

*Oral
History
Program*



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Kevin Sullivan

Interviewed by Alyssa Kammerman
9 April 2019

Oral History Program
Weber State University
Stewart Library
Ogden, Utah

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Mission Statement

The Oral History Program of the Stewart Library was created to preserve the institutional history of Weber State University and the Davis, Ogden and Weber County communities. By conducting carefully researched, recorded, and transcribed interviews, the Oral History Program creates archival oral histories intended for the widest possible use.

Interviews are conducted with the goal of eliciting from each participant a full and accurate account of events. The interviews are transcribed, edited for accuracy and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewees (as available), who are encouraged to augment or correct their spoken words. The reviewed and corrected transcripts are indexed, printed, and bound with photographs and illustrative materials as available. The working files, original recording, and archival copies are housed in the University Archives.

Project Description

Hill Aerospace Heritage Foundation oral history project is a series of oral histories documenting the life stories and experiences of the board members of the Hill Aerospace Heritage Foundation. Board members recall their time in military service, as well as their memories of starting the foundation in 1983 and opening the Hill Aerospace Museum in 1987. Each interview begins with a brief life sketch of the individual board member, then moves onto their memories of the early days of the Hill Aerospace Museum. They discuss ongoing efforts to make the museum the premier location for preserving Utah's Aviation and Air Force history and name important figures on the Board of Directors, base command, and museum staff who helped to make the museum an important influence in the community.

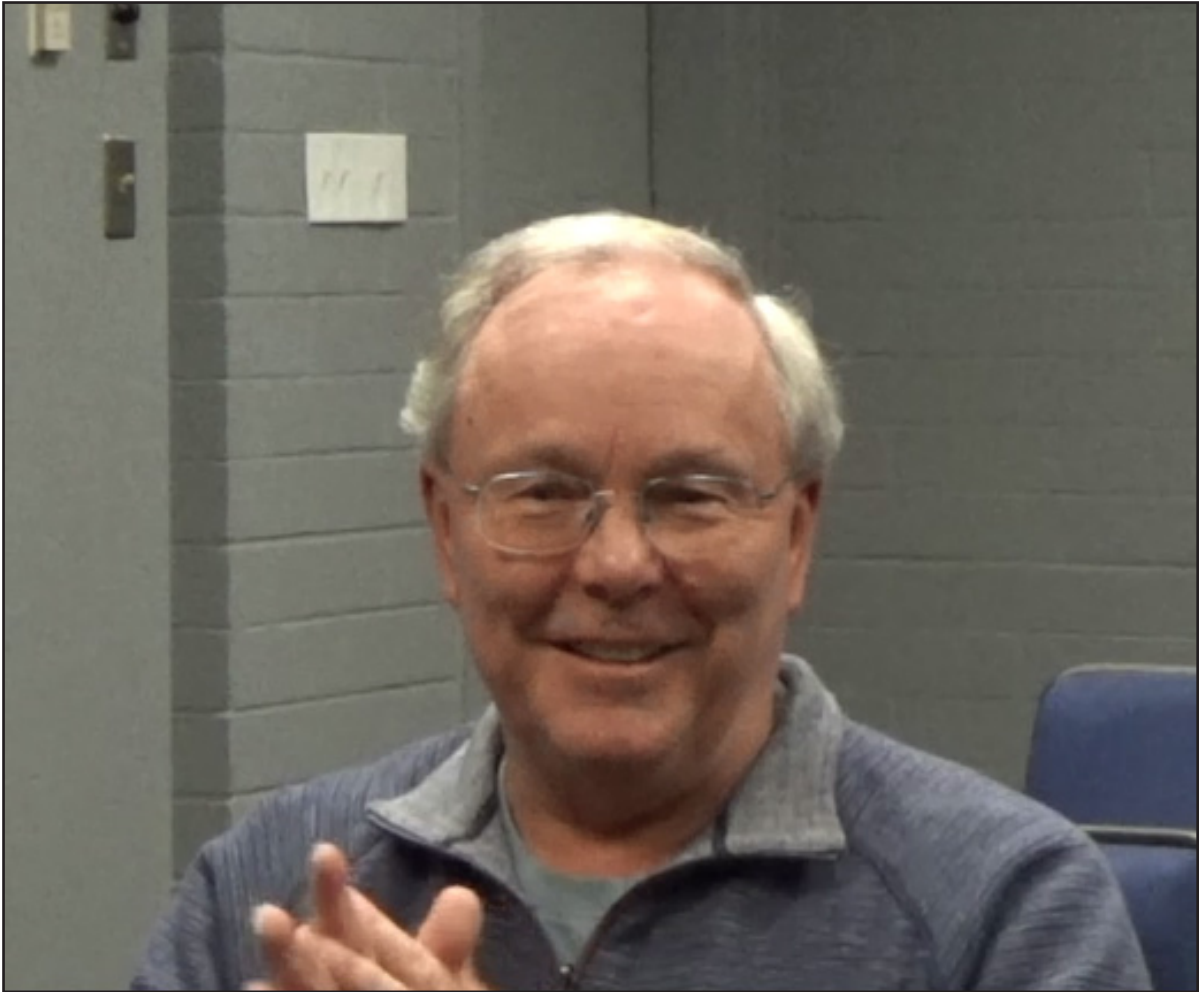
Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account. It reflects personal opinion offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Sullivan, Kevin, an oral history by Alyssa Kammerman, 9 April 2019, WSU Stewart Library Oral History Program, University Archives, Stewart Library, Weber State University, Ogden, UT.



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Abstract: The following is an oral history interview with Kevin Sullivan, conducted on April 9, 2019, at Hill Aerospace Museum, by Alyssa Kammerman. Kevin discusses his life, his time while serving in the United States Military, and his experiences while serving on the Hill Aerospace Heritage Foundation Board. Reagan Baird, the video technician, is also present during this interview.

AK: Today is April 9th, 2019. We are at Hill Aerospace Museum interviewing Kevin Sullivan. My name is Alyssa Kammerman and I'm going to be conducting the interview. And on the camera with me is Reagan Baird. So thank you again for meeting us today.

KS: Sure.

AK: First I'm going to start out with when and where were you born?

KS: I was born a long time ago. I was born on October 28, 1951 in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

AK: What are your memories of growing up in Connecticut?

KS: I didn't grow up in Connecticut. I was in Connecticut about long enough to be born. My dad was in the Army Air Corps for World War Two. After World War Two ended he got out. He was working at a bank in New York City and was recalled for the Korean War in early 1951, so he was actually stationed somewhere on the West Coast. My mom had been a nurse in Bridgeport General Hospital, so that's where I ended up being born. But shortly after I was born, we joined my dad on an Air Force Base somewhere on the West Coast, and I don't remember where. So I really don't remember the first couple of years of my life.

We moved around. We spent some time in California, some time in Texas. And then in 1953, my dad was reassigned to Loring Air Force Base, Maine. And that's kind of my first memory of anything.

AK: How long did you live in Maine for?

KS: Six and a half years.

AK: Ok. And you would have been how old?

KS: Um, I got there when I was about two and a half or three, and I left there six and a half years later. So nine years old.

AK: Ok. What are your memories of living in Maine then?

KS: I don't have a lot. I do remember in the winter, my dad having to carry me to the bus stop because the snow was so deep that I couldn't walk through it. We had one of these folding umbrella-type clotheslines in front of the house and I remember that being completely covered with snow in the winter. I remember skiing a little bit. I learned to ski. They had a ski slope on the base with a rope tow and I learned to ski there. So I mostly remember winters in Maine because that's what you have. I mean those winters! So, beyond that, not a lot of recollections of Maine other than the winters and how severe they were and an opportunity to ski.

AK: Do you remember which elementary school you went to?

KS: I really don't. I think it was on base, but I don't recall what elementary school it was.

AK: What was it like growing up on a base as a child?

KS: Actually, I only lived on a base the one time in Maine. And it was old. I think they called it wherry housing. It was kind of an L-shaped thing and there were maybe six units on one side and ten units on another side. Kind of thrown together. I mean, it was the kind of house where when you opened the medicine cabinet in your house, if you looked through where you put razor blades, you could see into the bathroom on the other side. It was not plush living, I can tell you that. But I only lived on a base when we were in Maine. I guess the other thing I remember about Maine was probably in about 1958, they closed the runway on Loring Air Force Base and because my dad was a flier, the whole wing, families included, went to Raimy Air Force Base in Puerto Rico. And we spent three months in the summer of, I think, 1958 in Puerto Rico. I went to school in Puerto Rico for a period of time. And so that was pretty neat to have that opportunity. And then we came back to the states on a Navy boat, which was kind of interesting. So that's Loring, Maine in a nutshell as I remember it.

AK: Did you have any siblings?

KS: I do. I have a younger brother and a much younger sister. My brother is two and a half years younger than I am. My sister is 15 years younger than I am. And so there was no sister in Maine [laughs]. There was a brother.

AK: Ok. What was your dad's job with the Air Force?

KS: He was a navigator. He flew B-36s when we first got to Maine and then he flew B-52's after that. And then after we left Maine, he kind of changed career fields. He was in the acquisition business later on in his career.

AK: When you say acquisition business, was that for the Air Force?

KS: Yes. Actually, what he did was configuration management. And that's kind of working with the contractor to ensure the configuration of whatever system you're procuring.

AK: And what about your mom? Did she have a job?

KS: My mom, as I said, was a Registered Nurse. Never worked after I was born. She was a stay-at-home mom with two boys and a daughter later on. So, no, but I won't say she didn't work because bringing up a family is probably the most meaningful work you can do. But she was not employed outside the home.

AK: Ok. So after Maine, where did you guys end up?

KS: After Maine, we went to Syracuse, New York. My dad got a master's degree, so we were there for a year. So I went to probably third grade, I guess, in Syracuse. I don't remember a lot about Syracuse. I do remember we lived on kind of a steep hill. And I do remember my brother on a bicycle one day going right down the hill without breaks, going across a major intersection at the bottom of the hill and luckily, he made it. But Syracuse was kind of a bump in the road for us. We were only there a year. My dad was pretty focused on getting his master's degree and so we were focused on avoiding him while he was studying at night.

So after that, we moved about an hour up the road to Griffiss Air Force Base in Rome, New York. We were there for about four years. I went through fourth through seventh grade in Rome. And that's where my dad first got into the acquisition business. He was assigned to a place called the Rome Air Development Center. Upper state New York back in those days was a pretty robust economy. It was kind of a mill-town area of the country. If you drive

through there today, it's very depressed. All that industry moved to the south east. But Rome was a fun assignment for us growing up as kids. We had a little league baseball park right across the street from the house and so we had kind of built in entertainment. So that was Rome.

AK: Did you ever play baseball or just watched?

KS: Little League, but that's about it. At that point, I think my interest waned and maybe my ability waned also. So I played a little bit of baseball there.

AK: Which high school did you go to?

KS: I went to junior high there. I went to Laurel Junior High School and there were two high schools in town. Not in the greatest part of town so my folks were kind of happy that we moved out of Rome before I got into high school, to be honest with you, because the high school also was not in the nicest part of town. So that's Rome, New York.

AK: Where did you move during high school then?

KS: We moved to Acton, Massachusetts. My dad was stationed at Hanscom Air Force Base. We lived in West Acton, which is just outside of Concord, Massachusetts. So it's kind of the heart of the American Revolution. I finished junior high school at Acton Boxborough Junior High School. And then I went to high school in Concord, Massachusetts, at a place originally called "Xavier High School" and then "Xavier School." And then it closed. But we lived there for, probably through my freshman year in college. But Massachusetts was kind of a neat place to grow up for us. I mean, it was really, really close to what was kind of the cradle of the Revolution.

As I got older, I worked in Cambridge, which is just right outside of Boston. And that was a pretty neat place to place to grow up. Once again, not on a base. Actually, quite a distance from a base. So, other than when we were first stationed in Maine, I didn't have a lot of understanding of what it was to be a military dependent because we really hadn't lived on bases for most of my life. And we didn't live on base there either. I realized once I came in the Air Force that I probably wasn't as well prepared as I might have been had I spent time growing up on a base. I think there were things I didn't understand about the Air Force that I might have had I lived on a base all those years. But we lived just in downtown communities. And so other than the fact that we moved periodically, I didn't really understand a whole lot about the Air Force, really until I came in myself.

AK: When did you join the Air Force?

KS: Well, after I graduated from high school, I went to University of Connecticut. I graduated in 1974 with a degree, a wife, and a commission in the Air Force. And I still have the wife and I still have the degree; the commission is [motioning away]-- I've retired, so. So in 1974, I came in.

AK: You said you had a commission in the Air Force; Did you do ROTC?

KS: Yeah.

AK: How did you meet your wife?

KS: We lived in the same dorm. The first year in two separate towers. We had men in one tower and women in the other tower. And then the next year they went to alternate floors and she was, I think, one floor below me. So we were in the same

dormitory. And actually we met through our Resident Advisors. The R.A. on our floor happened to be friendly with R.A. on June's floor, and they're the ones that kind of got us got us together. So I tell people I've been with my wife forever, I mean, my entire adult life. We started dating probably September, October of our freshman year, then have been together for a long time since.

AK: I like that. Tell me a little bit about the ROTC at your college.

KS: How about I tell you how I got in first. The year I graduated from high school was the first year of the lottery system for the draft and I drew a winner; I drew a number twenty eight. Number twenty eight was a winner. I had a deferment because I was going to school, but I'll never forget coming home from work that day, it was the summer before I went to college, and getting into a knock down, drag out fight with my parents about joining ROTC because they were afraid that I'd graduate from college then I'd get drafted. And at that point, I wanted no part of ROTC. I wanted to go to college, drink beer and chase women, frankly. That was what I was interested in at that point in my life and I wasn't interested in ROTC. So for the first two years, I wasn't in ROTC. But then as a sophomore, I realized that someday I was going to graduate.

My dad wasn't going to pay for me to go to school forever, you know. I was going to actually have to go out and get a job. And I knew my dad had been in the Air Force and it had been a pretty good life for our family. They were willing to offer me a hundred bucks a month to go to school and then offer me a job that paid almost ten thousand dollars a year when I graduated. So I said, "Well, we'll give this a try." So I went through the two year ROTC program. And I probably

would have been the cadet least likely to succeed. I was interested in ROTC only as a means to a commission. I mean, really. So I didn't get wrapped up in all the cadet activities. I went to class, it was a three credit "A," and that's kind of what ROTC was to me. So I don't think that any of the faculty there would have looked at me and said, "yeah, Sullivan's going to spend thirty-five years in the Air Force and be reasonably successful," because that wasn't the perception I think I probably gave at that time, so.

AK: Did you mention earlier that you almost got drafted into the Vietnam War?

KS: Well, yeah, I actually wasn't almost drafted. The way it worked back in those days was there was a lottery system, and every year, for those that were going to be eligible for the draft that year, all the birthdates were basically thrown in a bin and they pulled them out, 1 to 365. And at the time I got my draft number was over the summer of 1969. We were still pretty embroiled in Vietnam and probably anything up through about 150, you could be pretty much guaranteed you were going to be drafted if you didn't have a student deferment. I had a 28 and 28 was a winner. I would have had a student deferment because I was going to college, but after college I probably would have been vulnerable for a draft.

As it turned out, by the time I graduated from college the war had pretty much wound down and I'm not sure we were even drafting all that much at that point. We were probably doing some, but not to the extent that we were when I got my number in 1969. So I was never "almost drafted," but had the war continued, you know, had I graduated and not gone into the Air Force, then there's probably a chance I could have gotten drafted and that's what my parents

were concerned about. Their vote was go into the Air Force. Don't wait to get drafted and go into the Army.

AK: Interesting. How did the Vietnam War affect that time in your life?

KS: The first time I saw the ROTC building at the University of Connecticut was probably in the summer of 1969 or 1970, when I first went to visit the University of Connecticut. And it had been taken over that year by Students for a Democratic Society, so it had been painted with flowers and all sorts of things on the outside of the building. When I was in ROTC, you didn't wear a uniform on campus. Uniforms were kept in the ROTC building. You changed into uniform to go to class, you changed out of your uniform when you left. So you weren't a real popular person. In my case, because I had been there for two years, I had a set of friends that knew who I was. It probably wasn't that big of a deal for me. You know, I just transitioned from a guy with hair down to here [points below his shoulder blades] to a guy that had a military haircut and they knew I was in ROTC. But it really wasn't too much of an impact. But particularly for a school in the northeast, it was not real popular to be in ROTC at that point in time.

AK: So you mentioned that none of your ROTC teachers would have seen you as a success or someone who would stay in for thirty-five years, but it sounds like you did, so what was the transition there? What made you decide that you actually did want a career in the Air Force?

KS: You know, there really wasn't a point where my wife and I decided, "let's stay in." We came in and, you know, all of a sudden, thirty-five years later, it was time to retire. I mean, we really never did make a conscious decision, "Hey, we're going

to stay in the Air Force." We just went year to year. We got one assignment after the other. And pretty soon it was time to do something else. So, I mean, we really enjoyed it. Moved around a lot, maybe more so than my wife would have liked. Certainly more so than my sons would have liked. But all in all, really good life. And we're really pleased that we did it. It gave us a lot of great experiences. But it's a little tough on a family when you're moving kids around. And every time we moved, my wife had to find a new dentist and a new hairdresser, a new grocery store, you name it. And we were overseas a couple of times, which is a little bit difficult too, so. But, yeah, we never made a decision to stay. We just stayed in.

AK: When you first graduated as a commissioned officer, what was your job? "MOS" I guess is an Army term, but--

KS: It's "AFSC," in the Air Force.

AK: OK. What was your AFSC then?

KS: I was a munitions officer. My first assignment was to Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, which is now closed, to go to Munitions Officer School. I knew nothing about being a munitions officer of any kind. It was not on my dream sheet, it wasn't what I asked for, but it turned out to work out really well for me. But yeah I was a munitions officer. I spent six months in Lowry Air Force Base, which once again is now closed. It's actually a Reserve base now.

After I graduated from there, I went to England Air Force Base, Louisiana, which is now closed, for my first assignment as a munitions guy. And it was really a pretty good place for a young officer. It was a small base. We probably only had about 200 officers on the base because we had A-10's. It was a single seat

airplane. So we didn't have pilots and navigators or front seaters and back seaters. We had a relatively small base. It was a good place to kind of grow up and learn the Air Force. When we found out we were going there, my wife and I had to pull out a map to figure out where the heck Alexandria, Louisiana was, I can tell you that. Because it was not exactly somewhere where people from the North East were looking to go.

AK: What were some of your responsibilities as a munitions officer? What did that entail?

KS: Initially, I was the third lieutenant in a munitions loading section, and we had about 150 guys there and their job was to put weapons on airplanes and load 20 millimeter cannons. And because, frankly, we had more lieutenants than we knew what to do with, I ended up being the officer in charge of the squadron lead crews. And those are the guys that train the other load crews. And so I spent about probably six months there. Then I moved to the weapons storage area where we stored the munitions. It was a pretty small weapons storage area. And I did that for about a year. And then I moved to be the Wing Weapons Safety Officer and I did that for about a year as well. So I was there for maybe two and a half, three years and had three different jobs. And that kind of was typical of my entire career; I guess I couldn't hold a job.

I'd hold a job for a year or two and then they'd move me, so. But like I said, it was a good place to start. It really was a good place to start because it was small, pretty well self-contained, a pretty focused mission for everybody there. So it was not necessarily where we would have preferred to be

geographically, but it was a good assignment. And that's where my first son was born, in Rapides General Hospital.

AK: How many children did you have?

KS: Two sons.

AK: So what were some of your duties as a Wing Weapons Safety Officer?

KS: Mostly doing inspections and kind of making sure that weapons safety policy was being followed throughout the wing. It was kind of interesting, in that shop you had a wing weapon safety guy, you had two flying safety officers, and then you had ground safety people. And one of the things I'll never forget is we lost a fair number of A-7s when I was there. They were having engine difficulties. And we lost our Vice Wing Commander. He crashed, went off the bombing range, and the flight safety guys were gone. So they put me in a truck and said, go out to the site, because the safety office had to respond to any accident like that. You know, I'll never forget that accident site. I mean, it was just a hole in the ground. I felt every young pilot oughta visit a place like that, just so they understood the ramifications of not doing everything right. I'll never forget that. I'll never forget the feeling of being there. It was just kind of ominous. But other than that, it was a pretty good tour.

AK: So, did that job entail going on deployments along with your unit?

KS: No. I did deploy, but not as the wing weapons safety officer. When I was in charge of the weapons storage area, that also didn't entail a whole lot of deployments. But at the time, the Air Force was retiring A-7 aircraft and...The A-7 was a close air support airplane and it had some pretty specific missions. At

Nellis Air Force Base, we went out to what we called red flag exercises. And those are exercises where you bring in multiple types of aircraft and you actually try to employ them as you would in combat. The theory is, if you can kind of practice as realistic a combat as you can during peacetime, then you're going to lose fewer people when you go to war. And because there were so few A-7s left in the Air Force and because we had all of them at England Air Force Base, we were cycling and we went out there at every single red flag. And they do them about once a month and you're out there for two or three weeks.

So we were running out of aircraft maintenance officers to send out there so the guy who was running the maintenance organization said, "Well, let's send Sullivan." And so that was my first exposure to aircraft maintenance and it was about a three week deployment during which we also lost an airplane, which was an interesting experience as well. But that was really my only what you might call a "deployment" when I was there. And back in those days, we didn't deploy the way they do today. We were an Air Force that was focused on the Soviet Union. We had overseas bases and we had bases in the states, and we didn't rotate the way they do today. So I don't have the deployment history that, say, if you were talking to a guy who came in the Air Force maybe in 1991 on his history, from then to now would be entirely different than mine was, because we are a deployed Air Force today. We weren't back then. We were pretty much a main operating base Air Force. And if you deployed, it was for training exercises, typically.

AK: Ok. So tell me about the rest of your military career. Did you stay as a wing safety officer? Did you need to change jobs?

KS: No. I tried to get out of there as quick as I could. From there I went to Clark Air Base in the Philippines. And when I went to Clark, they had started changing AFSC's a little bit. At one time there were three maintenance AFSC's: there was Munitions Maintenance, Avionics Maintenance, and Organizational Maintenance. And they merged the munitions AFSC about the time I moved to the Philippines and I ended up being an Aircraft Maintenance Officer when I was in the Philippines. I'd never been to the schoolhouse, they didn't send me back to go to it. So I just kind of transitioned into the airplane business on F-4s. And that was an interesting, interesting time. That was in the late 1970s. I was in the Philippines from 1978 to 1979.

We were not a well-provisioned Air Force, we weren't a well funded Air Force; we were an Air Force that was just coming out of Southeast Asia. A lot of people had separated from the Air Force, we had a very young workforce. It was one of my favorite assignments, but most of the time I was there, I was working six and a half-day weeks and it was not an easy assignment. I was what we called an AMU Chief. I had twenty-six F-4s that I was responsible for and about 300 people to begin with, and then it would drop to about 200 because we reorganized. And it was just a busy, busy time. I really enjoyed the assignment, but I pretty much missed two years of my older son growing up because I would see him at night and then I would fall asleep on the living room floor and get up at 4:30 or 5:00 o'clock the next morning and go to work. I mean, I enjoyed it, but it

was a busy, busy assignment. You know, it was my first exposure to aircraft maintenance, which I really enjoy. And that's kind of what I did for much of the rest of my career.

AK: So with the aircraft maintenance that you did, were you mainly overseeing or were you helping with the maintenance itself?

KS: Oh no, they wouldn't let me touch any tools [laughs]. Yeah, I was supervising a large number of enlisted members that actually knew what they were doing and actually did the work. So, no, they wouldn't let me get near a tool.

AK: How hard was overseeing that kind of work when you had never done that kind of work yourself?

KS: It was kind of hard for me because I never even went to aircraft maintenance school. So, I was pretty much behind the power curve, to be honest with you, in terms of even understanding a lot of what goes on in maintenance. So it was kind of a sink or swim environment and I guess I'm lucky enough I floated. So, it was a little difficult. Luckily, I had some really good senior NCOs that were around me. And one of the jobs of a senior NCO is to train lieutenants and they did a pretty good job, I think, of training this particular lieutenant at the time. So, I think that being smart enough to know what I didn't know is probably how I was able to succeed.

AK: How did the Cold War affect your time in the military?

KS: That's what drove our OPs tempo and that's what drove how we trained. You know, up through 1989, our focus was the Soviet Union and stopping Soviet incursion through the Fulda Gap. And that's how we focused everything that we

did. I mean, that's how we trained, so it drove everything. It drove our basing, it drove our, what you might call, our "deployment" ops tempo, because we really didn't deploy. We had fixed bases overseas that were there to focus on the Soviet Union and we had bases in the states that you would deploy from if you had to go overseas. So it was a much different environment. We had a known enemy--pretty much a single known enemy. We pretty much knew how he was going to fight a war with us and we pretty much knew how we were going to fight a war with him. So in a lot of ways, it was a much more predictable, much more stable environment than occurred subsequent to 1989 and then really subsequent to 1991 when we did get into an overseas deployment mode. So it was much more stable. We knew who the bad guy was, we knew how he was going to fight us and we knew how we were going to fight him. So, a much different environment than folks that came in the Air Force in the early to mid 1990s.

AK: Fascinating. Were you still in for the conflicts in the Middle East?

KS: Oh yeah. I retired in 2007.

AK: How do you feel that that changed your experience in the military?

KS: You know, in 1989 I was a lieutenant colonel, squadron commander. Fairly shortly thereafter I was promoted to colonel and then I was assigned to Air Force Materiel Command, which is the command that owns Hill Air Force Base and that is a United States focused base. And that's where I spent much of the rest of my career. So to some extent, I outranked all those deployments, if that makes sense. Because, you know, lots of lieutenants deploy and lots of captains deploy

and then a little bit fewer majors deploy and then a little bit fewer lieutenant colonels deploy. There's some colonels that deploy and then very few generals deploy. I was in school during Desert Storm at an Air War College, so I kind of missed that. Then I came here, to a place where you don't deploy from and I was on the Air Logistics Center side of the base. So I kind of missed a lot of that, to be honest with you. I never deployed to Southwest Asia.

As I got older, as a general officer, I toured Southwest Asia, but I was kind of there as a tourist, to see how what we were doing here was impacting them. So to some extent I really missed a lot of that, partially because of where I was assigned and partially because of my rank. So it didn't impact me the way it did some of the younger folks other than I knew what it was doing to them, and I knew what it was doing to their families as they rotated back and forth. So, I needed to be sensitive to that and that kind of changes the way you do business. But personally, the longest I was "deployed," if you will, was to go to a six month Acquisition School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. So I just didn't experience a lot of family separation the way people do today. So I saw those deployments really through the eyes of the people that worked for me in a lot of cases, more so than personally.

AK: Do you feel like the war in the Middle East kind of changed that feeling of having a known enemy?

KS: Oh it did. Oh, absolutely. I mean, it completely changed. It made things a lot harder, to be honest with you, because we weren't sure where the next bad guy was or who he was or how he was going to fight with us. I mean, the Soviets

were going to give us a fair fight. I mean, we were going to bang it out somewhere in Europe. When you get into a situation where you're dealing with terrorists and you're dealing with non-government actors across the world, you're dealing with rogue regimes in Iraq and North Korea, it's a much different environment. It's a much less fixed environment and so you have to be a lot more agile than you have been when it was just one bad guy. So, yeah, it's changed a lot. It's reverting back a little bit now, to be honest with you, but over the past twenty or twenty five years, it significantly has changed how the military has been focused and how the Air Force has been focused.

AK: Fighting an ideal as opposed to a known enemy now.

KS: Right.

AK: Interesting. So you mentioned that after Vietnam, you said there were a lot of new young people in the Air Force. After the animosity that the military experienced during Vietnam, did those young people seem to you to have a renewed commitment or a sense of morale boost about joining the military?

KS: Well some of them were still coming in to avoid the Army. The draft wasn't a huge issue, but I don't think I really saw that until maybe midway through the 1980s. And frankly, President Reagan had a lot to do with that. For example, when President Carter was the president of the United States, if you worked at the Pentagon, you didn't wear a uniform to work except one day a week, because we didn't want to give the impression that our capital was an armed complex; and this was someone else's view, not mine. And that's not real motivating when you're told don't wear your uniform to work. That changed during the Reagan

years and frankly, the whole perception of the military started to turn around, I would say, during the early to mid 1980s. Funding got a lot better in the early to mid 1980s. We'd developed some bad habits in Southeast Asia. I mean, when you're in a wartime environment, I think there's more of a tendency to maybe bend the rules, if you will--or at least there was then. And at least in my business, in the maintenance business, I don't think we did real good work when I first came in.

I think we kind of had this Vietnam syndrome where, you know, however you get it done is OK, just get the job done. You didn't focus as much on doing it right and following the technical data that you should be following. And I think it took us until the early to mid 1980s when we really got out of that syndrome and really started to do the kind of quality maintenance and kind of quality work that our pilots deserved. And I think part of that was just getting away from that wartime environment. And I think part of it was an all-volunteer force where you had people in the Air Force that wanted to be there and not people that were in the Air Force because they were avoiding going into the Army. I think the fact that there was from the administration a kind of different view of the military, and then the fact that we started to buy new weapons systems and fund the military a little bit better, I think all of that kind of led to a much healthier environment and a much better environment.

AK: How did 9/11 affect you? I know you were higher ranking, but...

KS: Right. I was a Brigadier General. I was on a stage at Eglin Air Force Base talking in a contracting conference when the first plane hit and someone came running

out and said something to me. And, you know, frankly, when the first airplane hit, I don't think there was a huge reaction. Then when the second airplane hit, we recalled our battle staff. We weren't sure what we were going to do, but we figured we probably ought to recall our battle staff. And so it didn't do a lot to me personally. I mean, I didn't deploy, I continued to be in the job that I was in. It certainly changed America's perception of things. I mean, nothing like a good disaster for people to pull together. And I know that I'm being a little bit facetious there, but it really kind of brought the American people together and I think it changed completely how the American people viewed the American military. And first responders in general; I mean, police, firefighters, EMT's. I mean, I think it completely changed their view of that. And that hasn't changed and that's been a long time ago and that really hasn't changed. And believe me, it wasn't that way in the late 1960s and early 1970s. So personally, for me, it didn't do a lot. Changed a lot of the country's perception, and for a lot of the people that worked for me, it changed things.

For the younger people and some of the folks that worked for me, some of the Logisticians that worked for me, they were in career fields that were very routinely deployed. I mean, these were men and women who were being deployed for six months--typically, the Air Force deploys in six month intervals. They'd be back in the States for a year and then deploy again for six months. And they'd be back again in the States for a year and then they deployed for six months. And so that changed our whole retention models. You had to recognize that with these family separations, we were also moving into an era of dual-

income families. Mine was not; I mean, my wife did not work outside the home. And so you had to kind of factor that into how you treated your people and other things you were concerned about. You needed to be more concerned about things like child care, you needed to be more concerned about things like how spouses are being taken care of while their sponsors are deployed. What happens when you have two spouses that are in the military, and one's deployed for this six-month period and they come back and then the other one is deployed? And so it changed that whole dynamic of what's important for retention, what's important to keep these folks motivated. So that's kind of how it impacted me: it was really how I dealt with the people that worked with me and worked for me in most cases. So that was probably the biggest change for me.

AK: That's fascinating. So, as a Brigadier General, what were some of the main things that you would have to head up with that? Did you have specific projects that you were in charge of?

KS: Initially when I was promoted, I was down in Eglin Air Force base, and I was the vice commander of something called the Armament Center and that's an acquisition organization, and basically, we're buying munitions. You know, air to ground missiles, air to air missiles, guided weapons. And so that was a lot of community interface, a lot of oversight of acquisition programs. And that didn't change much. I mean, I stayed there through 2001.

In 2001, I went to the Pentagon and I was one in an organization called the ILG, I think. Basically, I was in charge of supply, transportation and logistics plans for the Air Force. And that was where I really started to understand the

impact of this deployment ops tempo, because some of those folks, some of those supply people, some of those transportation people were some of the most deployable people in the Air Force. And for the first time in my life, I was responsible for people that were being put in harm's way. Because a lot of Air Force transportation people ended up being in Army convoys, and Army convoy commanders.

Historically in the Air Force it was our officers that fought our battles, it was our officers that flew our airplanes, it was our officers that were in harm's way, and our enlisted members were kind of, you know, back at the main base and they would watch the airplanes and recover the airplanes and and run the supply organizations. But they typically weren't in harm's way for the most part. All of a sudden, we had Air Force transportation people that are in Army convoys, susceptible to IEDs, and we were having people killed. And that was kind of a new concept for the Air Force where our enlisted members were out in harm's way.

Our transportation people, our security forces, people that were outside, our explosive ordnance disposal people that were outside dealing with IEDs. And a lot of these people, from a career management standpoint, I was responsible for them. And all of a sudden OPs tempo issues became a problem and we were losing, I mean, people were separating from the Air Force because they'd had enough. They'd been deployed three times in the last five years and they hadn't been there for their kids birthdays, they hadn't been there for anniversaries, and they'd missed Christmas two out of three years. And so we kind of had to deal

with that. And that's where I first got a feel for just what this new Air Force was going through from a personnel standpoint and how difficult and how hard it was on families as people were deployed.

The interesting thing about the Air Force is, in the Army you kind of have people who deploy and people who don't deploy. You've got people who are susceptible to deployment and then people that run bases. In the Air Force, you just got one group of people. And so they would deploy and they'd be gone for six months and they'd be busy as heck. And then they'd come back to their base and the people who were at the base for the last six months, they'd deploy. But then they'd come back to their base and half the people would be gone so they'd be just as busy as they were when they were deployed. They weren't in harm's way, but, you know, their spouses and their families kind of thought, "Well, okay, you're gonna be back, you're gonna want to spend some time with me." And that wasn't necessarily the case. In some cases, it was almost harder to be home and not be able to be home, than to be away and not be able to be home. And that's just a function of how the Air Force deploys people, which is a little bit different than the Army and the Navy. So that was something we also had to come to grips with. How do you try to make it better for the guy that's home when half of the people in his shop are deployed and he's working just as hard at home as he would be if he was deployed? Only when he or she is deployed, he doesn't have to worry about his wife and kids or her husband and kids because they're not with them. So that was kind of an interesting time frame for me.

AK: And so you guys worked on ways to help them stay home a little bit longer?

KS: We tried, and we tried to work on trying to bring more people into the career fields because that was a point in time where we were doing a lot more commissioning of enlisted members to kind of fill gaps as people separated from the Air Force. So there was a lot more of that going on. There was a lot more focus on, if we can't reduce their deployment ops tempo, can you at least make it predictable? Can you at least let them know that you're gonna be home for a year or 18 months? And so we worked particularly for these high ops tempo career fields to try to make it more predictable for them and the way we selected them for deployment. So those were the kind of things we could work around, but the bottom line was there were certain career fields, and because of the nature of the career field, you were just going to deploy more. So you just try to kind of minimize this disruption, make it as predictable as possible, and then worry about how you fill in the gaps when they separate.

AK: Interesting. So when you retired in 2007, what did you go on to do after that?

KS: I consulted a little bit. I decided I was here for four years as the commander of the Air Logistics that I was on as a major general. And I took another assignment to Washington, D.C. and when I took that assignment, I was fifty five, I guess. And once I decided to take that additional assignment, which would have kept me in a few years longer, that I wasn't going to work full time when I left the Air Force. I mean, I didn't need to. So I did some consulting. I did a lot of volunteer work. I volunteer for the foundation here, I was a trustee at Weber State University, I was on the McKay Dee Foundation board for a while, I was on the board of directors for the Ogden-Weber Tech College, and a few other assorted

volunteer things. So I did a little bit of consulting and I did a little bit of volunteer work.

AK: What made you choose to stay in Utah?

KS: Well [laughs], basically, because my wife said I could. When I retired we were in Washington, D.C. and there were really two options. I have two sons that live just outside of Columbus, Ohio and when I retired, neither son was married and there were no grandchildren. And we had a lot of friends out here, we'd been stationed here twice. And so we kind of debated between Columbus and here. I was still doing a lot of skiing, my wife had friends here, and so we decided it would be a good time to go back to Utah. We enjoyed it here, we had friends here, and so that's kind of what drove us here. And there wasn't a huge pull to Columbus. Now, I have two granddaughters in Columbus and I have a house in Columbus. Because when the first granddaughter was born, I had two options: I could either move to Columbus or I could get a house in Columbus. So we're back and forth between here and Columbus, now. But it really was because we had been here twice, we enjoyed it, we have friends here, and that's what brought us back here.

AK: When did you start volunteering at the museum?

KS: You know, we got back here in March of 2009, and probably within a year-- probably around 2010--General Reynolds approached me and asked me if I would be interested in coming on the board. And actually what he really wanted was he asked me if I would be willing to follow him as the board chair. And I told him no. That I would come on the board but I wasn't interested. And you have to understand that Marc Reynolds devoted twenty years of his life to this

museum, and I'm not minimizing that. He was here every day of the week. We didn't have a Robb Alexander when Marc was running this organization. So Marc was really a combination foundation chair, executive director, education specialist, volunteer, administrative assistant to himself. I mean, Marc did everything. And like I said, he was here every day of the week. And I said, "Marc, I can't do that. I mean, I'm doing other things. I won't commit to doing what you're doing." I said, "I'll come on board." And so I did, I came on the museum board, probably in 2010, maybe 2011, but in that time frame. Just as a board member.

After I'd been on the board for a while, I kind of got an assignment from Marc, and that was to see what we could do about expanding the museum. You know, we have the two galleries now, and we'd like to build a third. And so we started. And during this time frame, I was on a couple other boards and I recognized that for us to really mature as a board, we needed a full time executive director. I mean, no one was going to do what Marc Reynolds did. No one was ever going to do that again, to devote the time and energy that Marc devoted to the museum as a board member to try to fill that executive director role and the board member role. So I was encouraging Marc that we pursue an executive director. And at the same time, we were kind of looking at what can we do to expand the museum? And so we hired a consultant, a development guy, a fundraising guy. And I worked with him and Barry Chapman worked with him. And he kind of did a study for us on what it would take to raise, at the time, we thought about 18 million dollars to build up a new gallery. It's a lot more than that now, but it was about 18 million dollars at the time. And in the course of doing

that, one of the things we decided was that if we were really going to get serious about fundraising, we needed to hire a no-kidding development-director kind of guy. A guy, for example, that had 30 years experience at Weber State [laughs]. And we had to get some money from the state. So at any rate, after we got this study done, we convinced Marc that we needed to go hire this developmental director, and so we did. We put an advertisement on a number of different places and interviewed a number of different people. And Robb Alexander popped up on the list. And I mean, here was a guy that had 30 years of fundraising experience, great contacts in the local area, and we said are you sure you want to do this, Robb? But anyway, we hired Robb and we hired him specifically to be a development guy, to raise money. And in fact, we kind of structured his duty package so he wasn't the executive director. I mean, we wanted him to focus on fundraising. But as things evolved, two things became apparent to us: one was that we really needed an executive director. And the second was that Robb could do that and he could be good at it. And so it kind of evolved such that the guy we hired as the development guy, the money guy, happened to be really qualified to be an executive director, too. So he evolved into that role.

About that time, Marc was really getting fairly ill. And that's when I decided, OK, I can do this foundation chair thing. If we've got Robb here as an executive director or we have an executive director who can kind of Full-Time focus on running the foundation, and I can focus on chairing foundation board meetings and working with Robb on fundraising. So that's kind of how I got to to be as involved as I am in the museum. And I would never have done that had we

not hired an executive director. I just didn't think I had the time and energy to devote to doing the things that Marc Reynolds did. I mean, he was extraordinary, the amount of time that he devoted to this museum--and his wife Ellie as well. Between the two of them, they just devoted so much time and effort to this museum. So I devote much less [laughs]. But if I've done anything that I'm pleased about is the fact that we convinced ourselves in order to take the next step as a foundation, we needed someone running the foundation full time. And Robb happens to have been great and we got a great guy to do that. But that decision was probably as smart a decision as I've ever made, that we really needed to bring someone on full time. And that has worked out great. So the only reason I'm here is because Robb's here. So that's kind of how I got involved.

AK: What are some of your other duties as a museum chair? Obviously you conduct board meetings, like you said...

KS: You know, about the only other thing I do is I help build the budget. I'm on the Finance Committee and I kind of help with the budget. The other thing we felt we needed to do was do a little bit better in investing our money. We don't have huge amounts of assets, but we have some assets and they were just sitting in banks. So we made a decision collectively. And it wasn't just my decision. I was involved in it, but we decided that we needed to invest some of that money and we've done that. So I was involved in that.

The other thing I'm involved in is--when Robb tells me I need to--is begging for money [laughs]. We spend a fair amount of time working with the State. Up until about three or four years ago, we didn't get any money from the

state to help run the museum. And in talking to one of our state senators, he said "you guys ought to ask for some money." And so we asked for a one-time gift about four years ago, I guess, to build the Marc Reynolds Education Center. And we kind of decided on that on the way down in the car. It was me, Robb Alexander, Barney Chapman and this consultant we'd hired and we said, okay, what are we going to ask for and how much? And so we decided we'd ask for \$150,000. The education center used to be a big self-help project and we're gonna build up a quality education center. And so we did that. And then the next year we went back and we asked for one-time money just to help run the museum. And when we were doing that, we noticed that there were other museums in the state that were getting ongoing money. And so, Robb and I looked at each other and said, well, we oughtta ask for ongoing money. And so the other thing I've done, I think, is to kind of help us get our fingers into the State coffers, in terms of helping to run the museum.

I mean, we're a fifty million dollar economic impact to this community. We run forty thousand kids through our education center a year doing STEM education work. We think that we provide a service to the state and it's not unfair to ask the state to help us with some money every year. And one of the challenges we have is we can't charge admission to this museum because it's run by the Air Force and the Air Force has rules as to how they do that. And so we can't charge admission. So we have a hard time just generating operating funds. Rob does a great job in getting foundation contributions for specific projects. But but you can't go out to people and say, hey, how'd you like to give

us the money just to operate the museum? Well, they're not interested in that. They want to help build an education center, help build his display or help paint an airplane. So that kind of money we can kind of get. You know, targeted funding. But just basic operating funds is how we've really helped ourselves with the state. So I helped Robb with fundraising. Don't get me wrong, he does most of it. But when he wants me to help him do that, that's what I do. I don't spend huge amounts of time here, to be honest with you. I'm here once a month for a board meeting and once a month for an executive board meeting. And then I might see Robb two or three other times a month, depending on what time of year it is and whether the legislature is in session or not. So that's kind of what I do.

AK: What have been some of the things you've enjoyed most about your time at the museum?

KS: I've just enjoyed seeing where we've come in the past six or seven years. I've enjoyed seeing us build the Aerospace Education Center; watching that go from a self-help plywood structure back there to something you can park a tank on the second floor if you could get it up there. I've enjoyed watching us improve that airpark. If you were to drive through that airpark five or six years ago, those airplanes were in crummy shape. They needed painting, they were faded, they attracted birds. And we've managed to get just about everything out there painted over that period of time. I've just enjoyed watching some of the displays that we've put up out there. I mean, the museum is a different place than it was five or six years ago. And I think it's because we have a good museum staff and the foundation employees have done a great job. Robb's been a great leader for that

team, and it's just been a kind of a pleasure to see. The focus of the board has changed. The early focus of the board was on procuring assets. I mean a lot of the aircraft you see out here. In some cases, Marc Reynolds flew to Alaska to pick up airplane parts. So they were focused really on bringing things into the museum. But, you know, once you get them all in and once you fill up the museum, then you kind of have to shift your focus. And so our focus now is shifted more onto displays, more to sustaining the collection that we have. And it's been kind of interesting--[sound cuts out].

AK: All right. Do you remember where we left off?

KS: Um, we we're talking about what I enjoyed most about the museum or what was most rewarding about the museum, and it's just seeing it evolve, seeing it improve really day to day, seeing the board refocus their attention from procuring exhibits and procuring aircraft, to sustaining what we have, and maybe becoming a little bit more professional in terms of how we run the foundation, which I think was needed for us to--I think that was the next step we needed and I think we've done that reasonably well. And also seeing how Robb has been able to develop donor contacts that we didn't have in the past. I think that's been important.

AK: You mentioned that you've had to shift your focus from procuring the artifacts to finding a way to display them. What have those efforts looked like?

KS: Oh, it's things like, one time there was a philosophy on the board that said our job is to go get the stuff and the Air Force's job is to maintain it. The Air Force doesn't have the resources to maintain it. I mean, there are other things the Air Force is going to prioritize higher than painting a B-52 out here, as they should. I

mean, that shouldn't be their highest priority focus. So we kind of had to change that mindset and realize we can't just go get things and give it to the Air Force and expect them to maintain it forever because they're not equipped to do it and they're not funded to do it. So. So we've had to do more of the sustainment work, the maintenance work to keep the exhibits up to speed than they would have been doing, say, ten or fifteen years ago.

The other thing we've done that I've been proud of is really focus more on our education efforts. And part of that is building the new education center. Part of that is hiring some professional educators to help us put together better education programs. We now do outreach, which we hadn't done for years. We now actually on Wednesday's send our education folks out into the schools to do outreach work for us. We have a pretty robust intern program, more robust now than it was, say, five or ten years ago, which is good for us because it brings in talented people and it's good for the interns. So just kind of seeing us evolve to the next step as a museum. The museum director is also pursuing American Museum Accreditation, which is something that the foundation is focused on. We think it's good for the museum. We think it's also good for us from a fundraising standpoint if we can say that we're accredited, and they're probably a year away from accreditation. That's something that we've pushed as a board. So that's, I guess, pretty much just watching the museum evolve and get better year to year.

AK: Where do you hope the Hill Aerospace Museum goes from here?

KS: I'd like to see us get that third gallery. I'd like to see us find 39 million dollars to build a gallery. That's gonna be a long haul to do that. But I think if we could get

that done during my tenure, then I would be happy with that. That's going to be a tough pull, but I'd like to see that happen. If that doesn't happen, we have to move these airplanes out here. The area that they sit on is on land that we have out-leased to a developer and he's gonna want to develop out there. So we're going to have to move those airplanes, we're gonna have to move the chapel, we're going to have to move the barracks behind the chapel. And so ideally, those airplanes mostly move into a building. If they don't, I want to see them relocated, probably to the east side of the museum and see that done successfully. But my real goal would be to try to get that new gallery built. I think that would be, if not the final stage, at least close to the final stage to get the museum to where we want it to be.

AK: Are there any final stories or thoughts you'd like to share before we finish up?

KS: I don't think so. I think you've covered the waterfront pretty well.

AK: [laughs] Ok. Wonderful. Well thank you so much for allowing us to interview you today. We really appreciate it.

KS: Sure. And thanks for doing this. We appreciate it.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW AGREEMENT

This Interview Agreement is made and entered into this 9th day(s) of April, 2019, by and between the Weber State University, Stewart Library, Oral History Program (WSUSLOHP), Hill Aerospace Museum, and Kevin Sullivan, hereinafter called "Interviewee."

Interviewee agrees to participate in a recorded interview, commencing on or about 2:30 time 4/9/19 date, with Alyssa Kammerman.


This Interview Agreement relates to any and all materials originating from the interview, namely the recording of the interview and any written materials, including but not limited to the transcript or other finding aids prepared from the recording.

In consideration of the mutual covenants, conditions, and terms set forth below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

1. Interviewee irrevocably assigns to the WSUSLOHP and Hill Aerospace Museum all his or her copyright, title and interest in and to the interview.
2. WSUSLOHP and Hill Aerospace Museum will have the right to use and disseminate the interview for research, educational, and other purposes, including print, present and future technologies, and digitization to provide internet access.
3. Interviewee acknowledges that he/she will receive no remuneration or compensation for either his/her participation in the interview or for the rights assigned hereunder.
4. WSUSLOHP and Hill Aerospace Museum agrees to honor any and all reasonable interviewee restrictions on the use of the interview, if any, for the time specified below, as follows:
_____.

Interviewer and Interviewee have executed this Interview Agreement on the date first written above.

INTERVIEWEE



(Signature)

Kevin J. Sullivan

(Printed Name)

INTERVIEWER



(Signature)

Alyssa Kammerman

(Printed Name)

