

Interview with  
Garvin Kowalke  
August 18, 2005  
By Peter Shrake & Bill Schuette



GK: I'm Garvin Kowalke, born here in North Freedom, WI, out on the farm, June 5, 1922. Born and raised there, and helped out on the farm.

WS: Where did you go to school?

GK: I went to a country school, right out there in Green Valley, which about a 3 mile walk, I should say run, because I usually did it that way. I went to school there up to my 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and then started high school in North Freedom. I spent one year as a freshman, now, I had an older brother and sister, but they were of that age group where I wasn't involved with anything them. And I had a younger brother and sister and I was babysitting a lot. That was about my relationship with my little brother and sister.

We had our neighbor's farm and he had a fire in the barn and it knocked him out so my dad bought the farm. We're talking about 1935, and we were already getting involved in a cotton pickin' war. My older brother left the farm and went to work with a construction company to get more money. When we started getting really serious over there and helping France, Spain and England—I mean with Hitler—then of course the draft went up, so my older brother, instead of working for construction and being drafted, why he came home and worked on the farm and he didn't have to be drafted.

Now, at about the same time—now we're getting up around the time when dad bought the farm, and I had to quit high school in order to help him out on the farm. So, that was the limit of my education at the time. When my brother came home then, and was working, I was looking for a better job, then came Pearl Harbor. Or I should say, then came my wife, and we were married in 1940, and we were there on the farm, then Pearl Harbor hit.

I had a real desire to be a pilot. Planes were flying over from the Dells, they came over the farm, and I just loved airplanes. For some reason, I said, I think I'll go and be a pilot. So, I went to Madison and took the exam for pilot school. After I got through with the exam, there was a big master sergeant and he looked at my score and he said "I'll see you in about a year." I said "Huh?" Of course, being only a freshman, I didn't even know what the word geometry meant. So, I completely failed the algebra, the mathematic part of that exam.

Well, being an independent individual, I stepped out the door and went to the next door and it was the enlistment center and I walked in there and I enlisted in the army air corps as a private. They sent me down to boot camp in New Orleans where I took exams where I wanted to go. I still wanted to get into the flying, which was my number one priority. He indicated that my mechanics was outstanding. So, he said he'd send me to Glendale, CA, to train as a crew chief on P38s. My wife and I, away we went.

That trip from New Orleans out to Glendale, CA, that was one of the experiences that stuck with me all throughout my life. We got on a troop train at 5 at night, the shades were pulled for security, and away we went. At about 5:30 in the morning, “OK, shades up,” and I pulled my shades up and the sun was just about ready to rise, and that was the picture I saw—we were just entering Arizona, and it was the most beautiful sight I’d ever seen. I really loved the West—I loved Zane Gray books—I even made wooden pistils when I was a kid. Everything was a cowboy.

When we hit Glendale, CA, I started school as a P38 crew chief. The \_\_\_\_\_ and they were due to head for Africa in a year, and my assignment would be to go with them to Africa. While I was taking my training and learning to fix engines, and stuff like that, I had a buddy—and he was a college graduate—we were real buddies, and I said I had to retake that exam but I couldn’t get the math. He said, “I’ll take you through a math course.” So I spent that year working on the P38s, and every night he and I sat down and we went through the books and I studied math.

Then came December and I sent my wife back to Wisconsin—on the weekends, we’d see each other—as I was going to be headin’ to Africa. My buddy and I went out that night and saw the girls off to Wisconsin. Then we hung around there for quite a while, and by that time I was just about able to navigate, and I got back to the base and crawled into the sack. Well, unfortunately, or I should say fortunately, about 6 o’clock in the morning a trooper came in from headquarters [and he said] “Kowalke, you got to be at headquarters at 8 o’clock this morning to re-take your exam. The guys there, they pulled me out of the sack took me to the shower, cooled me off, and got me dressed and everything and at 8 o’clock I headed in there for the exam. My mental condition: I had no worries, nothing concerned me, I was able to concentrate, so I took the exam. I never went back to redo a question, I just went one, two, three, and I went through that exam in 3 hours, and that was a 4 hour exam. I took it back to the commander and gave it to him, and he said, “I don’t think I’ll see you in another year, you’re going to be in Africa.”

So he took the exam [I had just completed] and an hour later the runner comes up, “Hey, Kowalke, you got 95 on your exams, and in one week you’re heading for your camp for air cadets,” right there in Glendale. Well, that was the next step, and I went into pilot school and learned to be a pilot, on 3 bases in Calif. Then I ended up in Waco, TX, for my final exams in 02s, which was a twin engine, which was advanced, and came through with flying colors, and in July of ’43, hey, I’m a second lieutenant and I’m a pilot.

My next assignment then—I had my application for A20’s—I wanted that twin engine attack bomber, which was really a sharp outfit. When I graduated and came up for assignment, [I got] my second choice, which was training command. Being smart, I might as well put in a year or two getting some flying training under my britches before I get into combat, I really better know what I was doing. I went by the book and I’ve always preached that, what I had in my left hand was my Bible, what I had in my right hand was the book to run this cottin’ pickin’ operation. That was my whole position.

I ended up at San Antonio, TX, Randolph Air Force Base where I went through instructor’s school and then I became an instructor pilot in Waco, TX, in advanced flying. I spent almost a year there in Waco, and during that time period we had an air show back at Randolph, and I went back there and looked at all the airplanes and there she sat! They had a B29, and that was the most beautiful piece of machinery that I had ever seen, well, almost. I went through it and said, “This is it, I want to be a B29 pilot, I want to fly this girl”. So, when I got back to Waco, I put in my application to transfer.

I got it almost immediately. They sent me to Roswell, NM, to take my training secession, got me some B17 time and B29 time. The B29 was one of the most beautiful airplanes I have ever flown. It was brand new, just came out of the factory. It was firm, it was solid and just as stable as your kitchen table. I was then sent over to Kansas, Smoke Hill Army Air Force Base. There I’m assigned to a B29 crew and this is going to be for combat. Now, the B29 is an atomic weapons delivery system, and that was the training we were taking. In fact, we’d

spend our weekends in the hanger going over a training secession with the atomic bomb itself. They had the models there and we'd go through everything about it, its mounting, the delivery system, how it's all wired, everything.



PS: So, when you started getting into the actual training for the B29, you started working with the bomb?

GK: Oh yes.

WS: What year was that?

GK: That would have been late 1943, early 1944.

WS: So up to that point you had not flown combat.

GK: No, I had never flown combat. When we got to our training secession, they sent us out to the airfield at Las Vegas—there was 12 of us—and we went through—there were two types of bombs—for 10 days we went through orientation on that particular type of weapon. Then they split us up, six of us went to Guam and the others went to Tinian and Saipan. Our mission was fire bombs, and it would be night missions. I was assigned as co-pilot of the lead crew. [That was the airplane] Two Passes and Crap. He was the lead commander of the squadron. He had been flying B17s over Germany and had about 20 missions. He came from Canada, down into Kansas.

Those were the missions we started to fly. We took off from Guam and hit targets in Japan, all the way from Nagasaki clean up to Hokkaido.

WS: Did you ever fly over Tokyo?

GK: They [another group] had been flying missions over Nantucket, coming up from the south, and we were still finishing out the training program. So, we didn't get in with those guys, but we learned a lesson [from them]. But we didn't pay any attention to it really. What I'm saying is that, we didn't get our cotton' pickin' airplanes together soon enough to protect each other. They'd come up there and drop the bombs and they'd all be circling out there, spiraling around and WHAM, they'd dump on them and they'd [the zeros] catch 'em.

Our first mission was up in Hokkaido, and that was the longest mission that a B29 had ever flown—it was over 20 hours. We came up and blasted out a big manufacturing plant, we burned that out. We [the other group] came up together within sight of each other, and then we'd make one circle, and when we made that circle, we'd join in formation and then hit the target. And after we hit the target, we'd split up and head for home. Iwo Jima had been secured and we were using that for emergency landing, have the aircraft fixed there and then go on back to the Marianas Islands. So, that was our first mission.

Our fifth mission, which was a dandy, and I think that was the only mission where a B29 had ever been looped. We came in to hit Tokyo, and we were about in the middle of the formations. The other formations had dropped their fire bombs out here and you keep dropping back this way. Well, when we came up to the target, the cloud from the bomb drops and the fire were already at 20,000 feet. We were flying at 11 and 12 thousand feet, just high enough to be above the ground fire, and low enough and fast enough so that the ground fire wouldn't hit us. So there we are at 11.5 and as we came in on the target, getting ready to drop our bombs we got caught in the floodlights, all the searchlights down on the bottom, they caught us. That would mean that when they caught us, the [Japanese] fighters would come down the searchlight and hit us. And that's what they were setting up. We were just about to drop the bombs, and they caught us. We hung tight, dropped the bombs. But the, instead of pulling out and headin' home, he takes a look at that and the command pilot, he says, "Hey, we're going to duck those guys." So, he's going to turn into the smoke that's built up from the fire and then they can't see him. So he did. And we got the wildest dam ride I've ever had in a bomber like that. Well, what happens, here's this smoke rolling up like this. The air coming down to feed it is extremely, whoosh, like that, it's just chuckin' in. Well, that's what we hit, that air that's being sucked in. So down we go. I pulled back all I could to pull the nose back up, taken' the power up, because we went to maximum speed and nose down. We got down to where you could see the flames and everything and now the wind was being built up from the fire and we hit that. We went right straight up and we went right on over, and we just kept her steady and came out 2,500 feet over Tokyo. We just hung loose there, and climbed out a little bit and headed right straight for Tokyo Bay to get the hell out of there. We made it. Our tail gunner was going to try to bail out, but he blacked out from the force, it knocked him out so he didn't get to move. Since it was such a surprise to the Japanese gunners, we hardly got shot at. So, we made it back home.

WS: Was that the first time that a B29 did a flip, or were there others?

GK: No, that was the only time that I know of. The B57s, yah.

So, a few missions later then, on our 10<sup>th</sup> mission, we were on a day bombing flight and again over Tokyo, as we pulled in there, they threw everything at us that they could. We had P51s on Iwo Jima, and when we fly B29s over Iwo Jima going to the target they would take off and follow the B29s to use them as a navigator, and then when he's in there doing his bombing work they're down doing all their strafing. They were really cuttin' the hell out of the Japanese shipping and anything that was on the ground, and they were doing a really good job of it.

Well, the commanding general, he was in the observation plane, and he was sitting up there about 20,000 feet watching over the whole thing. He gets hit by a Kamikaze and blew his engine up and they had to bail out.

He bails out over Tokyo Bay. We've got a submarine that's sitting in Tokyo Bay, taking pictures and observing everything and it's our rescue sub in case there's any damages like that. They'll pick everything up like that. So the general hardly ever got wet. He's down there and gets in the submarine, but the airplane was lost.

So, we're heading on back and we got an engine knocked out too. So we're flying on three [engines]. So Bucket decided not to stop at Iwo Jima. I can't over judge him, but that was the wrong move. But anyway, we kept past Iwo and headin' back to Guam and we get about 250 miles north of Guam, and we've already alerted the headquarter there that, hey, we're on three, and all of a sudden, BINGO, number one starts to go out. That's putting us on two. Buck kinda lost it then. He jammed those two throttles, we were descending towards the ocean, and he puts on the power like that and he pulls her up and she starts to shutter and roll and he's just sittin' there, and I took the airplane away from him and I pulled the power back, got her straightened out. I alerted the crew that we're going to have to ditch this bugger. Oh, the other thing that caused this problem was that he was going to lighten the airplane, so he opens the bomb bay doors and dumps the fuel tanks. Well, the fuel tank weight wasn't that much so there shouldn't have been that big a problem. When he opened up the bomb bay doors, he couldn't get one door shut. The bombardier couldn't come back and check them right away. And we're coming down that close to the ocean. So that's why, when he jammed the throttles and it started rolling, I took over and set her up for ditching, picked me out a nice big wave, and sat her on top of it. That's when she crapped out. Because the bomb bay doors were open, that made the airplane break in half, right at the edge of the bomb bay doors so the tail section sinks and the other section just sits there, because the wing tanks are open, just like an airbag.

I'm lookin' at the ocean and the nose is under the water, and I'm looking there to go out so I slammed my window open and as the water rushed in I just swam out through it. I had my Mae West [life preserver] filled and on my dingy [life boat] was strapped to my belt and I was pulling that along with me.

As I'm swimming up like that, trying to get to the top of the ocean, I'm sayin' that is one of the easiest ways to drown. If your lungs fill up, there's no pain, no nothing, it just fills you up. As I'm getting to the top, I'm at that stage where, am I going to make it or not? And then, she calls me. I can see her, and she's calling my name. And all of a sudden, I had all the strength in the world. And, off went my boots so that I didn't have any weight and up I went. And, by golly, I made it out. And I got my Mae West and dingy inflated and got it all set, and as I'm doin' that, and lookin' around, say, here's Buck Singer in the water. He doesn't have a dingy, so I'm going to have to get him one, and I'm lookin' around at the garbage, and yah, I found one and brought it back in and got it inflated, got him in it and tied it together, and then heard one of the kids hollerin', one of the gunners, he was out there without a dingy, so we paddled to him and got him into the boat between us, so that would help keep him alive. The rest of the crew, we only lost the central gunner, and that was because his position was right where the bomb bay door broke open. The rest of them, they all got in their boats and got rescued.

WS: How many were on the plane?

GK: Twelve. When I say twelve, there was eleven in the whole crew, the squadron navigator, he was on the plane to get flying time and training time. I checked the crew that was my job to make sure they were all OK.

We were just paddling around looking, and as we turned, there was a body in the ocean and I paddled over to that and got ahold of it, and it was that squadron navigator. No dingy, and his Mae West was not even inflated, so he didn't have a chance. So I checked his pulse, yeah, he was gone, so I removed his dog tags and put them in my pocket so they would go to his family, and then said the prayers and punctured the other dingy and punctured the Mae West, and buried him right there.

All those items like that that you talk about being with your veterans and what they all went through and who did that and where they did it, I've had to do it myself.

The next morning, about 8 o'clock in the morning, here comes a PBY, the flying boat, but the ocean was still rough, so he can't land to help us. So, they dropped some supplies, and about 3 o'clock in the afternoon,

here comes a destroyer escort, and they come in on us and picked us all up. And one of the things they had to do was, I heard a cannon go off, and I'm lookin' out the window, and oh, yah, there's the hulk sittin' above the water and they had to smash it and sink it wouldn't be a damage to any boating and shipping. So, then they got us all back to Guam.



Then, Buck Singer got terminated for not stopping at Iwo and endangering the aircraft.

So now we had a crew and we had to look for another airplane. We got talkin' and the crew wanted to stick by me. So the Old Man says, "OK, you're now an aircraft commander, and we'll get you a co-pilot." They got me a new airplane, got me a co-pilot.

They got me a plane named the Renegade, and I changed the name to City of Baraboo.



WS: Do you remember what the colors were on the logo?

GK: It was a real dark, dark blue, almost black, but mostly dark blue, only one color.

WS: So, what was your next adventure?

GK: Every one of our cotton' pickin' missions had something going on.

WS: How many missions did you fly?

GK: We flew 22 on this one (Two Passes & a Crap). I flew 10 with the other one (The City of Baraboo). Two of those would have been support missions with the Hiroshima bombing, when I flew the weather reconnaissance the day before to make sure, "Is it storming over Hiroshima?" and I came back that night, so they got all the information. They had a lead bomber that was over the target before the bomb dropped so that they'd have the hourly information as of that day.

WS: And your crew didn't know anything about what you were doing at the time, right?

GK: No, they knew what was going on.

WS: How long did it take you to get there?

GK: The whole mission was only between 16 & 18 hours.

WS: What did you do on the flight out, was it on automatic pilot?

GK: Between you and the co-pilot, you fly the whole time.

WS: So, you just sit there and dream, right?

GK: Sweat!

PS: So many of the missions you flew in the City of Baraboo were also combat missions.

GK: Oh, yeah.

PS: Were they all fire bombing missions?

GK: They would be fire bombing.

WS: What happened after the [atomic] bomb was dropped?

GK: The day after, we got a radiologist and got all the radiation detection equipment and hung it from the airplane, we looked like a porcupine, then we took off and went right over Hiroshima, changed altitude and made sure that the levels were there, if it was necessary to put anybody in there, why they would know what was going on. I took pictures of the bombing drop, of the damage and all that. My main comment on that, was that we hit a couple of targets in Japan, we were close to 90% of destroying the whole city, but it took about 250 to 350 airplanes. We put the spotters out there first and they dropped the fire bombs, and we just built the fires. They didn't have that protection. The Kamikaze helped them a little bit, but not that much.

WS: So there was more destruction with the firebombing than with the atomic bomb.

GK: No, it was about the same, but it took about 300 airplanes to do it. When I looked at that whole thing, yeah, you got sick about it. Wondering what in the hell are you there for, and why. Why the countries can't work together and start improving themselves. I have some real deep thoughts on that.

WS: You said you took some pictures, was this with a special aerial cameras mounted in the plane?"

GK: Oh, yeah, from the bombardier. He took some pictures. And that showed how everything was burned out and leveled off.

WS: Were you low enough to see the destruction that the bomb did?

GK: Oh, yeah. We weren't all that high.

WS: Were you surprised that one bomb could do all that destruction?

GK: No, I was familiar with the bomb tests that they had out on the West coast. It all adds up to the situation we're in right now.

WS: After that last mission, what did you do after that? After Japan surrendered?

GK: After Nagasaki, that's when they signed the peace treaty, our mission then—we had two missions—one was going back to the United States, and the other mission, we knew that our air force would have a position in Japan, and that mission would be to move all our aircraft and equipment up to Japan and take over Japan. I had a choice, I could either transfer with that outfit and go to Japan, or I could go back home into active reserves. I figured I'd been over long enough, so I was going back home. I've stayed in the active reserves when I got back home. Of course I was in 1945-46. Well, then comes about 6 years later, Korea and we get all tangled up with their dammed operation, and they recalled the reserves, so we're gonna go back. And that's where I ended up then, I got sent back to Japan. In the mean time when they called me back to Japan from the reserves I went right back to Randolph Air Force base, in San Antonio, where they had the B29 training, they had the B29s there and while I was working with that, then came the B57 Canberra, twin engine jet, and that's an atomic carrier and they had that at an air show and I got the bug again. I transferred to jets and jumped into that.

PS: Did you fly jets in Korea?

GK: Yes. I didn't do any bombing missions, we were put on hold back here as to when our bombing was needed, but in the mean time, we flew in and out of the bases there. We flew missions and covered everything in Korea and knew everything what was going on. We covered Korea, China, the whole area was under the B57 squadron observation, including Russia.

PS: Did you fly over Russia?

GK: No, we never flew over Russia, we just sat there and said, "Hey there, you guys mess around, we're going to knock your dam blocks off, which was their dammed attitude."

WS: Which plane did you like to fly the best?

GK: The B57 was absolutely beautiful. And that one's delivery system, I was familiar with it, since I had looked at the B29 once. The B57 delivery system—the B52s are all high altitude systems—and this one here we fly our missions between 600 and 1,000 feet, right down on the deck. When we come in, if this is our target, we spot that target, at about the time we get here, we pull up in a loop, go straight up, open our bomb bay door and drop our bombs. The bomb goes up, and as it goes up, we close the door and roll up and take off—to get the hell out of there. We're up there about 15,000 feet. The bomb is going up, turns around and goes straight down. That blue one there was our practice bomb, and I put 3 of those in a 150 foot circle, and I got the squadron award. And I kept one of the bombs as a souvenir.

WS: I understand that you got a purple heart, what was that for?

GK: That was for the ditching (of the B29).

PS: How long did you stay in the service?

GK: It was about 27 or 28 years.

WS: Did you ever fly commercial jets?

GK: No. Well, after Korea, then I was assigned back to the U.S. and assigned to the East coast. While I was out there, there were two assignments that came up and two of could make them. One was in Germany and the other was in Hawaii. I took Hawaii. (Laughter)

I had just gotten assigned over to the B57, and I was flying single engine fighter jets in training. My wife couldn't have any babies, and the adoption rules were so dam stupid. Because I was in the military and moving around a lot, we were having trouble adopting a baby. I'm there at Randolph and I get a telephone call from my friend here in Madison, she's a secretary to the professor at the university, and she said she just got a call from a friend of hers in Marburg, Germany, and a friend of hers had just had a baby boy and leave him there at an adoption center, they couldn't keep him. And they had a Spanish background. My wife, Roberta, had some Spanish history, and she said he would be just perfect for me. I said, well, you call her back and make sure they keep him there, and I'll be right over. (Laughter). And that's exactly what I did. I talked to the commander and he said, "Sure, take all the time you want."

So I grabbed a jet and headed for the East coast, where I picked up a military aircraft and we landed at Wiesbaden. We went to a hotel and called Marburg, and took a taxi and went up to Marburg, Germany, met with the mayor of the city—he's like the mayor and judge and president of everything, he's a full commander—and he authorized the adoption. We signed the papers right there. And I saw him (the baby) there and we headed back to Wiesbaden. The next morning, I have a visitor: here were two nurses and a driver, and they drove down from Marburg and they had him (the baby) with them. His name was Craig. I said, "I'll be damned, it's absolutely great!" What I was doing was trying to get him a passport to go back to the U.S. "Well, we could help you with that." So they put me in the cotton' pickin' car with the baby and drove me to the office where they were filling out papers. The place was pretty much full, and they were talking in German, and they just walked right through with the baby, walked right up to the front desk and told them all about this. "Oh, well, sure" and boom, boom, he's got his cotton pickin' papers. Two days later we're on our way back to the U.S.

WS: Was your wife with you?

GK: No. They picked me up in Chicago and spent the night with friends and the next morning we headed for San Antonio.

WS: What is your son doing today?

GK: He's living in Madison, and is an insurance adjustor for American Life.

PS: Did you serve in the Viet Nam war?

GK: Yes, I was over there. When I got out of Korea and they sent me back to the East coast, and after I got the assignment in Hawaii—this would be about 1966—first I was Operation's Officer for Hickam Air Force Base, in Hawaii. Then I moved up to Air Force headquarters for Pacific Air Force. "Well, I've got 3 or 4 years before retirement and I said dam it—and I'm sittin' there a major—and I've got to really think this thing out." When I retire, I want to have the place that I want to live all paid for. I hoped that when I retire, I'd be promoted by that time. So, as I'm sittin' there in Hawaii thinking about this, the deal comes up, that Viet Nam is really kickin' it off. They weren't getting anybody out of the Pentagon, those guys there were all covering their butts and nobody was being transferred out of the Pentagon to overseas operation. I said, "Hell, I should really do this. I'll take me a year in Viet Nam." I said, "send the kid back to Wisconsin, and I'll put in a year in Viet Nam and when I come back—that cotton pickin' assignment will tell me two things: I'll be able to go where I want to go, and I'll betcha I'll get me a promotion out of it." So I did. I went ahead and volunteered for Viet Nam.

WS: What did you fly in Viet Nam?

GK: The O2s, the observation planes. So when I was over there in PacAF, the observation was to find out where the enemy was. We were up there in Danang. I have pictures of that around here too.

WS: Did you ever name your airplane "The City of Baraboo" again?

GK: (laughs) no. I was in the flight examiner, where I would train crews on what they were to look for, what they were to do and how to fly the observation mission. I would fly on the instructor's side, and have a pilot with me, an observer with me and I'd take them out on a mission or two. After a while they would get on an O2 and they would fly a mission I would be a shotgun and sit back in another plane and watchin' over them, watching out for the fire, watching out what's going on down here all around and anything in the air. That was my job then, to make sure that everything was being done right.

There was an outfit that had something like a motel and it was for tourists. There were apartments and apartments with kitchens where they could cook. Well, we just took it over and I had one of the apartments there, and I also had the kitchen because I'm a cook. I was there for a year.

PS: When did you leave Viet Nam?

GK: I was there between '66 and '67.

PS: Did you get your promotion out of it?

GK: Yeah.

WS: So your plan worked?

GK: Yup, in fact, I got an assignment in the Pentagon when I left, well, Andrews Air Force Base.

GK: When I was in Hawaii—that was the other lucky thing that happened. There was a young couple in the university in California—a young guy and his girlfriend. So, she gets pregnant. She flew to Hawaii and had her baby and puts it up for adoption and she headed back for California. Well, my name is the first one on the list for the adoption. That was a baby girl, and that's the one [pointing to a photo].

WS: What's she doing today?

GK: She got herself married to a guy who was an A10 pilot out in Germany, so [laughs] she went the military way. They ended up in Korea. She gave me two beautiful granddaughters.

WS: Who is this [pointing to a photo]?

GK: That's her, Kimberly.

WS: Thanks for sharing your adventures with us.

GK: When you're over in Viet Nam, and sittin' there, you can't go to war with a dam country when they say "Oh, Oh, you can't cross that river"! Because, if you try to cross that river, then China says, "Hey! You're on ground next to us, and we're not going to put up with that. What was our god damn country thinkin' about? So we ended up going back out of Viet Nam. And what happens? North Viet Nam takes over.

PS: What year did you retire from the service?

GK: In 1970.

PS: Did you come right back to Baraboo then?

GK: Yes, when I was in Washington, D. C. at the Pentagon.

PS: What rank did you retire at?

GK: Lieutenant Colonel.

WS: Well thank you very much. Do you mind if we use any of this for publication?

GK: Well, I didn't do any cuss words [laughs].

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Each time J.R. Kowalke gets in his car he has his brother to thank for teaching him how to drive.

"We grew up on a farm near North Freedom and had enough land so he would let me take his car into the oat fields and drive," the 82-year-old said. "He was always with me each time. That's how I learned how to drive from my brother."

Kowalke's brother, Garvin, died at the age of 90 on April 17.

"He was a good brother. The type you look up to growing up," Kowalke said. "He was my baby-sitter so when he would go downtown he would take me. He didn't like me staying home. And when he started dating the girl he later married, he would take me along. He always kept an eye out for me."

Kowalke said when his brother went into the service the two didn't spend as much time together as they did when they were younger.

"He would come home once here and there," Kowalke, of Grand Rapids, Mich. said. "It was hit and miss, but when he retired we would go deer hunting. I never would get one, but my brother would always get a deer. We had a lot of fun as brothers do."

Kowalke said his brother accomplished a great deal in his lifetime.

"He used to pilot a B-29. One of those big jobs," Kowalke said. "He named it the City of Baraboo."

Kowalke's brother enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1942 and later in the U.S. Air Force, serving for 28 years. He flew through three wars and earned the Distinguished Flying Cross, four Air Medals and the Purple Heart. He also achieved the rank of Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Air Force before retiring in 1970.

His service is featured in the book, "The Hero Next Door," which include his flights from April through July 1945. The book also tells of Kowalke's flight on Aug. 4, 1945 when he piloted the B-29 he named "The City of Baraboo." That flight in the B-29 was to collect the weather data for the Aug. 6, 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Three days after the bombing, Kowalke flew another mission over Hiroshima to check the radiation levels.

Kowalke's career took him and his family to such locales as Texas, Japan, Maryland, Hawaii and Virginia.

After retiring from the military, Kowalke and his family moved to Baraboo, where he was employed as the Sauk County director for the Wisconsin Civil Defense Agency for 15 years until he retired in 1985.

"I remember us moving around a lot when I was young. We moved about every two to three years," said Kraig Kowalke, Garvin's son. "He was really good at finding houses for us. He was a military man, but he made time for his family when he could. He always provided for us."

He said his father enjoyed listening to country music or watching Hee-Haw or The Lawrence Welk Show.

"He didn't like us listening to the Beatles," Kraig said. "I guess he was a little afraid of them having a bad influence on us, but that didn't stop him from listening to their slower songs."

Kraig said his dad would sing in a church choir when he could.

"He also sang at a lot of family gatherings," Kraig said. "He could harmonize and sing well."

Kraig said his father loved the outdoors.

"He was just a good dad," Kraig said. "He taught us to appreciate life and what it has to offer. He was just a real gentleman. He did a lot in his lifetime. He touched a lot of lives when he was here. He will definitely be missed."