

## Lester (Les) Bakke

Ever since the seventh grade, I knew I wanted to serve in the Air Force. Whenever the recruiters came to Newfolden High School, I'd talk to them and get literature. As with all young boys, I wanted to be a pilot. Although events didn't happen as planned, I eventually did enlist in the Air Force.

After graduating from Newfolden High School in 1963, I attended Moorhead State College (MSC), now Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM). Following my first year at MSC, I returned home to Newfolden in the spring of 1964 looking for work. Not many companies wanted a 19-year-old worker for the summer only. I went to Grand Forks with my brother Arvin looking for construction work. Back then, if you could get construction work, you had it made. I checked with one construction company with no success. I went to the Employment Service and they had no real prospects. Finally, I went to the Air Force recruiter. Sergeant Sellers was the recruiter and he had me take the Air Force entrance examination. I remember that I took the test without scratch paper, he forgot to give me some when the test started. I completed the tests early, a habit of mine. When I turned the test materials in, Sgt. Sellers asked for the scratch paper. I told him that I didn't have any. He asked "How could you do the math without scratch paper, would you like some more time?" I guess I did well enough on the exam because he wrote me a letter later as follows:

*Your test results: mechanics 95, administrative 70, general 95, electronics 95. 95 represents a perfect score. I have asked Hqs. to hold an electronics vacancy. Send me the personal history form. I will mail your papers next week. Sgt. Sellers.*

There are two interesting things about these scores. First, since my scores were high, I could choose any field I wanted and decided electronics was the best for me and later earned a Computer Science degree. Second, I got the lowest score in administrative and I spent twenty-six years as a Computer Center Director.

On July 22, 1964, I left Newfolden for Fargo, ND. I stayed at a hotel on Broadway (I don't remember which one) and the following day I enlisted in the Air Force. After taking and passing a physical examination and taking the oath, I was ready to leave Fargo for Lackland Air Base, San Antonio, Texas. Since we had a couple of hours between the oath and the flight departure, several of us were in the waiting room of the induction center. After sitting there for a few minutes, I heard someone call my name. An Air Force sergeant whose name I don't remember asked me to come to his office. There, he told me that the rest of the waiting room was full of draftees and he saw no reason for an Air Force enlistee to have to sit with them. He and I talked for nearly an hour and he gave me some extremely valuable advice about the Air Force. He was the Air Force liaison with the induction center and was prone to tell the truth. Recruiters don't always tell the truth. He asked about my education and test scores. Since I'd recently completed 51 quarter hours of college and had very good test scores, he suggested that I try for language school. He said that because of my scores, I'd be given a language test in basic

training. Those who passed the test could go to language school for a year and become a linguist. The schools were at Monterey, CA, Syracuse, NY, Yale or University of Indiana. Airmen would be enrolled in intensive language for 10 months. The liaison sergeant said the duty on a college campus wouldn't be too bad! I knew that when it came time to take the language exam, I'd do my best.



July 23, 1964, I left Fargo for San Antonio, Texas to serve in the Air Force. Two other Air Force enlistees from Grand Forks joined me. I was put 'in charge' of this small group for our flight to San Antonio. The other two were Jerry Deschamp from Westhope, ND and Kenneth Langerud from Rock Lake, ND. We were assigned different flights in basic training and I never saw

either again.

We left Fargo mid-afternoon and arrived at Lackland near midnight. We were processed in, collected our clothing and taken to a barracks. It was about 2:00 am before we got to



bed. Just before I fell asleep, I thought to myself 'What the heck have I done to myself now?' After thinking about it a few minutes, I realized that thousands of other men had done the same thing and if they could do it, so could I. During those few minutes I had my only regrets about joining the Air Force. The next day arrived about 5:15 am with assembly at 5:30, then off to breakfast. We then went to the barber shop for a haircut. As with everyone else who has ever gone to basic training, the hair cut was something. It took all of two minutes and we all looked alike. Of course, the barbers had fun asking what type of cut we wanted or did we want the part on the right or left. Then they shaved it all off!

Basic training is basic training and it's about the same for everyone. OK, Air Force basic training is not as tough as some of the other branches. The liaison person in Fargo suggested that I be an average trainee in everything except those things that were scored or graded. It was good advice then and I'm sure it is still good advice. We went through the normal basic training activities: physical training, classes, military conduct training. We also learned that we seldom could do things correctly. Whenever we did something wrong, we got a demerit. If one got too many demerits,

you were 'set back' meaning you spent a week longer in basic training. Being of average height, I was in the middle of the flight when marching and drilling. Since I'd been in school for the preceding 13 years, I had no problem with classes and tests and did well. Because I grew up on a farm and worked at various farm chores, I was in pretty good shape. Since I also played football, basketball and baseball in high school the physical education segments were not very difficult. Each day after pushups, sit ups and other exercises, we had to run a mile. I was in the third flight, so over 120 men were in front of me in the mile run. A flight in Air Force basic training is a group of 60 men. I decided early in basic that I would try to finish first once. I did during the last week of training. The last guy I passed really didn't want me to pass him and I finished only a few feet ahead.

About the fifth week of training, a few of us were relieved to take the language test. Since I knew about it, I tried my best and scored a 123 on the exam. The minimum score for language school was 115. Only two of us in my flight taking the test that day passed. As soon as our drill sergeant learned that the two of us were going to language school, he changed his treatment of us. I never received another demerit the rest of my basic training. I learned later that the drill sergeants had orders to not hold language school



people back. Between the time I qualified for language school and enrollment at Indiana University (IU), the FBI did a background investigation. We had to complete background information on forms including all the places we'd lived, all our jobs and a list of friends and people who knew us. I did get mail from several of them asking what the heck was going on, the FBI was just here asking about you. Following the investigation, I was granted a Top-Secret clearance which I maintained during my years in the Air Force. Because of the work we would be doing, it also had a crypto addition.

The rest of basic was uneventful. Since it was July and August, it got a bit hot in Texas. When the temperature was too high, we could not have PT (physical training) on the parade field. So, the resourceful drill sergeants had us doing PT in the barracks. We had the usual guard duty assignments. We also had a GI Party as every other basic trainee has. A GI Party is the cleaning of the barracks. After eight weeks of training, we all got our orders. Mine was for the University of Indiana in Bloomington for Russian language school. On September 23, 1964, I received orders to report to IU no later than October 15, 1964. Since the school didn't start until mid-October, I had an extra eight days in Lackland after completing basic training. I was assigned to a casual barracks for the week and put in charge of discharges. These were people who failed basic training and were being sent home. I don't understand how some of them got in the Air Force in the

first place. One young man, in particular was in really bad shape. While marching the discharges to chow, I had to make sure to tell this one person when to start walking and when to stop. I had to be especially careful when we crossed streets because he didn't look either way. I left Lackland Air Base on October 1, 1964, my birthday, although I don't remember being aware that it was my birthday. I was just happy to leave basic training.

Since I had two weeks before I had to report to Indiana, I decided to take a train through New Orleans and spend a couple of days there seeing the sights. I checked in at the YMCA and spent three days and two nights in New Orleans. I would have spent more time there, but a hurricane was due to hit the coast. During the time there, I took a tour bus of the city, visited historical sites such as the battle of New Orleans from the War of 1812, and saw the French Quarter. I think the French Quarter was the most interesting. Many years later I saw it again and was very disappointed, it had become a tourist trap. In 1964, it still had charm and was open and friendly. The front gates to several of the homes were open and I could walk in and look at the courtyards. I left New Orleans the evening of the third day and arrived in Bloomington the next morning.



Military service on a college campus was wonderful. After spending several weeks with only men, the campus was really nice. Most college students have little spending money, we, however, were paid every month. Although we lived in military-only dormitories, we ate in one of the campus dining halls, the one which served a couple of the women's dorms. It was nice duty.

The first day of class was definitely an eye-opener. All of our instructors were native Russians and spoke very little English. None of us spoke Russian. During our first day, one of the students, Ron Battaglia started talking with one of the instructors in Polish. His family edited and published a Polish newspaper and he spoke it fluently. The rest of us were envious. We learned that all of us had at least a year of college. Most of us were college dropouts also. All of us scored well on the Air Force tests and the language test. Many of us were undisciplined and unique. A few of the more memorable are described below.

Captain Pribble was in charge of the detachment at IU. We were a technical school attached to Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois. Captain Pribble had reached the highest rank he could and was coasting until retirement. He required the very minimum discipline of the troops. Nearly all of the students and most of the permanent staff made fun of him when he wasn't around.

Warren Russell from Hawaii, was my roommate while at IU. He was the son of a minister and a transplant to Hawaii. He had a girlfriend back home and talked about her often. He didn't party or do much other than go to class and study. I don't know where he went after we left IU.

Bill Querin from Parma, Ohio became my best friend while at IU and later in Texas. Bill was a carefree, fun loving guy. During Easter break in the spring of 1965, Bill and I hitch hiked to Parma to visit his family. I enjoyed the trip and the visit. Bill's family treated me as one of the family. Bill had a girl friend from a nearby town and of course he wanted some time alone with her. I spent about half the weekend with Bill's parents and sister while he was gone. We got along pretty well during the weekend. On Saturday, we went to an amusement park near Cleveland, it was the first time I'd ever been to one. We rode the roller coaster and several other rides. Perhaps the most fun was when we rented some small motor boats and went for rides on the lake.

The Student Union at IU was the place to go on campus. It was there that Bill and I met Carol and Maggie. I don't remember the last names of either but remember them fairly well. Carol and Maggie were sitting in the Union playing cards. I don't remember exactly what card game they were playing but Bill and I started talking to them. They knew a little bit about bridge, I knew how to play whist and Bill could play a couple of other games. We all decided to meet again and learn to play bridge. We continued to meet at regular bridge playing sessions. We also went to some parties with them, meeting students other than those at the language school.

The Student Union at IU had a coffee house in the lower level. This was a sixties style coffee house. Several nights per week, they had singers, primarily folk singers. It was a nice relaxing place to go after a hard day learning Russian.

We also had a student who walked on his hands on the top of the building. It was not unusual for him to come in a third-floor room from the roof. He only lasted a couple of months before he was discharged.

John Morris from Arkansas was one of the smartest students in the school. He had one disadvantage; however, he couldn't see. He had very thick glasses and was always asking someone else to tell him what was written on the black board. The fact that he was one of the top students in the class was an amazing feat. John often got in trouble for not saluting officers. The truth was that he couldn't see well enough to recognize the officer's insignia. John completed the course as one of the top three students. He made it to Texas to the second part of our course, but then received a medical discharge.

Milt Copeland was from the Copeland Ranch of west Texas. At one time his family owned much of the range land in that part of Texas. He always seemed to have more than enough money, but was also willing to share. The most interesting thing he did was



ship rocks back to Texas. He thought the Indiana rocks were much nicer than anything in Texas so he filled his B4 bag with rocks. The Air Force always shipped one bag to the next duty site, so the rocks went to Texas. Milt shipped his clothes with a bus line. Milt was one of our tour guides when we got to Texas.

Tony Heller was perhaps the most unique of the class. Tony loved trains. He knew the schedule of the trains in Bloomington and would get up in the middle of the night to go to the tracks and watch the train go through town. He would get up, go to the tracks, watch the train go by and then return to bed. Tony finished the language school but didn't make it through the next phase of our training.

Our Russian instructors were native Russian and spoke very little English. Our classes were taught primarily in Russian. Our instructors were unique also. One had owned a couple of factories in Russia, but left it all to move to the US. Our only woman instructor had been an actress on stage in Russia and Europe. Another man was of Russian nobility. All of the instructors told us how wonderful we had it in America. They told us that all we had to do was study, learn Russian and we would have it made. They probably were correct, but not all of us realized it. We had to maintain a 70% average to stay at the language school. If we had less than an 80% average, we had a required two-hour study hall each weekday. Our classes were eight hours per day. We not only had language instruction, but also some Russian history, music and culture. We learned not only normal Russian but also how to swear in Russian. We later found out why. While listening to Russian military communication, we had to understand all the words.

Another of my classmates had a pilot's license and occasionally a couple of us would chip in for the aircraft rental fee and go flying. Somewhere I still have video of a couple of those flights. Much of the land around Bloomington was farm land with lots of trees and a huge manmade lake.

Near Bloomington was Brown County park. By the lake in the park were picnic areas. Several nice afternoons and evenings were spent in the park. As we spent more



time in Bloomington, we got to know more of the regular students and they would join us for the parties or we would join them. I don't remember anyone not treating us well. This was in 1964-5, before the protest movement of a few years later. Even though, everyone knew we were in the military, we were treated as one of the students. While at IU, I attended a Lutheran church on a somewhat regular basis. During one of the services, the pastor asked for volunteers for the Christmas pageant.

Ignoring the rule of the military that you never volunteer, I did and played the part of one of the shepherds. It was the first time I heard a truly great soprano singer. She was a music major at IU and really had a wonderful voice.

There was a lot of discussion of what we would be doing after language school and it didn't take long for us to figure out that we would be doing intelligence work against the Russians. We told our family and friends that we would be Russian spies. Once we got to the next phase of training, we were not allowed to tell anyone anything about our schools and possible jobs. It was interesting trying to tell friends that I couldn't talk about what I'd told them earlier.

All good things come to an end and our days at IU ended after ten months of school. Each of us earned fifty-one quarter hours of credit at IU. After returning to college this was helpful because I transferred the credit to MSUM and became a Junior. Registration times were based on how many credits you had, so I got to register early.

Following graduation, we were given orders to report to Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, TX. Several of our class took the opportunity to go on leave back home, but I didn't. One of my classmates suggested that I go with him to his home in Texas and then on to San Angelo. He wanted to see his girlfriend, who was only sixteen years old. They were married later that year. Since he wanted to spend time with her, he set me up with a blind date and we went to a drive-in movie. She was also sixteen, married to a soldier in Vietnam and was about eight weeks pregnant. I learned that women married young in Texas. Since he lived close to Ft Worth, TX, we went to my first strip club.



Goodfellow Air Force base was a typical base with all the military rules and regulations; quite different from IU, we adapted. At Goodfellow, we learned more Russian, primarily military Russian. We also learned that we would be sitting at radios listening to Russian military broadcasts. We spent hours listening to and transcribing Russian into English as it was spoken. We really became fluent in the language and could do the work live. It was also very interesting when we couldn't find an English word for the Russian one. Since we were doing the transcribing on typewriters, we had to complete a course in typing. In high school, I had typing and could do about 60 words a minute. However, I had to go through the typing class anyhow along with others who could type. It was interesting to hear all of us who could type when it came time for free typing. I still don't understand why the Air Force did not have an exemption test for us. I'm guessing it was just the military way of doing things. The Russian training was about four months long and near the end, some of us were asked if we wanted to cross train in a course military intelligence of about five months. Since I liked school, I volunteered and completed the intelligence school.

While at Goodfellow, I purchased my first of several motorcycles, a Honda 300 Dream. Along with several other bike riders, we rode around the countryside, with the best place

to ride being in dry riverbeds. I rode the Honda back to Minnesota following my training. Goodfellow was the first place I experienced the USO , there was a USO building in the town where we could get away somewhat from the military. People at the USO were nearly all volunteers, some spouses of men stationed there and some local volunteers, mostly women.

Near Thanksgiving time in 1965, Al Lamoroux, one of my classmates asked if I wanted to go to Albuquerque with him to visit his uncle, aunt and family. Of course, I accepted



and we spent Wednesday through Sunday away from base. Of course, the family had a daughter, Peggy who I went back to see a couple times and communicated with for a year or so. Peggy was eighteen and a freshman in college. She had a younger brother who had polio and had a of couple braces on his legs. His name was Robert but everyone called him Buddy. We hit it off really well and became friends. I

remember that he wanted me to stay in Albuquerque and cried when I had to leave. I think Peggy wanted me to stay too.

While at Goodfellow, I learned about a special program for airmen called the Airman Education and Commissioning Program. If you qualified, the Air Force would send an enlisted airman to college and following graduation the airman would go through Officer Candidate School and be commissioned as an officer. I applied, took the tests, passed the physical and was provisionally qualified to attend either the University of Arizona or Arizona State University in Engineering and Math. I was provisionally qualified because the applicant had to be at a permanent duty station in order to apply. The applicant also had to complete at least half of his tour at that site before going to college. I thought this was a great program, so when we filled out our 'dream sheet' or our choice of duty stations, I chose all the twelve-month sites available, they were all remote sites such as in remote Alaska, Turkey, Korea and Vietnam. In true military fashion, I got my orders for Hickham Field, HI, a thirty-six-month tour. I decided that I could survive in Hawaii for half that time, eighteen months before going to college. My roommate from IU was from Hawaii and said that he would introduce me to his family and I would like it there. Since



I was going to Hawaii, I didn't need any of the normal overseas shots, so I went home on leave a happy person. However, the Air Force must have realized that first term airmen

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do not get assigned to Hawaii and sent me a telegram changing my orders to Misawa Air Base, Japan. When I arrived at Travis Air Base, CA to fly out, the people realized that I hadn't had my shots yet, so I got two in one arm and three in

the other. My flight was changed from Hawaii to Japan and I was sent on my way. When I arrived in Japan, there was a smell of fish everywhere and I was not very happy. About a month after I got there, the Education office contacted me to do the formal application for the Commission program to which I told them to forget it! The person in Education office couldn't believe it and reminded me in strong terms what I was giving up. My mind was set, I would complete my four years and return to civilian life.

Our work at our duty station in Misawa, Japan was as we expected. We were assigned to the 6921<sup>st</sup> Security Wing which was located about a mile from the rest of the base at Misawa. We had our own barracks, dining hall, recreation building and laundry. We also had native Japanese come in each day and clean our barracks. Actually, barracks was not really what we had, it was much closer to a dormitory with individual rooms both single and double occupancy. I was lucky to get a single room. Since we were on duty 24 hours a day all year, if we were absent from work, we were not considered AWOL (absent without leave), but deserters. This was because of the top secret work we did. One of our first briefings was about going off base. As with many US bases, just outside the gates were bars and other places of entertainment. We were told to stay away from Nina's bar, so, of course, we all had to go there to see why. It was rumored that Nina was a member of the communist party and would try to get information from us. I didn't see any of that. However, when Nina said that she was going to put on a show and locked the front door, she really did a show!

I was assigned to the fourth shift as an intelligence analyst and served as such for the entire two years I was there. My specialty was analyzing the Russian Air Defense Command, Protivo Vozdushnoy Oborony (PVO) which translated roughly into Air Defense of the Homeland. The Russians had radar stations all along the coast of Russia that tracked all the aircraft in their area. The radar stations then reported to a regional site with tracking data. This was done using Morse Code, so we had many airmen listening to the code and typing it on typewriters. As analyst, we read the numbers, plotted the aircraft flights on a large plexiglass board in real time. Of course, we had to write the

plots and numbers in mirror image so the people on the other side who did the reporting could read them. About every two or three weeks the Russians would change the code and we analysts always wanted to discover the new codes before the Russians got used to using them. The Russians divided their area into large regions and smaller regions within the large ones and used numeric codes to identify each region and sub-region. We were able to plot in real-time and within a few months I could track over 50 aircraft, plotting every minute or two. I really did enjoy my work.

I was stationed in Japan during some interesting times, two of which I still remember. The first occurred in 1968 when the USS Pueblo, the US spy ship, was captured by the North Koreans. I found it interesting that the Pueblo was launched in April 1944 and I was born in October 1944. As expected, the entire base went on 24-hour alert. Of course, since we were already 24X7, it made no changes for us. The rest of the base, however, had alert status, which meant they were restricted to base. We, on the other hand, had no changes, so we were able to board buses, go through the main base and out the gates and enjoy the bars and other entertainment. As I stated earlier, if we didn't report for duty, we were considered deserters. During the tense moments of the Pueblo incident, we were asked to provide all of the tracking data the Russians were doing directly to the National Security Agency (NSA). We did that with a teletype machine which was encoded before transmission. The teletype machine had a paper roll where all of the typing was recorded. The paper record could be turned on or off. When it was on, the speed was about 45 words per minutes. When off, it increased to over 60 words per minute. I sat at the machine typing for nearly my entire eight-hour shift with the paper copy off to gain speed. We would occasionally get messages for NSA asking for clarification or additional information. At one time, I got a message that told me that my typing was going directly to a General in the Pentagon. I wish I could have kept a copy of that transmission, but of course being in an extremely secure building, we could not take paper out with us.

During the Pueblo incident, I was able to read a highly classified message from Washington, D.C. to the Admiral of the US Fleet in the area. The message gave the Admiral three choices; one, using whatever force necessary enter Korean waters and retrieve the ship and its crew, two, wait for diplomatic channels to solve the crises. The third choice was not listed on the message but we assumed it involved nuclear weapons. The Admiral chose the second option, diplomatic channels. Since Japan is not far from the Korean peninsula, we were somewhat concerned about the possibility of war in our neighborhood. We watched the Russians track a US SR-71 aircraft fly over North Korea. The Russians had an initial plot, on the second plot identified it as a missile and dropped it after the third plot. I guess they did not believe any aircraft could go as fast and as high as the SR-71. Later we saw photos taken by a SR-71 flying over North Korea. A photo of the Pueblo was so clear that we could see the cables holding up the antennas. The photo was taken from an altitude of over 100,000 feet flying over 1500 miles per hour. It was amazing.

The second memorable incident occurred during a Russian space mission that ended badly. Cosmonaut, Vladimir Komarov was in a space vehicle and about to return to Earth when his parachutes did not open. The US returns space vehicles to the ocean but the Russians return theirs to land. When the parachutes that slow the entry to earth did not

open, we were able to listen to part of the conversation between the Cosmonaut and his ground station. Komarov was very professional and calm during re-entry although he knew he would crash and die. We heard him reading the numbers from his instruments such as temperature, speed, altitude, etc. as he was coming down. Since he was a long distance from us, we lost his transmission before crash-down. Recently a news story about the incident indicated that Komarov was screaming and crying as he came down, complaining about shoddy workmanship on the space vehicle. That is not what we heard.

While in Japan, I not only worked my shifts, but also took some time to get to know the country. I bought a motorcycle shortly after I arrived and used it to explore the countryside with a couple of other bike riders. My favorite place to go was Lake Towada which was a lake on top of an extinct volcano. It is actually the largest crater lake on the island of Honshu. It was a beautiful place and a great ride. The lake is over 1,000 feet deep and very cold.

Each year the base sponsored a trip to Hakodate on the northern island, Hokkaido. Since it was an inexpensive and organized tour it was a good way to get away from the military and see more of Japan. I went on the tour each year I was there. One of my buddies and I decided that we didn't want the organized tour of the city, so we went exploring on our own. One of the thoughts we had was to go the waterfront and see if we could find some Russians to talk to. Our tour leader strongly recommended that we not do that, he also said that Americans were sometimes kidnapped at the waterfront. After checking out



some of the city, we stopped at a local coffee shop for something to drink. Japanese coffee is served in smaller cups than we use in the US for good reason, the coffee is very strong. As we were sitting in the coffee house, two young Japanese women came to our table and asked if they could practice their English with us. Of course, we agreed, after all we were two young men! After finishing our coffee, they offered to give us a tour of the city and,

of one of the Temples and it had a small moat-like body of water around it. The photo is from the bridge. Mayako, the one on the right asked if we could become pen pals, again wanting to practice her English. I agreed and we exchanged letters. At first, the letters went from Japan to the US to my APO address and then back to Japan. With the help of Larry Yeto, a local Japanese tailor, I was able to send and receive mail locally. It was much quicker and less expensive.





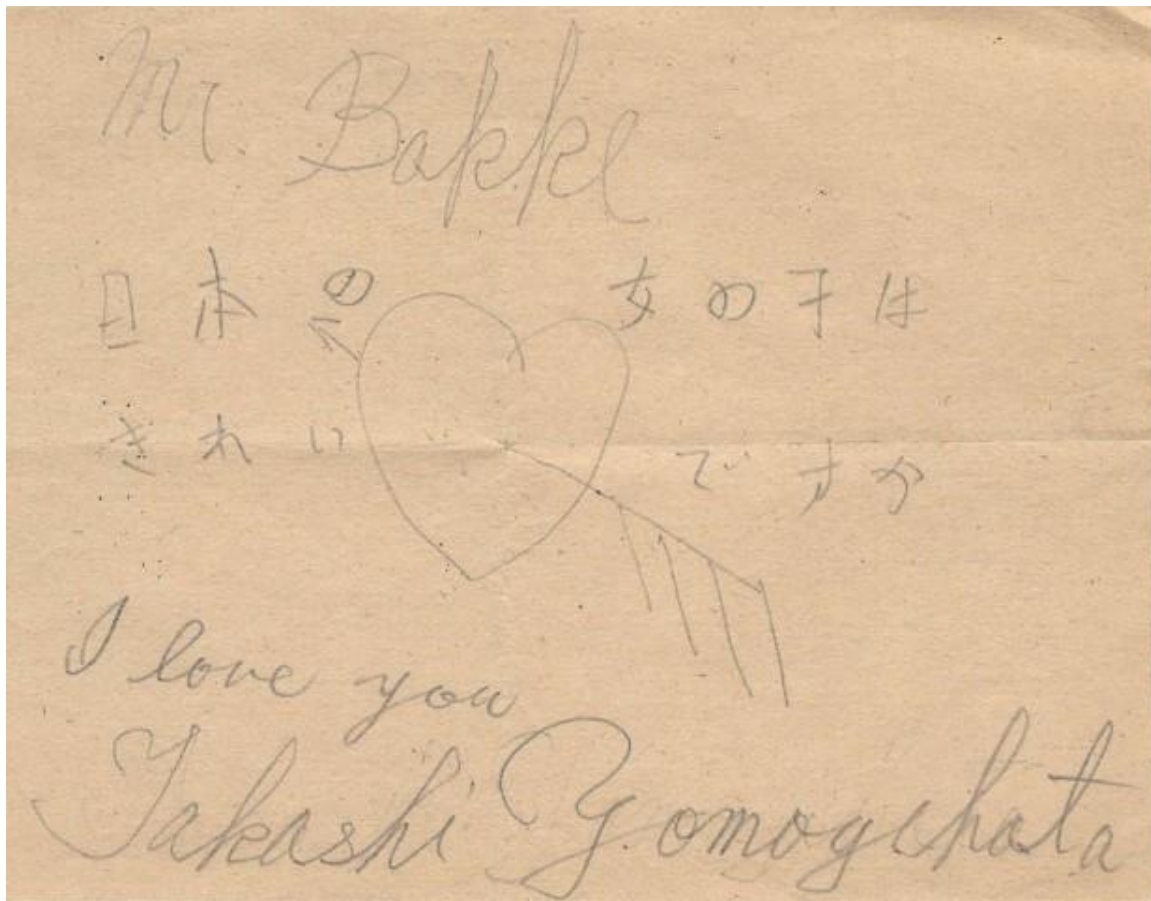
The following year, when the tour was offered, I wrote to Makayo asking if we could get together when I got there, she agreed. So instead of doing the tour, I met her and she showed me around her city. We visited a Catholic monastery where this picture was taken. You'll notice that both of us dressed up for the day. We took a tram to the top of the mountain near the city and had a spectacular view of Hakodate. Makayo's English was very good, my Japanese was terrible. She was smart and attending college the second year we met. She was also working part-time at a department store. We continued to exchange letters until I left Japan but we never saw each other again.

help tutor their students in English. Again, I forgot the military rule about volunteering and volunteered. For a couple of months, I either took a train or rode my motorcycle to a nearby town and did volunteer work.

I would read from books in English during class time and the teacher would record them for use later. For all I know, they may be still using the recordings. The most interesting time was during breaks when all the young boys want to play the American in ping-pong or table tennis. I started playing while at Goodfellow, TX and continued at Misawa. I got to be pretty good, as the local boys soon found out. Every break there was a line of them waiting to take me on. Above is a photo of one of my classes.



One day some of the students gave me notes they had written. I kept one of them, you can probably tell why I kept it. I also have no idea which one of the students wrote it.



Each year we also took an organized trip to one of the big cherry blossom festival. I later was at the one in Washington, D.C but the one in Japan was much better, the cherry trees were everywhere. The cherry trees in D.C. were a gift from Mayor Ozaki of Tokyo City in 1912. Mayor Ozaki donated the trees to enhance the growing friendship between the United States and Japan and also celebrate the continued close relationship between the two nations.



One of my friends purchased a car while at Misawa and we used it when several of us wanted to go touring. One day, as we were driving up a mountain road, one of the rear wheels separated from the car. Since we didn't have any tools to fix it, we simply lifted the car up, put the wheel back on the hub and finger tightened the hub nut. Not the best solution because it came off two more



times before we reached the base. When my friend was scheduled to return to the states, he took the car up a mountain road and parked in some trees and left it there.

Much of the rest of my tour was spent working and sightseeing. We went ice skating a couple of times at a local rink. I learned to downhill ski while stationed there. The base had a small downhill slope which was free to use, as was nearly all the recreational facilities on base. A couple of times each winter we went to a mountain ski area and did our best to match the locals in ability.



We played baseball during the summer; I lost my glove at one game. It was the one I had used in high school and I was somewhat sad to lose it. We played cards in the barracks often, I learned how to play double deck pinochle. It was a skill that I used to win a pinochle tournament at MSUM years later. We even went to the local bars, got drunk a few times and generally had a good time.



We visited local shrines and temples and this was taken at one of them. As you can tell from the photo, we were an integrated unit. The Air Force was my first exposure to non-white people. All Newfolden had were Norwegians, Swedes and a few Germans. It was an educational experience and one that has stayed with me. While at Indiana University I learned about racism when one of my classmates broke up with his girlfriend. He was from Alabama and heard that his college-attending girlfriend had gone to a party and a black man (not his words, of course) was also at the party. He attempted to explain it to some of us, but we just didn't understand. To the right is another photo of us our barracks. I did notice that some of the Japanese were also prejudiced against blacks whenever we left the base.



We spent many of our off-duty hours in the barracks discussing various topics. All topics were open for discussion including politics and religion. It was during some of these discussions that I began to question the validity of my Lutheran training. We had people of many faiths, all of which taught the 'right answer'. I decided that all could not be correct and also decided to stop attending the weekly services. I guess we were participating in the Socrates

learning method, a method of discussion, asking questions and exploring answers in a group setting.

One thing about Japan at his time was the ability to purchase tailor-made clothes which I took full advantage of while there. I became friends with a local tailor, Larry Yeto or Yeto San. I bought a lot of tailor-made shirts, sport coats and pants. When I returned to MSUM following the service, I might have had the best wardrobe on campus! Larry even invited me to his wedding which I accepted and did enjoy. The bride is the second from the right in the colorful kimono.



During the final few months, I started thinking about what I would do when got out of the Air Force. I did have a re-enlistment briefing where I was offered the equivalent of a year's salary as a re-enlistment bonus plus my choice of my next assignment. I turned it down because I didn't want someone else telling me what to do, when to do it and where to do it. I knew I could return to MSUM, but started looking at other colleges. After some searching, I decided that Western Washington State University would be a good place for me, so I applied and was accepted for the fall term. I stopped for a visit on the way back home and liked the campus.



Near the end of my two-year tour, orders came down that anyone with less than four months remaining in their enlistment would be extended at current duty station until discharge. That meant another three and half months in Japan, I didn't want that. There was a way out, however, I could extend my enlistment and get reassigned to the States. So that is what I did, I extended and left Japan after two years and was

assigned to Ft. Meade, MD, home of NSA. My friends threw me a going away party.

Extending my time was really good for me, but not really good for the Air Force, because when I got to Ft. Meade, I only had three months left (I took time to go home to Newfolden on the way to Ft Meade). While at home, I purchased a 1959 Ford which I drove to Ft. Meade. This was pretty smart because when I got to Meade, I had transportation and could see all the sites. The folks at Meade thought it dumb to have me work at NSA headquarters for that short a time, so I was assigned random duties. It also

allowed me to be a tourist in the D.C. area which I truly enjoyed. One of my classmates from Goodfellow was stationed at Meade also. He'd married a first-generation Italian woman and invited me to their house for real Italian food. The food was excellent, especially the veal parmesan. It was so tender that I could cut it with a fork.

This was in 1968 and political times were very chaotic. George Wallace was running for President, so another former classmate and I decided to see what he was all about at a speech at Silver Spring, MD. We both thought Wallace was crazy. My friend and I had another experience of racism when we wanted to go the beach to swim. There were few public beaches so we stopped at a private beach that had an annual membership of a couple dollars. So, we joined. The guy at the gate told us to bring our friends next time, "As long as they look like us." In other words, we were members of a segregated beach. We never went back. I toured most of the sites in D.C. including the Capitol where I stopped in to see our 7<sup>th</sup> district Congressman, Odin Langen who insisted on this photo. Langen was very tall which you can see in the photo. What you can't see is that he was standing one step lower than I.



Even though I had extended my enlistment, I was still really ready to get out. I found this interesting option. If I could get a letter of acceptance from a college for summer school, I could apply for an early out to go to college. I wrote to the office of Admissions at MSUM and to Western Washington asking for a letter of acceptance for summer school. MSUM sent me an acceptance letter for the second summer session a day before Western Washington, so I applied for early out and got it! I was honorably discharged on 15 July 1968, exactly seven days earlier than my original end date. It was a Friday and I drove from D.C. to the UP of Michigan before I stopped. I got to Moorhead on Sunday and started class on Monday. One of my classes was a Humanities class and the first book assigned to read was Heller's Catch 22. I so enjoyed the book, I read it completely one night, finishing early morning.

My four years in the Air Force were great years for me for many reasons. I earned a year's worth of college at IU, I earned the GI Bill which helped pay for my Bachelors and Masters degrees, I got to see many parts of the US and spend time overseas. Perhaps the most important thing I learned was that a poor farm boy from Newfolden could compete with anyone in the country. I owe much of this to the excellent education I received at Newfolden High School, Go Nordics. Another thing I learned was that **Forced Respect is the Same as No Respect**. There were many airmen I truly respected for their advice and guidance while serving. The majority of those people were enlisted men, not officers. However, we had to salute officers and call them sir. Throughout my career, I met and worked with many people I respected, but not necessarily by title or position. There is a story of the most important people in my life on this web site. I have a story of some of those important people on this website.