

Career of Working With Helicopters

RK: Well, yeah, I wanted to, after the war was over. I stayed in because I wanted to fly the jets. The jets were coming out, so I wanted to fly jets. And so I decided to stay in. And while I'm waiting to fly the jets, I got a - I decided to, well, it's a long story, but I decided to go fly helicopters. And helicopters in those times were very, very rare. There was only a handful of them. And, in fact there was - at the time the Air Force only had maybe half a dozen. That's all. They were very rare, they were quite limited at that time too, so they weren't really - but nobody was really interested in helicopters. So I was in the Air Force's first helicopter flight. We had two helicopters, and four pilots.

SA: When was that?

RK: Pardon?

SA: When was that?

RK: 1950. 1950. They were Sikorsky helicopters. And then, the first atomic bomb testing was on Enewetak Atoll, and that was to test the first hydrogen bomb which we looked at a little earlier there. And so I went out, and they sent me and another three officers out to the Marshall Islands, Enewetak, to test the first - and we had the first helicopters. The first use of helicopters for that. And then gradually helicopters become more and more [up that] of course they're [big and better] now. But, so I had an interesting tour in the air force, from fighters to bombers to helicopters and whatever. So it was a fun thing, I really enjoyed it. And I was in the Air Force for 22 years. And then I got out and went back to school, and got my degree, and then I went to work for Howard Hughes. He at that time, Hughes Aviation, was a pretty big [bastion]. We built the first attack helicopter, which is still in service and still used the world around. I was just reading an article the other day: it's used by almost every country in the world, uses the Hughes attack helicopter. It was a marvelous piece of equipment. Way advanced over others. But I flew helicopters in for another, what, thirty years. So, I've got about forty or fifty years of helicopter flying. [Laughs].

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RK: Yeah, that was - I went with Hughes after Korea, though. After Korea, then I got out of the air force and went to work for Howard Hughes. And of course he was developing helicopters at that time. And he developed two of the world's most remarkable helicopters. What was called the Attack Helicopter, which is used by almost every country in the world, uses the Hughes Attack Helicopter, and then there was the Civil Hughes Helicopter - those right there. That's the various ones that I flew. They are universally used as rescue Air Evac hospitals, and for people in accidents, and that sort of thing. And now, when we first started that program, Los Angeles and New York had one helicopter each. There were two helicopters doing rescue work then. And they didn't do much, just once in a while they'd do a little

something. But fortunately for me, I was assigned that project. And when I got through with it, which was about, oh, I don't know, ten years or twelve years or something like that, I had put helicopters in almost every police departments in the United States. That was my really - that's my best work that I did, is put helicopters in. And now there's not a police station or a state, or city, that doesn't have helicopters.

SA: Was it your idea to give helicopters to police departments?

RK: Absolutely. It was my idea. Well, hold on, that's not quite true. It wasn't my idea, it was the idea of a - oh, god, his name is on the tip of my tongue, Captain....anyway, he was in the Los Angeles County Police Department. It was his idea, but I picked up on it and made it happen. I was the director of the program. But it was his idea, and we did it. And we did it. And the first ones were in Los Angeles. And we finished that project up, and then we got a grant from the federal government. And after we got that grant, then we ran a trial program in Kansas City, Missouri. And that program was very successful, and that started the ball rolling. And then me and my team, we went all around the United States and got the police chiefs to put the helicopters in.

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RK: They called me up one day, and the guy says, "I'm from Mr.So-and-so," whatever, "from personnel, and I'm looking at your record here." And he says "and this, my records show that you're" - what was it, whatever it was, "71 years old," or - yeah, I guess it was 71. And he said, "that can't be true, can it?" And I said, "yeah...it is." And he says, "oh my god!" He says, "you're ten years beyond our insurance plan! So, would you mind retiring?" [Laughs]. So I said, "yeah." I said, "I've been meaning to do it anyways." So I finally hang it out, hung up.