Bert Beecroft in the United States Air Force

When my brother-in-law, Nixon McNiel, was about 82 years old, I realized that we did not have anything written about his time in the U.S. Army from before Pearl Harbor until the end of World War Two. When I tried to get him to record and/or write up his experiences it was too late. He had a couple of strokes and just could not concentrate to document this time in his life. I do know that he was drafted before the war started and served overseas in Africa and Europe from the beginning to the end of WWII. This is some interesting family history that is now lost. By some unusual circumstances we have a lot of small black and white pictures Nick took while overseas.

I decided to write my experiences in the Air Force during and right after the Korean War, while I still have some ability to write and remember.

When I was a Junior at Texas A&M, I did not pass my physical for Advanced ROTC because of asthma. I was not awarded a contract with the Air Force to receive a commission. When I was a Senior, the ROTC was able to award contracts to Seniors who did not take a contract earlier for various reasons. To get this contract, I went to an off campus doctor and took a physical and denied having asthma. On March 15, 1951 I was certificate fit and qualified for an appointment as a 2nd Lt. in the USAF. I was to be awarded a contract for a commission in the Air Force upon graduation. At that time I decided if I was going to the Air Force I wanted to go to pilot training and learn to fly. My application was approved while I was still in school and I was sent to an Air Force base for a flying physical. Again I denied having asthma but was almost rejected because I was under the minimum weight of 118 pounds by a couple of pounds. The Air Force doctor asked me if I wanted to fly and upon receiving the proper response he entered my weight at 118 pounds and passed me.

On June 1, 1951 I received a Bachelors of Science Degree in Civil Engineering, took the Oath of Office and was appointed to the USAF Reserve as a 2nd Lieutenant. After about a week my orders came to report to the 443rd Troop Carrier Wing, at Hensley Field, Dallas, which I did and was assigned duty to the Installations Squadron as Fire Protection and Aircraft Rescue Officer. I had a Sergeant under me who took me around in a fire truck and we inspected buildings for fire code compliance. The fire engine
was an early WWII type with no top and as we rode around I smoked a cigar
and put my feet where the windshield would have been if the truck had one.
The Sergeant was a good old guy and we rode around the base for a couple
of hours in the morning and played cards all afternoon. This lasted for three
or four weeks and then the 443rd was transferred to Donaldson AFB,
Greenville, South Carolina. I was sent there in the advance party to get the
facilities ready for the Wing to move. The 443rd was flying the WWII Curtis
C-46’s. These were a twin engine plane similar to the C-47 (DC-3) but
much larger with much bigger engines. The advance party was ferried to
Donaldson in these C-46s. As I remember the flight from Dallas to
Greenville was about 7 hours. I stayed very busy getting the buildings ready
for the Wing to relocate. Donaldson AFB was built early in WWII and was
to be the US home of the Royal Air Force if the Germans invaded England.
Later in the war there were some German Prisoners of War housed there.
However most of the living quarters were never used until the 443rd moved
there in the summer of 51. I flew back to Dallas a couple of times in a C-46
and then bought a 1951 Chevrolet and drove it back to South Carolina. It
took 24 hours of driving to make the drive. The roads were all only 2 lanes,
very narrow, and went through every little town on the route and each town
had from 1 to 5 or 6 stoplights.

Although I was still assigned as the Fire Protection and Aircraft Rescue
Officer, I was also the Air Installation Officer. I did not ride the fire truck
but spent all my time getting the base ready for the Wing to move. I lived in
the Bachelors Officers Quarters (BOQ) and was there when the Wing did
finally move. This move took place about in August 51. All this time I was
waiting for my orders to come so I could go to flight school.

The thing I remember most about Greenville, SC was that it was a rough
town. It was hard to go to town without having some hard time from the
natives. They did not like Texans at all.

When the entire Wing was moved, the Wing Colonel whose name I cannot
remember once invited me and another 2nd Lt. to go with him to have supper
with one of the civic leaders of Greenville. I remember going to the large
home of a family that had an automobile agency. It was much larger than
any house I remembered from San Marcos. These people were very nice,
well mannered, and spoke with an extremely deep Southern accent. This
was the first time I had heard anyone talk with this deep Southern accent.
Daily I did what a job superintendent does in civilian construction. Also daily I waited for the orders to go to flight training. Finally about the middle of September I received orders to report to Columbus AFB Mississippi to begin flight training. Sometime about the first of October I reported to the Training Wing and was assigned to Class 52-G.

Columbus was a medium size town with the Mississippi State College for Women and the Air Base as the two main reasons for it being there. I went to the Episcopal Church several times and they were very friendly and often I was invited to eat with one or another family. Mostly I just stayed on the base.

We spent the first 6 or 8 weeks having additional physicals, being tested by psychiatrists, and attending ground school. The 15th of November 1951 I finally got to the airplanes and began to learn to fly. The airplanes we were learning to fly in were early WWII North American T-6Ds. These airplanes had a Pratt & Whitney 650 HP engines, which was a lot of engine for the first airplane a student flies. Pressing a lever on the left side of the seat actuated the hydraulic system. This was a big deal when learning to fly, as right after take-off you had to remove your left hand from the throttle and press this lever as you also pulled another lever to raise the landing gear. By the time you did all of this generally the plane was not at the correct pitch and/or heading. Landing this plane was very difficult and unless the student had a lot of flying in another airplane it took a minimum of 15 hours but more likely 20 to 25 hours to be proficient enough to solo. It was January 24th 1952 before I was turned loose alone and had my first solo. It was about my 25th flight. Many days for various reasons some or all the students did not get a flight. After solo, we began flying acrobatics.

In the T-6 you can do a slow roll, a barrel roll, loops, and various other maneuvers. We also did spins. To do a spin, you would stall the airplane, nose high, and when the airplane quit flying it would drop off on a wing and begin to make a tight turn with the nose going almost straight down. All of these were a lot of fun, but tiring.

Even after solo I did not feel comfortable in the T-6 until I had about 50 hours of flying. Then it became fun and I felt I could handle the plane in any situation. Night flying, however, brought some new challenges and experiences. On my first night flight, the instructor did a slow roll. Now I
had done a lot of slow rolls in the day, but in the daytime you could not see the exhaust flame from the engine. However at night, on that first slow roll, the exhaust flame wrapped around the cockpit and it scared me nearly half to death.

In 1952 there were very few lights on the ground and when there was little or no moon, you could not tell the back sky from the black earth. It was not too bad flying local and just shootings night landings because you were never far from the lighted airfield. However night cross country flights offered another challenge. On the solo night cross country flights, often you could not see from one check point to the next. Check points were generally town, but the towns were not lighted up like today. So at a check point you would turn to a compass heading and try to maintain that heading, wondering if the compass was right. When a town finally appeared on the horizon, you were relieved until you made the next turn to another check point. Also when you were alone at night, the ground as back as the sky, you would think the engine was running rough, or about to quit, or something was wrong with the instruments and remained very uneasy until you came in sight of the beacon and runway lights of Columbus AFB. In those days the radios had tubes, were unreliable, and the instruments were ancient by today standards. There was no radar and no one on the ground could help you as they can now. All of your navigation was by dead reckoning, although we did have some crude radio direction finders, but there were few radio stations to use.

To learn instrument flying the student was placed in the back seat and pulled a big hood over that completely covered the canopy. The instructor in the front seat took the airplane off and then you had to fly the plane by instrument alone. I never really had any trouble learning to fly instruments. The instruments were old and not very reliable, so often you had to fly by feel. The altimeter and airspeed indicators were the only flight instruments that you could depend on to be about true, but after a time you became comfortable flying under the hood. Still in the hot weather students came in with their flying suits soaked with sweat. A lot of the instruments flight lasted 2 hours or more and you were really tired after those flights.

Our instructors were civilians working on contract with the Air Force. However all of our check flights were with Military Pilots. Probably 10 percent of the class “washed out” and were sent to other assignments for their time in the Air Force.
In Class 52-G at Columbus we had only one student killed in the airplane and we felt the odds were good. There were about 100 of us in the Class.

My last flight in the T-6 was on the 5th of May 1952 and on May 12th I received a Certificate of Proficiency Primary Pilot Training and was assigned to Bryan Air Force, Texas for the next phase of obtaining the Air Force Wings. By then I knew that I could learn to fly anything the Air Force had.

In late May 1952 I reported to Bryan AFB, Texas to begin the next phase of Pilot Training. When I reported to Bryan Air Force Base it was the second time I had lived there. Almost 5 years earlier in the fall of 1947 I had been a freshman at Texas A&M and that year all the freshman were housed at what was then called Bryan Field. The college used the base for several years and then turned it back to the Air Force after the Korean War started. Later the Air Base went back to A&M and it is still part of the University.

At Bryan we were assigned to training squadrons and then begin flying the T-28A. This was a new airplane to the Air Force and had about 900 HP with a big two bladed propeller. It was a fun and an easy plane to fly after flying the T-6, which was and still is a very hard and unforgiving airplane to fly. The T-28 was much easier to fly and land. Acrobatics were more fun and we could do an aileron roll which was so much easier than the slow roll. Since we students had learned the basics of flying, the emphasis was on formation flying and instruments flying. Formation flying was the most fun of all flying to me. At that time, and maybe still, the Air Force flew most formation flying as close formation flying. This is the type of flying that the Blue Angels and the Thunderbirds still fly. At Bryan AFB we also had what was called “buddy rides” where one student would fly instruments and another student would fly the front seat and be a safety pilot to take off and land the plane and to watch for other aircraft. I remember one flight where the other student pilot and I spent a couple of hours flying to Galveston and flying up and down the beach at about 100 feet or less looking at the bathers. Of course this was strictly forbidden and if we had been caught we probable would have been “washed out.” At Bryan AFB we became proficient in instruments and formation flying but also had several cross-country flights, many at night. These flights were still scary on a black night. We also did some night formation flying, which was not as comfortable as flying
formation in the daylight. It was at this part of the flight training that we were first exposed to the fact that we were being trained to be fighter pilots. Those that did not really respond to being aggressive and almost fearless were very likely to end up being sent to multi-engine aircraft after graduation. Also while I was there we had a number of fatal accidents. Of course it was in the Texas Newspapers and Mother would read about them and worry.

Apparently there was a shortage of the jet trainers at Bryan because a number of us, who had received ROTC commissions, were sent to Pinecastle AFB at Orlando Florida to receive our jet flying which was the final phase of pilot training, to receive the Air Force Wings.

I enjoyed Orlando the few times I went in to town. The people were friendly and it was there that I ate in a large cafeteria. On Sundays, I would go to the Episcopal Church, (first High Church I had ever been to), and then eat at this large cafeteria. I can still remember the large roast beef which was the largest piece of meat I had ever seen.

It was late July 1952 when I reported to Pinecastle and of course there was no Disney World so Orlando was just a middle size town in central Florida. We started right away flying the T-33, which was the first jet trainer for the Air Force. Jets were still relatively new and we were among the early flight classes to fly jets as student pilots. Up until this time we only wore headsets and baseball caps. At Pinecastle we were issued helmets with built in earphones and oxygen mask with the transmitter built in. We wore the same flying suits we had before.

The first flight in a jet was quite an experience. The most impressive thing about the first jet flight was how quiet it was and the only noise was the pilots breathing in the oxygen masks. The oxygen valves in the masks made a whistle when the pilots breathed. The engine noise was behind the jet and could not be heard from the cockpit when in flight. Another big change was that the T-6 and the T-28 were both hot as Hades in the summer and cold as a freezer in the winter. The T-33 was pressurized and air conditioned. The speed of the jets was another big change and it was a thrilling to fly at 350 MPH or more and be able to climb to 20,000 ft in a few minutes. Another thing I remember about flying jets is the smell. These early jets used a fuel that was just like kerosene. It was called JP-1 and cost the government about a nickel a gallon at that time. The T-33s were new and everything
pull out and climb back up to 15,000 ft. The instructor went first and then each of us would call our number and follow him down as he broke off, the next in line would fire and so on. It was exciting to watch the bullets hit or miss the target. However you could not really watch too long or you could not pull out. Every week while I was there at least one student was killed. This was due to target fixation, caused in part by staring too long at the target before pulling up. Several weeks there were two killed and there was talk of a congressional investigation. We also did the low altitude gunnery where we would come in to the target very close to the ground and fire and then pull up sharply and rejoin the flight 5 thousand above.

Another exciting phase of training was to fire rockets. We were armed with six rockets, three under each wing. We only did this a few times and one time I accidentally fired all six rockets at once and when I pulled up the instructor said to look back. We were firing at some old Army trucks and when I looked back all my rockets hit in the line of these trucks. I was real proud of that flight. Another exciting thing about firing rockets is that when you toggled them off they would drop a few feet and go at your speed for a second or so. Then the rockets would take off and you could watch then for another second or so before you had to pull up. The instructor would go in first and then he would watch us fire and grade us. These gunnery flights were the most fun but also the most dangerous.

We also dropped bombs, both high altitude and low altitude bombing. The bombs were 100 pounds and made a little explosion when they hit so you could look back and see where your bombs dropped. Most of us got where we could get close to the target on the low altitude runs but the high altitude bombing was much harder and there were fewer bombs dropped on the target.

Air to air gunnery was the flying that we did most of our training. In this operation a B-26 towed a long banner that was our target. The banner was about 5 feet high and 20 feet long. It had a pipe at the harness and attached was an aluminum reflector about a foot in diameter. This was for the radar on our gun sights. Our gun sights were lighted on the windscreen and would blink when we were in range. The target plane would fly at 15,000 ft over the desert and we would begin at about 18,000 ft and make a firing pass in line, each pilot waiting until the plane in front called off before beginning his turn. The idea was to get as many hits on the target as you could. Each plane had a different color of wax on the bullets so the target could be
matches and I guess it was for just for such an emergency. I was able to keep the fire alive with fuel and plants I was able to stay somewhat warm.

Just before dark a T-6 flew over and then landed about a half mile away. I walked towards the T-6 and the pilot started walking towards me. When we met he said a helicopter was coming but I could ride back with him or wait. I was cold so I rode back to the base with him. It took about an hour to get back and it was black dark for most of the flight to the airbase. The helicopter was still at the airbase when I got back and an airman with a blanket and a rifle was boarding to stay and guard the airplane overnight.

The airplane was a total loss. Somehow it was reported that I was dead, so my locker was cleaned out and someone had taken my car back to the BOQ. The next day I again flew a training mission. A few days later I met an Accident Investigation Board where I was cleared of any pilot error and the guy who was flying behind me was washed back a class or two. He was in error and had started his pass before I had pulled off the target. I was too involved with the training to think or worry about the accident.

February 18, 1953 I completed the Fighter School at Nellis and had about a month before I reported to California to be transported to Korea. I drove home, sold my car, and had a nice visit and then left from Kelly AFB, San Antonio, on a C-54 for San Francisco, California. At that time the Air Force made almost daily flight from Kelly AFB to Air Forces Bases all over the world and it was easy to get a flight as a passenger. I arrived at Camp Stoneman on March 20, 1953 and then just waited until I was “on the board” for transportation to Japan and then Korea. All we had to do was to check the board each morning and if our name was not on it then the rest of the day we were free to do as we pleased.

After a week of being very bored, my name finally came up and I was taken to San Francisco International to board a DC-4 to Japan. The DC-4 was the airlines and civilian designation for the military C-54. This particular DC-4 was on contract to the Air Force to fly personnel to and from Japan. The contractor was Flying Tigers Airlines, which went out of business in a year or two. It was about a 36-hour flight. We stopped in Hawaii to refuel and change crews but we were only there a very short time and all we could do was to get off the plane, stretch, and get right back on. Also it was about the middle of the night there. Then on west to Guam for another quick stop and finally to Japan at Tachikawa Air Force Base near Tokyo. We were in Japan
only a few days and then we boarded a military C-54 to Seoul, Korea. It was about an 8-hour flight to Seoul and again we arrived in the middle of the night. There were about 10 of us going to K-14, Kimpo, and after a couple of hours an army truck came and picked us up. It was a short ride of under an hour to get to Kimpo where we were shown into a transit quarters and had a bed. I was real tired and went to bed as soon as I made up the cot assigned to me. Soon after I went to sleep I was awakened by one of the loudest noise I had ever heard. Right next to the building I was in there was a gun emplacement with what was called a “quad 50” gun and crew. Some North Korean plane was bombing our base. The quad 50 opened up and the 4 50 caliber machine guns all fired at once. Out the window I could see searchlights and tracers of what seemed a hundred different guns. Some were quad 50s and some were much bigger. There were several guns with fast and faster “boom, boom, boom.” At least 4 or maybe 5 different anti-aircraft guns were firing and the sky was lit up like the 4th of July. After about 30 minutes a siren blew which was the all clear and I went back to bed. There was a “slit trench” outside the building but since we were all spending the first night there we did not know about it.

These air raids happened every few nights until the war was over. The raids were made by generally one old biplane at a time and they dropped some small bombs and maybe a few hand grenades. Occasionally a bomb would hit something but never close to where I was. Several times we could hear his engine as he made his bomb runs. A very few men were hurt, although one time the bomb hit a tent area and killed at least one enlisted airman. Another time some bomb craters were made in our one runway but they were filled before the first missions took off.

The next few days were spent getting shots and orientation about the base, lectures from the Flight Surgeon, etc. We also were briefed on what to do when the air raid siren sounded and were issued steel helmets and instructed to put them on and get into a slit trench. I do not believe that this “Bed-check Charlie” was ever shot down. At some time later we had an AD-I try to go up and shoot him down. That did not work. When the AD was flying all the anti-aircraft guns were silenced. Soon they were back to shooting up the whole sky when Bed-check Charlie made his bombing runs.

There were 3 squadrons of F-86s on the base and three or four of us “New Sports” as we were called went to each squadron. I was assigned to the 335
Fighter Interception Squadron, 4th Fighter Interception Group, 4th Fighter Interception Wing, 5th Air Force, USAF Far East.

When the 4 of us walked into the 335th Squadron ready room about 15 or so pilots sitting around said, “lock the doors”. After being short of pilots during the early part of the war there was now a surplus of pilots. The more pilots, the fewer missions each pilot would get. In 1953 you were finished with your tour after 100 missions. Apparently there was a shortage of some equipment also as about all we were issued was a flight suit and a G-suit. There were no helmets and oxygen masks available. I was assigned to B Flight. I knew that being a “new sport” would only last until some newer pilots joined the squadron and really most of the other pilots were very friendly to us.

The Squadron Commander, generally a Major or Lt. Colonel was the man in charge of all the flying and the pilots. The next important man was the Operations Officer, generally a Captain or a Major. This man scheduled the pilots for the assigned missions. There were four Flights, each with a Flight Commander who was generally a First Lieutenant or a Captain. When I got there each Flight already had about ten or twelve pilots. I did not fly at all in March but I went to the mission briefings, studied manuals, and listened and tried to learn what I could. The mission briefings were very interesting. All the pilots going on the mission, generally 16 to 32 or more were briefed in a secure briefing room. Early in the morning of the missions the pilots assembled in this room that had a big map of Korea. Each pilot had a smaller map encased in thin plastic and a grease pencil. First a Lt. from the 5th AF Intelligence would tell us what had happened in the war yesterday and overnight. He pointed on the map to the spots where the army had battles and a report of the casualties. Also we were briefed on how many missions were flown and how many of the UN airplanes participated and how many were lost. How the war was going and what was happening in the peace talks and more. Then the Group Operations Officer would brief on the mission to be flown. There were code words given, the frequencies of the rescue aircraft and their positions, what other wings were flying missions, etc. This was also very serious business and was given and taken without any smiles or jokes. After this briefing, then the flight leaders briefed their flights in the Squadron ready room. They would go over the other briefing and then brief each pilot exactly where he would be flying and what was expected of each one. A large part of this briefing is what to do in a large number of emergencies that can happen on missions.
Kimpo, K-14, had been a base for the U.S. Air Force during the earliest part of the Korean War and then was overrun by the Communists and the Americans took it back some time later. The landing strip was only 5,000 ft long, which was very short for our operations. The quarters were not real bad, and the food was nothing special but edible. We had an Officers Club that was nice and it had an outside area where it was a cool place to sit and visit late in the evenings. I remember being there and watching and hearing the firing of the large guns that were shelling North Korea. We were that close to the front.

About 30 or 40 miles south of us was another base, K-13, which had a longer runway and another Fighter Interceptor Wing, the 51st. There were three more Wings on K-14, one an USAF Photo Recon Wing flying F-80s and an Australian Wing flying Meteors and an U.S. Bomber Wing flying WWII B-26s at night only. They were housed across the runway from us and we did not see the personnel much but we shared the runway with their airplanes.

Soon after I arrived, one morning when I got up there was a B-29 on our runway. It had apparently been in trouble and landed during the night and the gear was not down or collapsed when landing. It was removed before I finished breakfast and got to the flight line. Since K-14 was the closest airfield to North Korea others flying combat day and night made many emergency landings. Our wing did not operate at night during the war.

The mission of the 4th Wing was to maintain air superiority over all of North and South Korea. Therefore when any of the United Nations aircraft were flying during daylight hours, we or the 51st were expected to have F-86s flying and ready to intercept any North Korean Mig 15s sent up from Manchuria. By the time I got to Korea there were no airfields in North Korea that were suitable for the operations of Migs. The North Koreans were flying out of Manchuria, which we could not bomb. I believe that the Migs did not shoot down any U.S. or UN airplanes we were protecting while I was in Korea.

Late in March I was given a short assignment to go to Seoul every day and check on a depot where many barrels of jet fuel and various bombs and ammunition were stored as a back up if K-14 were to be bombed out. There was also an airstrip there to land if that did happen. I spent about a week or
ten days checking out a jeep and driving over every day and looking to see that it was ready. Some pilot or another had to do this the whole time I was in Korea and mostly the more recent arrived pilots drew this duty.

Then in April I spent about a week or 10 days at the Survival School somewhere about 150 miles from Kimpo. This was a very interesting and different experience for me. The survival school was held at a MASH base. It was not too different from the TV show without the humor and glamour. We only saw the doctors and nurses at the Officers Mess. There were helicopters coming in regularly with the wounded. Our school was away from the field hospital and we were kept busy doing our thing. We were told how to evade capture if shot down. To travel only at night, steal food from the “kimche” pot that the peasants had outside every hut. This was a large clay pot where the peasants would put rice, vegetables, whole fish or any other eatable items. This was kimche and when the peasants were hungry they dipped in the pot and ate. It smelled really foul and I know I would have to have been really desperate to eat any. The Koreans breath smelled so bad that the base barbers had to wear surgical masks so we could get a haircut. We were issued a manual about what to say and how to act and react if we became a prisoner of war. The instructors told us about what to expect and it was not too pleasant. At one point they took us about 10 miles away in the country and set us out about a half a mile apart just before dark and then we were to work our way back to the camp. I spent almost all night getting back. Going through a small Korean village I stopped to rest and an American sergeant “caught” me and then released me to finish getting back. It was hot and dark and we had to go through several places where there were several Korean homes and the Koreans would get quiet and watch you until you were out of sight. We walked across mountains but mostly through rice paddies. I doubt if we learned anything that would have really helped us. Some of the instructors had been prisoner of war in WWII, but I know of no pilot who was shot down and captured who ever got back before the war was over.

The only flying I got in April was about 8 hours of instrument flying in a T-33. By May I could see that several of the pilots in B Flight would move on so I could have a chance to fly some combat. During May I was able to get 6 flights in the F-86 just so I would not be too rusty when I started flying combat. The only flying gear I was issued was a flight suit and a G-suit. I still did not have a helmet and oxygen mask so I borrowed one from a big red headed guy when he was not flying. His name was Robinson. However
in late May he was killed while taking off on a combat mission. I was watching the flights take off early one morning and Robinson for some reason tried to do a barrel roll soon after lifting off. He did not make it and hit the ground with a full load of fuel and ammunition. The plane exploded in a big ball of fire and burned for what seemed like half the day. It proved the saying that there are not any old bold pilots.

The supply finally received a few new helmets and I was able to get one of them. We also lost two pilots and airplanes from B Flight when they had a midair collision over North Korea. The others on the flight did not see any parachutes.

On all our flying, in addition to our flight suit and G-suit we wore a May West life jacket, a 45-cal. pistol and a letter opener type knife in a pocket for it on our left upper arm. We strapped on a backpack parachute before we got into the airplane and we sat on an inflatable life raft containing a survival pack of some sort. The knife was in the event the May West inflated or worse, the life raft inflated. Either had to be punctured before you were crushed and unable to get to the controls. I still have that knife.

In the summer and hot weather we wore just the flight suit and maybe a light jacket when flying. However when winter approached, we were issued survival suits. We wore these over our summer flight suits. They were insulated rubber, with big insulated boots welded on. They fit very tight at the neck and the wrists. The water is so cold that the survival time in case you bail out is only a few minutes, not enough time to get into your life raft, called a dingy. With the survival suit you have a little time to get into your dingy.

In early June I had two more training flight and then on June 8th 1953 I made my first combat mission. It was an early morning flight to check the weather and flying conditions over North Korea and an orientation for another pilot and myself. We took off before daylight and by the time we were at 30,000 ft it was full daylight. As we got well over North Korea we test fired our guns. Since in training at Nellis we had only two guns activated, when the six guns all fired at once it was quite a difference. We had the radar type piper on our windscreen and the first 25 or so bullets were tracers. All six tracers were supposed to converge at the center of the piper. I also noticed
that when all six 50s fired it slowed down the jet noticeably. As soon as our drop tanks emptied we dropped them. When we did this I saw 8 tanks falling like bombs. When there was a 16-ship flight it was really impressive to see all the guns firing at once and later all the tanks dropping. On this first combat mission we flew first over Pyongyang, which was the capital of North Korea. The city looked pretty well bombed out. There was a main street that was used as a landing strip earlier but it had bomb craters and did not look as if it had been repaired.

Just as we arrived over Pyongyang the anti-aircraft guns started shooting at us with some mighty big guns. The shells were exploding all around us and we kept turning every few seconds as we were taught. These must have had 120-millimeter shells, or bigger, to reach that high and the guns were tracking us with radar. The shells were set to explode at our altitude. When they exploded they made a big black cloud with a flash in it. This was called "flack." The shells were exploding behind our planes and then moved closer and when we made a break the flack went right behind us where we would have been if we hadn’t made the fast break.

When the flack first started, all I could think was, “Why are you trying to kill me? I am Bertram Eric Beecroft from San Marcos Texas and I never hurt anyone. I’m a good guy.” After we left the Pyongyang area the flack stopped and we flew southeast to the China Sea and the flight leader pointed out a small island named Cho Do, which was occupied by our Air Force and was where you hoped to be if you had to bail out. Many of our Air Force and others who had extensive flack damage or for any reason could not bring the aircraft back, would bail out there and could reasonably expect to be picked up by one of our rescue planes. All we had on this small island was some radar and a lot of concrete pillboxes. It was close enough to the mainland of North Korea that they were shelled almost every night. It they were shelled during the day, they could call in fighter-bombers to bomb the guns shelling them. I knew several pilots who did indeed bail out near Cho Do and were successfully picked up and returned to their home base. We saw no Migs on this first combat flight.

When we returned back to Kimpo the outgoing missions of three wings were just starting to fire up and take off. The Australians would line up with at least 16 Meteors; each armed with 8 or more rockets. They would all go off in a few minutes and then about 30 minutes later they would all be back and land, without the rockets. Their missions were always to the Haeju
Peninsula and apparently they did not carry much fuel. Often they were off after the 86's and returned much before the 86s. They were bombing or firing rockets at “targets of opportunity” and I do not know exactly what they hit or how effective they were. The Haeju Peninsula was not really a peninsula and I don’t why it was call one. There was a city with that name and it was only a short distance into North Korea. As many missions as the Australians made and as many rockets as they fired, it must have been the most heavily bombed part of North Korea.

Weather permitting, I then flew a mission every few days. Most of our missions were called “screens” and we would go to the Yalu River. We generally went in flights of 16 or flights of 8. A large mission would be 32 planes and led by the Group Commander and consist of planes from all three squadrons. The largest number of airplanes I remember in one mission was 64 and that was very unusual. This would be lead by the Wing Commander.

A combat mission would generally go about the same on most missions. We would take off in pairs; the flight leader and number 2 man first and the element leader and number 4 following. On the first turn out the element would join the flight in close formation. We would then climb out north in this close formation until we crossed into North Korea. Then we would spread out to combat formation and test fire our guns. Soon after reaching 40,000 ft we would all drop our exterior tanks at the same time. Combat formation is very complicated but generally we were about 200 yards apart, almost in a straight line. We would fly this way until we reached at least 40,000 ft and the Yalu River. Then the leader would start a wide turn and the element would cross over below the lead and his wingman. We would fly making these turns, all the time watching for Migs. Generally below us our fighter-bombers would be making bomb runs on the targets for the day. Often we could not even see them and almost never knew where they were. Many times we would see Migs flying about 15,000 ft above us. Sometime they would just fly up there and not come down and then one day they would all come down and try to fly through us and go after the fighter bombers who were making the bomb runs. Because of fuel restrictions we could only stay over the Yalu for about 20 or at the most 30 minutes. The big picture was that we were supposed to screen the fighter-bombers from the Migs and engage the Migs if they came down. On a good weather day there would be several flights making screens while several flights of fighter-bombers would make bomb runs. Mostly we maintained radio silence so we did not know when we would pass the flights coming up and
going back. It was not like the movies and there was almost no chatter on the radios. This type of flying required complete concentration and each pilot had to pay attention to his part of the mission. We could not hear the other flights except if someone was in trouble. Bingo was the code word for having just enough fuel to return home. You would hear something like “Blue 4 Bingo” and the leader would acknowledge perhaps only saying “Blue lead”. The combat flights were very serious business. Only after the pilots were back in the ready room did they relax and talk about the mission. The few times we would lose someone out of the squadron it was very quiet and somber in the ready room.

Another duty of being a combat ready pilot was to sit alert. On both ends of the runway was an alert pad. About an hour before daylight and until dark there were always 12 86s on the alert pad. If the weather was good and missions were flying, there were always 4 pilots strapped in the airplanes, with the auxiliary power supply plugged in. If we got a scramble, these four would be airborne in less than 2 minutes. The other eight could be airborne in less than 10 minutes. This was called 4 on two and 8 on 10 and was the normal way to sit alert. During bad weather or if none of the UN airplanes were flying there would be 12 airplanes on 10 minute alert. There were a number of reasons for a scramble, a downed pilot, the radar picking up an unknown airplane or the airplanes on a mission having to return early, and many other reasons. Often there was a scramble just to see how efficient the system worked. Mostly it was just a long boring day. Sitting alert was not a sought after assignment.

We still had too many pilots so I did not get to fly as many missions as I would have liked.

On July 18, 1953 I had an interesting mission. I was flying Number 2, on the flight leaders wing which means I was there to protect and keep the leader and the other element of two airplanes in sight and we were all looking in different directions for other airplanes, both the enemies and ours. This was right on the Yalu River and we were at 40,000 ft. The flack was especially heavy that flight and the Migs decided to come down after the fighter-bombers working below us. Our flight went into an almost vertical dive to intercept the Migs. We did cause the Migs to break off and fly north over the Yalu River to safety. However, the flack was much heavier as we descended and my plane took some flack damage. The F-86 was bouncing all over the sky and it was an extremely rough flight down. I knew I had
been hit but I also knew that the engine was not hit and the airplane could
still fly so I kept in formation and stayed with the fighter-bombers until they
left the target for home. After we landed without incident my airplane was
declared too damaged to repair and was used for parts. I really did not know
how bad I was hit and the airplane was performing as usual so I was not at
all nervous. Later I was awarded an Air Medal for that flight.

One combat mission I was on, the Migs were flying well over us and the
flight leader took our flight up to about 51,000-ft. We were still well below
the Migs but we were flying without much control and when we raised the
nose of our planes we would stall out and fall until we obtained flying speed
again. The reason the Migs could fly so high is that they were much lighter.
Our jet engines were about the same, but the Migs had less armor protection
for the pilot and were a smaller and lighter aircraft. The procedure when
engaging the Migs was to dive below 30,000 ft and then engage in combat as
above that the Migs had the advantage. The Migs did not come down on
that flight and when we landed the flight leader took some kidding about
trying to climb so high. 51,000 ft was about the absolute ceiling of our
planes. 45,000 was normally the highest we generally would fly so to have
positive control of the airplane.

The biggest danger in flying combat was being hit by flack. On every
mission I flew we had some flack. Most of the combat damage sustained by
the F 86s was from flack, often heavy but when we stayed above 40,000 ft it
was lighter. Generally if a Mig did hit one of our planes, it was damaged so
that the pilot had to bail out or was killed. The Mig 15s had 20-mm cannons
instead of 50 cal machine guns. Very few of the pilots of the Migs were as
well trained as we were. Almost every time a dogfight occurred, the F 86
would win or evade being hit. It was generally believed that a few of the
Mig pilots were Russians. I have read that long after the war, some Russians
admitted flying with the North Koreans.

Generally you needed 30 or 40 missions to move from flying wing, Number
2 or 4, to becoming element leader, Number 3. I flew wing on all the flights
I made until after the war. During June I flew 9 combat missions and in July
I flew nine more and on July 27, 1953 the war was over. I had flown two
missions on the last day but no Migs were flying.
After the war we continued to fly very similar missions except we would not fly directly over North Korea. We would fly up and down both coasts of North Korea. Mostly we flew up the West Coast but several times we flew up the East Coast. A lot of our missions were to escort photo-reconnaissance flights. One flight I was on we flew up the East Coast when the visibility was good and flew in sight of the Russian port of Vladivostok. When we flew those longer flights we would always fly at 45,000 ft.

It was on one of these flights up the East Coast that I had another interesting experience. We were returning but were still about 100 miles out when I had a “flame out.” I mean the engine just stopped turning. There was no air conditioning and the cockpit heated up like an oven. The fuel pump had failed. I set up a maximum glide condition and since I was so high I was able to glide back to the base and did a nice dead stick landing. A dead stick landing is a landing where you cannot make a mistake. You have to be exactly right the first time. You have to have the correct airspeed; your judgement on your altitude, glide angle, and position in relation to the runway must be right the first time. There is no second chance and if you are too high or too low or too fast or too slow you crash and burn. The fire trucks and the ambulance were waiting for me, actually chasing me down the runway. Of course I could not taxi so I just pulled the airplane off the runway and got out. I was weak and could barely walk. A medic came and asked me if I was OK. I told him I was just scared plumb to death. He did not know what to do. I think he wanted to put me on a stretcher. A jeep from the Squadron arrived to take me back. I received a “Well Done” in our flying safety magazine for the 5th Air Force for bringing the Sabre back and making a text book dead stick landing.

Our rear maintenance facility was in Japan and periodically some of us would fly some Sabres back to have major maintenance done. I was able to do that a couple of times and got to see a little of Japan, but only on the Southern Japanese Island of Kyushu. There was not really a lot to do or see there. One time another pilot and I rented some motorcycles and rode around some. The motorcycles were old and one gave completely out and the other was barely running. An old truck came by and picked us up and took us back to where we rented the worn out things. Another time I flew to Tokyo to get a silver tray that the squadron gave to the departing Commanding Officer. Lt. Col. Vermont Garrison. I stayed there about 3 days waiting for the engraving to be done but I did not know how to take a
tour. I am not even sure that there were such things at that time. Although I did a little shopping I was not an educated shopper and bought very little.

Also I did make a tourist visit to Seoul one time and there was not much to see there. It had been bombed out so much that it was largely ruined buildings. I took some pictures of the town and some of the palace, which had not been restored and kept up at that time. The town of Kimpo was just outside of our fence. There was nothing much there either. The people lived in the most squalid conditions you can imagine. The main street was like a sewer. In Korea and some of Japan, the people still wore the old clothes but some young people in Japan were wearing western attire. No one in Korea was wearing western clothes. The women all wore a dress with the belt just below their breasts and a very full skirt. Apparently this allowed them to wear the same clothes when they were expecting.

In Korea there were no automobiles and there were old beat up buses that were used to go the school or maybe work. The farming was done with oxen. Korea had not made any recovery from WWII and the Japanese occupation until after I had left. I found the people were just barely living and would accept most any situation they were given. It seemed to me that they could live under the Japanese, the Americans, the North Koreans, or no one and live about the same.

During this period I also went to another base and pulled targets for others to practice their air-to-air gunnery. It was different flying an F 86 pulling the target. You had to stay on the ground longer then make a very steep climb to bring the target off the runway without damage. After the flight I would fly next to the runway and drop the target before landing. I did this for about 10 days.

Soon after the war I was designated element leader and by October was leading flights as flight leader. I felt much responsibility leading flights for I not only had to take care of myself but I was responsible for the other three pilots and planes. By December 1953 I was appointed Flight Commander of D Flight. We did a lot of sitting alert. Once when I was on alert we were scrambled, (instructed to take off) but only my wingman and myself. The radar had picked up a target they could not identify. It was a very cloudy day with cloud layers to about 35,000 ft. I was instructed to fly to 40,000 ft on a certain heading. Once there I was instructed to go to a lower altitude as the target had descended. Then I had to climb back up. We would penetrate
a cloud layer or two each time we changed altitude. This went on until we were low on fuel and had to land. The radar controller was completely mystified and we never were able to see what he was seeing on the radar screen. At the time I decided it must have been a UFO.

In January 1954 I was designated a test pilot. This was a lot of fun and a lot of additional flying. Whenever an airplane came out of maintenance it had to be flown by a test pilot before the Squadron pilots could fly it. The flight consisted mostly of writing down readings and putting the airplane through a series of steep turns, stalls, and climbs and also breaking the sound barrier. The test flight was flown without the drop tanks so they were short and fast.

Our flying continued as before in 1954. It was not much different than during the war except we did not go over North Korea and did not have to evade the flack. The flying was still intense and the escort of photoreconnaissance replaced the screens on the Yalu. This was much before satellite and U-2 photo missions. The photo airplanes flew generally from 15 to 25 thousand feet and flew up and down both coasts of Korea taking pictures to prove or disprove that North Korea was living up to the terms of the truce.

On January 22, 1954, the 335th Squadron was assigned to escort a B-45 on a photo mission up the East Coast of North Korea. The B-45 was a new airplane in the USAF and we did not have them in Korea during the war. The B-45 and crew flew to K-14 the night before the mission. The flight was delayed for some reason unknown to us so we waited until early afternoon to take off. We flew one flight of four from each of our four Squadron Flights. D Flight, with me in command, was assigned to fly “top cover” at about 35,000 ft. This particular mission was a high priority one and we flew it in complete silence. Generally on a flight, the pilots are in the airplane with the radio on and the flight commander says something like “D Flight start your engines.” On the special missions the engines were started without any radio transmissions at all. Since the F-86s were in revetments, you could not see the other airplanes so the start was made by your watch, which had been set at the briefing. These briefings for this kind of missions were done in the secure room and took about an hour. The last item in these briefings was to “hack” your watches. The briefer would say something like “in 55 seconds it will be 11:46” and then count down the last 10 seconds and say ‘Hack.” So we were instructed to fire engines at 2 PM and maintain radio silence. On these flights you did not check your radios.
They were supposed to have checked by the crew chief earlier in the day. This was a 16-airplane flight led by the Squadron Commander, Lt. Col. Robert Dixon, leading A Flight. A and B Flights were to fly close cover and C and D Flights were to fly top cover. The B-45 took off before the F-86s and after our take off we climbed together in a 16 airplane flight in close formation. We spread out a little, all remaining at the same altitude and rate of climb. In about 15 minutes we were in sight of the B-45 so we dropped out tanks and test fired our guns. All still in radio silence. As we approached the B-45 I led my flight up to 35,000 ft and spread out into combat formation. The A and B flight stayed about 25,000 ft. close over the B-45. We were then flying as we did during the war except we were a very few miles off the coast instead of over the Yalu River. About 45 minutes into the flight we noticed about 15 or more Mig 15s, well above us to the east over the land. The first radio silence was broken by someone who called “bandits at 3 o’clock high.” That was for the B-45 as all the F-86 pilots had seen and were watching the Migs. Our mission was to protect the B-45 and there was no intention of engaging the Migs.

One of the Migs suddenly left the others and started down through our formation going straight to the B-45. I immediately fell in behind him and about the time I had him locked in on my gun sight he began firing. Just before he fired, Col. Dixon called the B-45 to “break left” which he did. The Mig fired 3 20-mm canon shots at the B-45 but his shots went behind him. I said, “Keep breaking he is shooting at you.” Col. Dixon said “get that S--- --- ---.” I responded with “D lead locked on” and began firing as he broke right and up off the B-45. From the time the Mig came down until I was firing at him was only 20 or 30 seconds.

Since I had been diving to stay with him, I was able to close as he started his climb out to the east. As soon as he was breaking away from the B-45 I started firing bursts at him. I could tell I was hitting him as first fuel and then smoke started coming from his plane. Then he started some evasive maneuvers, which I could easily stay with him. He even did a barrel roll, which I thought was kind of silly and I rolled right with him, firing and hitting him, some more. I saw more smoke and fuel streaming from the Mig and then my guns quit, he slowed down and I pulled up to not collide with him. I told my wingman, who was calling me “clear” the whole time that my guns had jammed and I had lost sight of him. The wingman replied that the Mig 15 pilot had bailed out. Col. Dixon then instructed the entire flight to return to K-14.
The 3 and 4 positions of D Flight stayed with the formation as briefed. If more Migs had attacked, these two F-86s would have picked them off as I did. However only one Mig pilot elected to attack. My wingman, flying 2 in our flight joined up with me and we returned, actually flying over part of North Korea. We arrived back at K-14 a few minutes before the rest of the flights on the mission. Our operations officer and a big group of flight line enlisted men met me at my revetment. From the radio talk, it was known that I had shot down the Mig 15. As I got out of the cockpit most of them were congratulating me but one said something like “are you trying to start another war.” Although I did not answer him, for some reason it bothered me. My gun film was removed before I even got out of the cockpit and was taken and developed immediately. The jeep took me right to the secure operations room where by then Col. Dixon, the Wing Commander and several other high-ranking officers were waiting or arriving. The pilot of the B-45 also showed up but he did not really understand what happened. He said that none of his crew ever saw the Mig or saw him shooting. However he did make the quick break, as he had been briefed, and thus saved the B-45 from being hit by the Mig.

Soon the gun camera film was brought in and shown. It could have been a serious incidence if I had flown over North Korea in pursuit before the pilot had bailed out. The truth was that we were over the mainland before he bailed out. Nothing was said to me, however, and I went back to the squadron room and got out of my winter survival suit. There was a lot of excitement in the squadron and many of the pilots wanted to go up and see if they could draw some Migs out over the water. Of course no planes were sent up and the F 86s sitting alert were not scrambled.

That night on the radio out of North Korea, the announcer told of the “warmongering pilot shooting down an innocent North Korean airplane.” Also they named me and had my home town of San Marcos, Texas and stated that the good people of San Marcos would not be pleased to know one of their citizens did such a dishonorable deed, or something about like that. I did not hear the broadcast, but several in the squadron did and reported it to me. I never thought much about the broadcast as I did not have a radio with me in Korea and never listened to one. After I was out of the Air Force, I received notice that I was awarded an Oak Leaf Cluster to my Air Medal for this action.
The situation settled down quickly and we were back to normal duty again.

On February 3, 1954 I received orders to report to Laredo AFB, Texas. On the Feb 4th our Squadron was sent south to Kunsan and K-8. This was an exercise to move out of K-14 as if the North Koreans overran it again. We spent the night there and the next day I led my flight back to K-14. The weather had turned bad and when we reached K-14 it was pretty well socked in. The visibility was less than a quarter of a mile. However by the time we got there we were all low on fuel and had to land so we shot a GCA, (ground controlled approach.) We entered the fog in a tight flight of 4 and I was leading and flying on instruments. The other three were flying tightly to me. When we got to about 100-ft altitude I could see the ground but not the runway. However soon I could see the runway and we landed, all four on the runway at one time. It was a beautiful flight and landing and it was my last flight in an F-86 Sabre Jet.

The next day or the day after I was packed and trucked to Seoul where I boarded a military C-141 to Japan. After a couple of days in Japan I was sent to the United States in a military Constellation. The flight back to the States was the reverse of the flight over except our fuel stop was at Midway instead of Guam. When we got to Hawaii we stayed a few days and did see some of the Island and took a few pictures. At last I was returned to San Francisco where I immediately got on a B-26 going to Los Angeles. I slept a few hours in Los Angeles and caught a C-54 to Amarillo. From there I took a civilian airline to Austin where Mother and Daddy met me.

I had about 4 or 5 weeks before I was to report to Laredo AFB. The most significant event that happened to me during that time, and in my whole life, was that I went to visit my sister, Catherine in San Antonio where she was working. It was there that I met her roommate, Elizabeth Anne Pratt. Eight months later I married Miss Pratt.

At the end of March 1954 I reported to Laredo AFB and immediately started flying the T-28A again. I flew one or two flights a day becoming familiar again with this airplane. After a couple of weeks I had a couple of flights in the T-33.

On the 16th of April 1954, I took a couple of weeks leave and then I was sent TDY (temporary duty) to Craig AFB, Selma, Alabama. Craig AFB was where the school to train pilots to be instructors was at that time. I started
ground school and flying on May 4th and flew almost every day and often twice a day. It was some pretty intense flying and studying and I had very little time for anything else. I did go into Selma a couple of Sundays to Church and everyone was very nice. This was long before Selma became a focal for the civil rights movement. On June 9th I had a couple of flights in the T-33 and completed the school.

I took some more time off and reported back to Laredo AFB. Before I went to Selma, I lived in the BOQ at Laredo AFB but when I returned I took an apartment with another instructor pilot, Ned, we called him Harry, Hughes from Connecticut. Ned became a good friend and was in my wedding.

I was assigned to a training squadron and began instructing in the T-28 on June 18, 1954. The students we instructed had completed basic training and we took them through the T-28s and then the T-33s. It was the end of July when we finished the T-28s and begin flying the students in the T-33.

In mid August I volunteered to go to Brooks Field, San Antonio, to train some Air Force Reserve WWII pilots in the T-28s. I was able to see Betty during those two weeks almost every evening. Although the T-28 was much hotter and nosier than the T-33 it was worth it to me to be in San Antonio.

About the first of September I returned from the TDY and again became an instructor pilot in the T-33s.

One real advantage in being an instructor is that you know the airplanes much better and realize that you have become a better pilot by teaching others.

While instructing I flew two flights a day with students. Every week we changed from the morning to the afternoon flying. We reported to the training squadron at 6 AM for one week and then at 12:30 PM for the next week. One of the few breaks in the routine was that we took a long cross-country flight with the students in each class. I remember going to California at least twice and to Florida, Arkansas, Kentucky, Alabama and several other states. On one cross-country I remember we left Laredo and it was about 100 degrees when we took off. We got to Little Rock and it was blowing snow. The student and I had on only summer flight suits. That was a shock.
On one cross-country flight to California, the student and I were about 40,000 feet when I noticed a bright star. I pointed it out to the student and he said he also had never seen such a bright star in the daylight. It was about 3:30 PM. The instruments were showing that our course was towards that star. Soon I realized that our course was about 30 degrees south of what the instruments were showing. We corrected and arrived at the base in Los Angeles about 5:30 or later. It was dusk and we could not see the runway due to what we called haze. We had to shoot an instrument approach to find the runway. This was the first time I was exposed to smog. To my knowledge it was not even named at that time. When we landed the tower asked if we had seen anything unusual on our flight. When I responded yes, I was instructed to meet with an officer who was assigned as the UFO officer. I made my report and later wrote it up and sent it to some agency or another. This was the time of the UFOs and the Air Force was apparently taking it serious. I do not know what it was.

Instructing was different flying that I did in Korea, but it was also interesting. The students were only a few years younger than I was and they were mostly a very educated, healthy and motivated group of young men. They learned fast and were ready to adapt to each airplane. Teaching aerobatics was very physically tiring, as we did not wear g-suits. After two flights of an hour or more each doing aerobatics without a g-suit, I felt like I had done 8 hours digging ditches. Instructing instruments was much easier as the student was in the rear seat under the hood, and the instructor was in the front where the visibility is so much better.

As conscious as we were about safety, we still had accidents and lost some students and instructors. Not as many losses per hours flown as flying fighters but still enough to realize that flying can be very dangerous. Safety was always stressed during my entire military and civilian flying.

Not long after I was married most of the instructors in our Wing, were flown to Craig AFB, Selma Alabama in a military transport. There we were each assigned a T-33 and then flew from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama to fly West Point Cadets. There were about 32 pilots and T-33s on this exercise. We ate lunch at the Officers Club at Craig AFB in Selma and then went to the flight line and flew to Montgomery. I had lunch with an instructor I knew named Captain John Friend. We had a Lt. Col. who was not from Laredo, but was a West Point graduate leading the flight. I was flying element lead on his flight and Captain Friend was
leading the second flight of four. It was a short flight and as I was taxing in one of the pilots who had taxied to the ramp just ahead of me asked me on the radio what had happened. I did not know what it was about until I turned my plane in line to park and saw two columns of black smoke just off the airfield. Captain John Friend and another of our group had had a mid air collision in the landing pattern and they were too low to bail out. Apparently the other pilot whose name was Bradley, had radio failure and John was trying to form up with him to lead him in. Bradley, not seeing John off his wing turned sharply into John’s T-33 and collided with him. Within an hour we were all flying West Point Cadets. It was a sad time for all of us. Both men were married and Bradley’s wife was within two weeks of having their first baby. John had married a lady who had lost her first husband to an airplane accident and then married her husband’s best friend, John Friend. It was a sad flight going back to Laredo.

Safety was stressed more and more each year that I was in the Air Force. From the time I started flying until my discharge, it was like two different Air Forces in regards to flying safety. From my first flying in the T-6 until after Korea, the emphasis was on leaning to fly and flying combat. After the war, safe flying was more important than the mission. The most dangerous flying was at Nellis AFB. When I was at Laredo AFB training students, the emphasis was on flying safely. I am sure that at Laredo we flew several thousand hours more per fatal accident than at Nellis. However flying at Nellis AFB and Korea was a lot more fun.

I continued instructing and enjoying it. On November 9, 1955 I instructed a student in a T-33 on night formation flying. That was the last flight for me in the United States Air Force. On November 10 1955, I was released from active duty and returned to civilian life.
Dates on My Military Service

3/15/51 Certificate fit and qualified to appointment as a 2nd Lt USAF
8/1/51 Oath of Office USAAF
6/1/51 ROTC Training Certificate
6/1/51 Appointment to USAF Reserve
7/13/51 At 443rd Air Instal Sq, Hensley Field Dallas Asgd add dy Ass't Adj
Sep-51 443rd AIS Donaldson AFB S.C. Primary duty as Instal Sq. O & Fire Prot & A/C resc O
4/28/52 Letter of Appreciation Basic Training- Flight School Columbus Air Force Base, Ms
5/12/52 Certificate of Proficiency Primary Pilot Training Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi
7/28/52 Sent from Bryan AFB to Pinencale AFB
8/10/52 Reported To Pinencale AFB
10/23/52 Assigned to Korea via Nellis and Camp Stoneman
10/25/52 Rated Pilot, Received Wings
10/25/52 Designated Air Force Pilot, received wings
10/25/52 Rated Pilot USAF
10/27/52 Same 3540th FTW Pinencale AFB
12/11/52 Assigned to 3525th Aircraft Gunnery Squadron Nellis AFB
2/18/53 Awarded the title Plt, Ftr form 3525th Fly Tng SQ. (finished gunnery)
2/18/53 Completed Ftr Training F-86 Nellis AFB Las Vegas Nevada
3/20/53 Assigned to 5th AF Camp Stoneman, Calif
3/23/53 Promoted to 1st LT
3/27/53 To report to 4th FIW at K-14 on 4/5/53
4/1/53 Assigned duty as Jet Fighter Pilot 335th Sq 4th Ftr Interceptor Group
4/4/53 Signed stmt will not disclose info capture of escapt POW
4/15/53 Assigned to B Flight 335 FIS as a Jet Fighter Pilot
4/20/53 To K_16 then K-46 prf survival School for 1 week
6/8/53 Declared combt capable in F-86
6/8/53 Made Combat Eligible 335th FIS
7/12/53 Cleared for secret Security Info 4th FIW
10/12/53 Designatee Flight Leader in F-86
10/27/53 Well Done Write Up
12/17/53 Appointed Fll Commander Flight D $th FIW 335 FIS
1/1/54 Designated Test Pilot in F-86
2/3/54 Assigned from Korea to Laredo AFB
6/9/54 Completed Basic Instructor Jet (T-33) at Craig AFB Selma, Alabama
8/23/54 Designated IP in T-28
9/1/54 Designated Instructor Pilot in T-33 3640 PTW, 3641 PTSq
6/7/55 UFO sighting
11/10/55 Release from Active Duty
1/31/58 Honorable Discharge USAF