford.



McKAY: As well as Colonel Rutherford. And we stopped at Quincy, Illinois and refueled.

BURG: But on those occasions when you did refuel, you did not, I assume, leave the vicinity of the aircraft.

McKAY: Never. No, we stayed, one of us was right with that airplane while it was loaded with objects for the museum.

JONES: Did you ever pick up anything while you were here, from the museum, say something that they wanted back in Washington that they'd sent out to the museum.

McKAY: Not that I recall.

JONES: I see.

McKAY: Not that I recall.

JONES: You mentioned one time that you brought a staff member with you? Bill Lewis.

McKAY: I think it was Bill Lewis, yes.



JONES: Flew him out from Washington to join the staff here.

McKAY: Flew him out from Washington and dropped him off here and left him here. He was doing some research work or something. I don't know what it was.

BURG: This is before the library was established, I see.

McKAY: Then one of the trips I made out here, he was one of the gentlemen that met me at the airport. I think that was in '66, I'm not sure. I think that was my last trip out here in '66.

BURG: So you were still flying that route as late as 1966.

McKAY: Right.

BURG: When everything had moved to Gettysburg. That's interesting.

JONES: Did you fly in and out of Gettysburg at all?

McKAY: Oh, yes. A number of times after he was President I flew a lot. After he was out of office.

JONES: So after the president was out of office you were at times assigned to fly him?

McKAY: Right. I was called upon to fly him.

JONES: I see. You were still assigned to the Executive Flight Branch?

McKAY: No, not at that time, but if there was any flights for General Eisenhower, I did the flying at that time.

JONES: And you were still at Davison.

McKAY: I was still at Davison.



JONES: I see.

McKAY: In fact even, I had a three-year tour in Europe and whenever the President would come to Europe, they would put me on a TDY [temporary duty] to Paris, with an airplane, at the disposal of the White House staff while they were in Europe.

BURG: When was that three-year tour?

McKAY: It was from '57 to '60.

BURG: I see. What aircraft type?

McKAY: L-23, Beechcraft, was what we used there.

BURG: That, too, is a twin-engine aircraft?

McKAY: That's a twin-engine.

BURG: Approximately five seats?

McKAY: Yes, five.



BURG: And did the President take advantage of that?

McKAY: His staff did, his staff did. The President used a helicopter mainly while he was in Europe. Which was an Army helicopter.

BURG: Right. I'm going to ask you--it's my understanding that you probably would have kept log books, pilot's log books of all of your flying experience. Was that done in our flying service?

McKAY: Well, I have what they call a Form 5 that the Army takes all your flight time and keeps track of it. Now, me personally, I didn't keep a log book. Because the Army kept my time, and I had that, and I think when I quit flying, as I recall, I had something close to thirteen thousand hours.

BURG: And in effect you had a pilot's duplicate of an Army form that was filled out each time you flew?

McKAY: Yes.

BURG: And these are in something like a loose-leaf notebook or--?

McKAY: Right. It's in a folder.

BURG: I think if you don't mind and at this time if I may, Mr. Jones and I would both like to voice the interest of our institution in that notebook. Material of that kind housed here in our archives is a terrific way to check on the timing of events. I presume that that form probably includes who the passenger or passengers might be.

McKAY: No. No, it doesn't. It, oh, it records the time of flight, whether it was night or instrument flying, and where the flight was to.

BURG: Which in itself is probably an excellent clue.



McKAY: Like Washington National was called DCA--that's the call letters of Washington National, so that's what would be over there, DCA to someplace. I mean, which would be another call sign.

JONES: And that someplace, if it was College Station, would it be College Station or would it be also an abbreviation of some sort?

McKAY: That would be abbreviation, I'm sure.

BURG: But it would be the same abbreviation.

McKAY: Every time, right.

BURG: Yes. Well, that book if you can see your way clear to donating it either when you return home or at some time that is convenient to you would be an excellent historical document for us.

McKAY: Well, I could--I'm sure I still have it. I don't know why I would throw it away. I could look through it and see what's in it, and the part that pertains to this that you're talking about I could pull the sheets from it and make xerox copies. Would that would be--

JONES: That would be fine.



BURG: Yes, be excellent.

JONES: Or send them out here and we'd make xerox copies.

BURG: Yes. We make them--

McKAY: I can check it out and see if there's anything in there that you think you might be able to use. I'm not so sure that there would be. I'd have to--I've forgotten what the thing looks like, really, and--

BURG: Right. Well, cover this full period--from the time you go on this duty including anything from the European experience where you may have been flying White House staff on those three years and including your Gettysburg flights. Anything that covers this association with the President or his brother, including Europe, would be of great interest. And as Mr. Jones says, if it's sent here we will be happy to xerox it and return the originals to you. However, it can be most conveniently done. All it needs, if we have that clue if you were pulling out of Davison for Washington National, the next jump took you up to Pennsylvania, or it took you out to Abilene, Kansas, or in fact if it takes you anyplace else. These may be flights that you don't recall but maybe in looking through that file--

McKAY: It might ring a bell.

BURG: Yes. Austin, Texas--why would I have done that at this-- ah, ha!

McKAY: Yes.



BURG: Now some of it may be engineer flights, but it's that kind that often helps us pin down where people were at given times.

McKAY: Right.

BURG: We'll have a story perhaps of Dr. Eisenhower was here on a given date, and maybe we doubt it, and it may be that in effect that log that you could provide clarifies things for us.

McKAY: Right.

JONES: Did--you said that you flew both Beechs and Aero Commanders for--

McKAY: Dr. Eisenhower.

JONES: Did he ever express an opinion or preference by--

McKAY: Oh, yes.

JONES: --looking out and saying, "Oh, my God, you've got the damned Beech or--

McKAY: No, he never said anything like that.



JONES: --you sure got the Aero Commander, I'm sure happy to see you got the--"

McKAY: He preferred the Aero Commander, as did myself and Bill Rutherford at that time. Even though Bill works for Beech Aircraft. They don't make the Aero anymore to my knowledge. But at that time he preferred the Aero Commander; it was much easier to get in and out of, you didn't have to climb up on the wing and duck down and climb into the back seat. The seat was more comfortable and yes, he did, he preferred the Aero Commander.

JONES: What about the President? Did he, did you ever hear him express an opinion one way or another about the planes that he was flying?

McKAY: No, I never did. I never heard him express anything. In fact when I flew the President, after he was out of office, I flew him in a Beech aircraft, not the Aero Commander. Beech had come out with a new, what they called the L-23F which was a Beech 100, King Aire, and it was a very comfortable airplane and that's the one we preferred then.

BURG: And also tricycle gear, I believe.

McKAY: Right. It was tricycle gear.

BURG: Did you have occasion to meet the President during his term of office?

McKAY: Yes, yes.



BURG: Can you recollect the first time that you were introduced to him?

McKAY: Yes, definitely. Yes, I sure can. It was down at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia at the Greenbriar [Hotel]. We were down there for a three-day conference. The President and the Premier of Canada and the President of Mexico were meeting. And Mr. Dulles was there; there was quite a few

dignitaries there. And I flew Dr. Eisenhower down. We arrived there at night because he was making a speech someplace in Pennsylvania, I forget where, but I picked him up, and we flew down and landed at night. And we were there for three days. In fact I got to take pictures of the President, and the President of Mexico, and all of them. I had them blown up. And let's see, Bill and I were sitting downstairs talking with Jerry Bain who was one of the Secret Service men.

BURG: How did he spell his name, do you remember, Colonel?

McKAY: B-a-i-n, I think.

BURG: Thank you.



McKAY: Jerry Bain. And I was called on the telephone through the speaker, and it was Bob Schulz telling me that Dr. Eisenhower wanted Bill and I up in his room, his suite, that we were going to meet the President when he came in from playing golf. Well, I was a little bit shaky; I'd never met the President. So we went up, and Dr. Eisenhower was pleased to take us in there because he thought quite a bit of Bill and I. And I didn't know how to act. I said, "Well, what do you do when you meet the President?"

He says, "Just act natural." And so, of course, we were all in uniform, and the President walked in just as casual as he could from the golf course. And the Doctor introduced us and

shook hands, and he put us right at ease immediately and sat and talked there for about fifteen minutes and finally excused himself, said, "I've got to go get cleaned up because I've got a banquet tonight," and that was it. That's the first time I'd met him.

But, after he was out of office, I flew him about two or three times from Gettysburg to West Point and over to New York, and he was always busy in the back. He had a stack of papers, and he was going through them constantly. But there was a couple of times when I'd look back, and he was just sitting there looking out the window, and I'd turn the thing over to Bill, and I'd go back and sit down and talk with him. We'd generally talk about his brother.

JONES: During those conversations did he ever tell you that he was a licensed pilot?

McKAY: No. He never once told me that.

JONES: Or asked to take the controls?

McKAY: No.

BURG: Very question that I had in mind. I wondered if he could resist.

McKAY: No, he never said a thing about flying at all. I didn't even know he was.



BURG: You didn't know that yourself?

McKAY: No. I didn't know it. I knew John was.

JONES: Yes, but he was also.

BURG: We have his pilot's license I guess from the Philippines--

JONES: Yes.

BURG: --out here on display.

McKAY: I saw a picture of him standing with an airplane and a group of people out there a while ago, but I didn't know he was a pilot.

BURG: He learned on the Boeing--Stearman.

JONES: Stearman.

McKAY: Stearman.

BURG: Yes, the PT--

McKAY: Seventeen.

BURG: --and he also flew the PT with kind of frightening results. Oh, that's--

McKAY: I sure didn't know that.



BURG: --and he's, I imagine was also at the controls of a Stinson Reliant.

McKAY: Yes.

BURG: General Lee, William L. Lee with Lefty Parker, Hugh Parker, these were the two officers in the Philippines who trained him to fly.

McKAY: I see.

BURG: And General Lee just died a couple of months ago, and Parker is still alive, living in San Antonio. Well, that's interesting and interesting that he never--

McKAY: Not once did he say anything about flying at all.



BURG: I find that fascinating that he never mentioned it to you, and you didn't happen to know it.

McKAY: No, I didn't know it and he never mentioned it.

BURG: What would your reactions have been, Colonel--let me pose a hypothetical question to you. Supposing that the former President of the United States, on one of these flights, in good clear weather, had asked if he might come up and sit in the right-hand seat and maybe handle the controls and told you, "I"--

McKAY: Why, no problem.

BURG: You'd have let him do it.

McKAY: Why, sure. I let Dr. Eisenhower do it. I sure did.

JONES: Oh, he did?

McKAY: Oh, yes, he'd ride right in the front seat on trips where I'd go up and pick him up by myself, which I've done many a time, he'd ride the front seat with me coming back. And he knew exactly where we were supposed to be at a certain time; he knew exactly how long it would take us to get from State College to Washington National. And if I was just a slight bit off course, he'd tell me about it, in a laughing way, I mean.

BURG: Right. There were occasions then when you picked him up by yourself, you didn't have Rutherford with you.

McKAY: Right. Oh, there were a lot of times that we did that.

BURG: I see. I had misunderstood.

McKAY: Rutherford would be on another flight sometimes. But on a long flight of any kind we'd both go together. But wherever possible, there would be the two of us. But there were a lot of flights where we'd have to go without a second pilot.



BURG: Would weather determine, in fact, let me put it to you this way--you're going up to State College and the weather is just marginal, let us say with two of you, with Rutherford and you both along--would you make the flight, but if Rutherford was not available, and you were alone, would you say, "I'm sorry, I can't."

McKAY: No, we'd make the flight.

BURG: You'd make the flight even if only one of you was available to go.

McKAY: Yes.

JONES: When did you leave the service then?

McKAY: 1969, May.

JONES: What was your last assignment?

McKAY: I was at Davison Field.

JONES: Davison Field. Still there.

BURG: And when would be the last time that you flew the President?

McKAY: Oh, golly. I can't recall. I would say maybe '68. Before he--see, he died in March of '69--I would say in 1968.



I think the last time I flew him I took him to West Point. I took him to West Point; he made a speech to, for the cadets or something up there. I didn't leave the airport; I stayed at the airport. He was met and ushered off in a car. I believe it was 1968 the last time that I flew him.

JONES: You mentioned that you had the assignment of being the liaison to the family during the funeral.

McKAY: Right.

JONES: And you were unable to complete that mission because of a heart attack yourself.

McKAY: Right.



JONES: What preparations did you go through preparing for that role as liaison and who contacted you and did you--

McKAY: Paul Miller, who was the ceremony officer for military district of Washington, I was there with Paul making up the plan, the funeral plan, which had already been made up. Through the help of John Eisenhower and various members of the staff the funeral plan was already made up. And I assume that John had to approve the members of the, like myself as the liaison officer for the Army to the family. I'm sure he approved all that, he or General Schulz, one of the two. And I don't know why I was picked, but I was, and--

JONES: What would have been your role? What exactly would you've been expected to do?

McKAY: Well, as I understand it, as I recall, I was to either escort Mamie Eisenhower or the brothers, one of the two. But at the time that I went to the hospital it wasn't exactly pinpointed. But I could have done either job. Now Colonel John Meyers who was a very close friend of mine, would have been one of the other, so--

BURG: We would find him in the Washington, DC area?

McKAY: I think he is; I'm not sure. But he was brought in at the last minute there, I remember.

JONES: Who took your role? When you were hospitalized?

McKAY: I think it was John Meyers, I'm not sure.

JONES: John Meyers.



McKAY: Because I was put in the intensive care unit and wired up to a little machine there when all this was going on, and I did get to see the funeral out here on television while I was in the hospital.

BURG: This had not shown up; there had been no sign of this on your last physical, flight physical.

McKAY: Never. No. And they said it wasn't even a heart attack. They said it was a muscle spasm. So I retired in May and took a complete physical again and nothing showed up; then in August, kapow! I had it--I mean a big one.

BURG: And it was indeed a heart attack.

McKAY: It was severe--in fact I was pronounced dead by two doctors, and Dr. Higgins who was the doctor I'd had in March admitted that that's what it was in March; that I'd had a heart attack in March, but they couldn't find it. That happens quite often.

BURG: And it was your good fortune that neither of these occurred while you were in the air.



McKAY: I guess it is a good fortune, that's right. I had no previous records at all. In fact it wasn't my heart exactly; it was an artery going into my heart that clogged up like a water pipe that corrodes and just cut off the blood going into my heart. Stopped.

BURG: I was going to ask you if on your flights up to Gettysburg or from Gettysburg to other destinations, did the President ever occupy the right-hand seat?

McKAY: No.

BURG: He never expressed a wish to.

McKAY: Never. Never.

BURG: But his brother did. His brother--

McKAY: Well, if I was by myself and Dr. Eisenhower, he'd get up in the front seat with me, yes.

JONES: Did you ever fly any other members of the family? Either the grandchildren or--

McKAY: No, no.

JONES: --John?

McKAY: That's the only--I met John and knew John. John was stationed at Fort Belvoir for a while, while I was there. And I drove Dr. Eisenhower over to his quarters one time and met him there and the children. But I've never flown anybody except the two of them.

JONES: What about when you were flying Nelson Rockefeller and these other gentlemen? Did any of them ever express an interest in flying or want to get up and--

McKAY: No.

JONES: Was it strictly business and they sat in the back, and they--



McKAY: Just strictly business, yes. They were very, very nice passengers. I mean they were very cordial and interesting to talk with. I mean they weren't a bit snobby or anything. They were down-to-earth people.

BURG: In that period of time that you were doing this work, do you ever recall being, let's say, treated poorly.

McKAY: Never.

BURG: By any of these--



McKAY: Never. By anybody from the White House staff, never. Army, yes.

JONES: Was there ever any friction between your group and the Air Force people that are assigned to the White House?

McKAY: No. I thought we had a very good relationship. In fact, Colonel Bill Draper, I thought, was one of the finest gentlemen and most professional pilot I think I'd ever met. He and Colonel Thomas both. In fact I checked Bill Draper out in the Aero Commander because they got an Aero Commander to fly Ike to and from Gettysburg, and I checked him out at Davison Field in the Aero Commander.

BURG: You obviously have reasons, specific reasons, for praising him so highly as a pilot, and you had a chance to observe him with that Aero Commander. What made him so--what's the word I want to use?--what caused you to rate him so highly? What was there about his flying that you appreciated and--

McKAY: Well, he was a perfectionist, I thought. Everything had to be just right and that's the way it should be when you fly. That's the way I try to do it.

BURG: You saw there was never anything slovenly then about the way he handled that aircraft.

McKAY: He handled it like a true professional.

BURG: Now am I correct in assuming that neither he nor you ever felt that any landing approach, for example, was routine? That you flew them all carefully--

McKAY: That's right.



BURG: --approaches were carefully--

McKAY: Nothing was routine. I mean strictly business all the time. And that's the way it should be.

BURG: So it isn't just a case of here I am coming into my own home field and a lot of my friends watching, this one better look good--we would expect the same kind of flying behavior from

you coming into Abilene where you're not known at all and where perhaps there's no one watching.

McKAY: That's right. If nobody's here, I'd still put it down the same way. They can see you bouncing, I mean you can't help it.

BURG: Again because you're, yes, but you're in it yourself and--

McKAY: That's right.

BURG: --and Colonel Draper's attitude towards flying was the same?

McKAY: Absolutely. Yes.

BURG: A quick study? That is, he mastered the Aero Commander rapidly?

McKAY: Oh, with no problem. No problem.



JONES: Well, colonel, I think we've consumed more than enough of your time on this trip. Don't you, Mac?

McKAY: Yes, I've got about four hundred miles to drive yet today.

BURG: Right. And we have finished just about one hour on tape which has just been splendid.

JONES: It's terrific.

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McKAY: Well, I hope it, I've helped you some. I mean--

BURG: Indeed you have and we thank you so much for giving us
this hour of your time.

