

A1C James M. “Jim” Akin’s phone conversation with VFW for The Oral History Project, Texas

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[A genesis story of Aircraft Fuel Systems Maintenance Specialist career field in the USAF,
Transcribed and edited for clarity by MSgt Yan J.K. Bolduc (USAF retired)]

Mr. Akin:

I was in the first class of the Aircraft Fuel Systems Specialist school, top of the class, and they sent me to Okinawa [Japan].

VFW:

Oh, wow! Now, what inspired you to join the Air Force versus the other branches?

Mr. Akin:

Well, I graduated in '60 [1960, sixty-four years ago as of 2024], and there was no: quote, war, unquote, in the news all the time. So, I didn't want to be a rifleman. And I like airplanes. So, that's where I went. My brother was in the Navy, and he didn't like it 'cause it was too crowded.

VFW:

Yes, sir! Yes, sir. And uh, now, um, of course, thank you so much for your sacrifice to you and your brother of course. And uh, who else in the family served in the military?

Mr. Akin:

In World War Two I had two aunts and an uncle. The uncle was in Germany as a mechanic, and my two aunts were nurses in the Pacific.

VFW:

Wow, you guys are an amazing family! Thank you so much to all of you for your sacrifices. Now, tell us, uh, please, Mr. James about your journey with our military starting with your Basic Training.

Mr. Akin:

Well, it was short. But I think I didn't have any trouble with it. And it was at Lackland Air Force Base [Texas]. And, flew right through! I had no problems, so... [no] demerits, or anything like that.

VFW:

Yes, sir. So, was it pretty fast?

Mr. Akin:

It was a lot easier than, well, the Army or the Marine Corps would do. So, I just lazi[ed] on that. I had no problems at all going to Basic [Training]. Then, they sent me to Rantoul [Chanute AFB], Illinois, for the first class of Aircraft Fuel Systems. And trained on B-52's, and, well, you were undertrained there. Then, sent to Okinawa, Naha Air Force Base [21st Troup Carrier (Tactical Airlift) Squadron]. And, basically, they did not know what to do with me! We were the first ones. I was the first one, literally, blessed[?] of California. And, let's see... it was two of us, and we went into the maintenance department, and they didn't know what to do with us so they sent us out into the fueling area, and the repair area, off by ourselves, without an NCO or any other supervision. And we worked on C-130's, fixing cracks in the wings and stuff... where the fuel tanks were. And that's about what we did. See, the big thing there, was... Let me get the words out: they were getting cracks from the heavy landings they were making, at the time I didn't know where they were going or coming back, what the hell's back to South-East Asia, from the heavy landings. And they sent a Lieutenant Colonel, now I can't remember his name, to go through it with us. And we got out to fix the cracks permanently [ABDR type repairs?], without having to change the wings on 'em. And... I'm getting all mixed up now. It's been so long ago.

VFW:

No, you're doing great! Uh, so...

Mr. Akin:

Anyway, we took a trip down to Bien Hoa [Air Base, Vietnam] to an aircraft hangar, and stayed there for a couple of days, showing the people how to do the... (sigh) And come back.

VFW:

Sounds awesome!

Mr. Akin:

Then after that, my instructor from school got to be my NCO, and we had to teach him! Then we got a cook, uh... Ocatia[?] was a Staff Sergeant. The cook transferred over and went to the school, and Cummins[?], our NCO in charge. And, that's still up just me and John Muirhead[?] doing all the work. And after 18 months I come home, went to McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, and served up my time there part [of] 52nd [552nd Airborne Early Warning Wing, RC-121 & EC-121 Warning Star aircraft, Air Force Logistics Command], [with] AWACS. And they put me in charge of their Fuel Systems shop; put me in graveyard [shift] with about 18 troops, all of them were 3-Level mechanics, and I'm [a] 5-Level or Journeyman, and finished up my tour there, and come home!

VFW:

Wow! Wow. You've done an amazing a... Thank you so much for your hard work. Now, tell us please, uh, how did it feel like to serve and defend the United States of America?

Mr. Akin:

Would you repeat that?

VFW:

How did it feel like to serve and defend the United States of America?

Mr. Akin:

I felt important. Then I felt over... overwork... Well, let me put it this way: I was an Airman Second [Class], and, that was the lowest grade in the shop, and I had Tech[nical] Sergeants and Master Sergeants that just crossed over into the shop, and they're all 3-Levels. And it kind of put me in the hole. So... I was glad when I got out of there.

VFW:

Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Well, thank you so...

Mr. Akin:

And then I come home!

VFW:

Well, we're glad to have you back and uh, looking back at your time in the service, what do you miss the most?

Mr. Akin:

Excuse me, can you... I got a broken hearing aid, and... Would you repeat that slower?

VFW:

No problem... looking back at your time in the service, what makes you smile?

Mr. Akin:

What makes me what?

VFW:

Smile. Like, what do you miss the most about your time in the service?

Mr. Akin:

That's a good question... The closest we had in Okinawa was the two of us, we were in together... we're, we were like brothers. The whole 18 months. He stayed over 'cause he had a Japanese girlfriend. So... But, he got promoted before me and he failed his first test. And I passed, so, I was the only 5-Level, until he passed.

VFW:

Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Well, thank you so much, again, um... (recording ends)

