BEAUTIFUL SABRE

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BEAUTIFUL SABRE

A USAF Pilot's Memoir of Gunnery School and Flying the Storied F-86F

EDWARD K. MILLS II

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Dedication

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY Princeton University roommates, Tony Ross and George Hackl. Both were United States Air Force fighter pilots.

Tony was in USAF flight school class 57-O. After earning his wings, he was assigned to Perrin AFB in Sherman, Texas for advanced interceptor training. From there he was assigned to an active duty squadron, the 49th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, Air Defense Command. The 49th was based at Laurence G. Hanscom Field in Bedford, Massachusetts. The aircraft Tony flew for the 49th was the F-86L. He returned to Princeton to attend grad school in architecture in November 1958.

Tony is a precisionist. My guess is that he was one of the finest jocks of the 49th, if not the finest.

George was in USAF flight school class 57-M. After earning his wings, he was assigned to Luke AFB in Glendale, Arizona, for advanced. From there he was assigned to an active duty squadron, the 310th Fighter Bomber Squadron, 58th Fighter Bomber Wing, Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). The 310th was based at Osan Air Base, K-55, in Osan, Korea. The aircraft George flew for the 310th was the F-86F. George returned to civilian life in June 1958.

Not long ago, George sent me the following note: “My overriding memory of the Sabre was that it felt like it was part of you and you were part of it. Like those thin leather gloves that we wore, you didn’t even know you had them on. Whatever you thought of doing in the sky, all that complexity of machinery that surrounded you was thinking of exactly the same thing at the same moment. It was never ahead of you but there wasn’t the slightest fraction of delay in its response. And it was nimble, smooth, fast, friendly. You could pull it around hard and it jumped with you.”

Although George came to fly the F-86F for many more hours than I, we loved the bird in equal measure.

Prologue

THE ROAR OF A JET ENGINE BROUGHT US out of the dining room, onto to an aft deck. The ship was the RMS *Saxonia,* a Cunard Line passenger vessel sailing from Liverpool to Montreal. It was midday on an August day in 1955. My wife and I, newly married babes of twenty-one, were coming home from our honeymoon. Since June we had been traveling in France and the British Isles. Now the *Saxonia* was taking us west on the St. Lawrence River, headed for Montreal. From there we would go by train to New Jersey, where we would move in temporarily with my parents. There I would wait for orders from the United States Air Force.

We could see the airplane in the distance. The roar we had heard had coincided with its zooming up, over the ship. It then had turned away from the *Saxonia*, sliding behind, curving down to pick up the course of the river. Now it was skimming flat, just above the rippling surface, headed once again for the ship, about to make another pass. In an instant, it was beside us, level with the deck on which we were standing. It was so close it seemed we could touch it if we were to reach out. We looked into the face of the pilot, peering over at us through his gleaming,

Plexiglas canopy. The airplane was beautiful. It was a creature of fine design, wings swept back, made for speed, graceful and robust at the same time. And it flaunted a gorgeous, radiant color—cerulean blue. Later we marveled that someone in the Royal Canadian Air Force had been allowed, perhaps even authorized, to select such a color. Perhaps the pilot was a very important person? Or did the airplane itself, being beautiful, simply demand dazzling paint?

Now it was past us, behind us and above us. The noise was deafening. As we turned to watch, it rolled onto its back, climbing upside down. Then it returned to right side up, leveled off, arced right and sped away. It was gone. I said to my wife, “I think that beautiful airplane was an F-86. I believe it’s called Sabre. Next year I might see more of them.”

My schedule for the three following years was already known. In September I would join Exxon, taking a management beginner’s job at their oil refinery in New Jersey. Then, perhaps before the end of the year, I could expect active duty orders from the Air Force. On graduation from Princeton University in June, I had been commissioned a second lieutenant in the Air Force Reserve, having completed four years of reserve officer training. In return for the commission, I had committed to three years of service. My hope was to be accepted into flying school and, in time, to learn to fly fighter planes. But that day on the *Saxonia’s* deck it was beyond imagining that the fighter I would eventually fly would be the very same, beautiful Sabre.

One

Princeton

One Saturday afternoon in the summer of 1951, not long before I was scheduled to enter Princeton University as a freshman, my father said to me, “We need to talk.” It was an unusual moment. He and I did not know each other very well. When I was a little kid, he had been away in World War II. He was commanding officer of a United States Navy ship of war. Overseas. After the war, when he was home again, I was away at boarding school. We did overlap, however, in the summers. But even then we seldom saw each other. He was preoccupied at work. He was striving, hoping to ascend to the presidency of a bank in New York City (eventually he did). I also was busy. In my teen years I always had summer jobs.

So I was apprehensive. He led me into the room in our house that he used as an office. He sat behind a desk. I took a chair in front. The afternoon sun streamed into the room. He got right to the point. “I commend you for applying to Princeton University and for getting in. Now we need to talk about how you intend to discharge your military obligation.”

I had no idea what he was talking about. About a year earlier, the North Koreans had invaded South Korea and there was

fighting going on. However, word of it had barely penetrated the cocoon of my boarding school. I was vaguely aware that Americans were engaged in the conflict. Obviously they served in the military. Perhaps this was what he had in mind. So I said, “Do you mean Korea, sir?”

“Well, yes, to an extent. But my feeling is that people of privilege, like us, have an obligation to serve our country, no matter what the global circumstance, whether we—Americans—are at war or in peace. And I believe the best way for us to do that is to serve in the military. Voluntarily. More than that, I feel we should make every effort to serve as officers. We need, if we can, to help lead the parade.”

Again, what he was saying was over my head. Although I well knew that he had been an officer in the Navy, I did not know how he became one and I could not even guess how I might become one. Or how becoming one would connect to my attending Princeton. I respectfully asked him to explain.

He told me that there were two paths I might follow. One was to sign up, on arrival at Princeton, to enter an ROTC unit. ROTC stood for Reserve Officer Training Corps. He explained that, at many colleges, including Princeton, ROTC units represented each of the three branches of the United States military: Army, Navy and Air Force. Boys who joined one of those units would, on graduation, be awarded commissions as officers in return for taking ROTC courses each academic year and attending military camp in the summer between their junior and senior year. The other path described by my father involved joining one of the military branches not as an officer but as an enlisted man. That could be done after graduation. Once introductory, enlisted training was complete, it would be possible to apply for admission to Officer Candidate School (OCS). Successful completion of OCS training would lead to an officer’s commission.

After explaining all this, my father said, "Please make sure you understand. I am happy to pay for you to attend Princeton. But I am not going to do that unless you commit, before you enter the University, to follow one of the paths toward serving as an officer that I have described."

It occurred to me, in that talk with my father, that I was encountering something consequential. Before he had gone off to war, about a decade earlier, he had been a little older than I was as we sat together that summer day. But not much older. Probably he had been as blasé about the conflict that was then unfolding in the world around him as I was about the military training that he was describing now. Perhaps the idea of obligation to country meant as little to him then as it did to me now. But he had gone to war. He had spent a couple of years at war. Much in his life must have changed. Certainly he had changed. So now the subject he was discussing with me was, for him, deadly serious. It meant a lot to him. Furthermore, my grasping the importance of it was so important to him that he was willing to cast me out if I failed to comprehend it.

I got the message. I didn't hesitate. I thought the sooner I gave evidence of commitment the better. I told him I would sign up for ROTC as soon as I got to Princeton.

****

I had two uncles who had served as military pilots in World War II. As young men in civilian life before the war, both had owned small planes. My father's brother had kept his plane at an airfield in New Jersey. The day after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941, he submitted an application to join the Army Air Corps as a pilot. Many young men had done the same thing. He was told to wait. Wanting to help, he had joined the Civil Air Patrol to fly hour after hour in daylight hours over

the Atlantic, looking for German submarines. They were sinking American ships within sight of the Jersey shore. One sunny morning he had taken me to see his little airplane. He was getting it ready to go searching. I asked him if he had ever found a submarine. “Not yet,” he said. “The ocean is a big place.”

He never did find a submarine. They stayed submerged, hidden, during the day. A few months after he had shown me around, his application to join the Army Air Corps was accepted. For the rest of the war he flew transport planes for the Army. He flew throughout the United States and widely overseas. On a trip to Texas he had met a beautiful woman who worked as a stewardess for Pan American Airways. She had grown up in a little farm town called Pharr, Texas, in the Rio Grande Valley. They were married and, when the war ended, he brought her home to New Jersey. Years later in the family it was said that she never was truly happy away from Pharr. In 1956, her mother would come to call on my wife and me when we lived in the Rio Grande Valley town of McAllen. At the time I was attending primary flight school near there. But that part of the story needs to wait.

My mother’s brother was the other uncle pilot. Before the war, he and a wealthy friend—each owning airplanes for pleasure—had set up a little airline. Their plan was to fly passengers and small freight from Wilmington, Delaware to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and back. Ahead of its time, the venture did not succeed. As a result, it appeared the uncle’s flying days would be curtailed, if not ended altogether. But, not long after their airline failed, the Japanese attack occurred and the uncle immediately offered his services to the Army Air Corps. He also was told to wait. But soon enough he was called up. In time, he was assigned to the China Burma India (CBI) theatre. There he flew combat, shooting at the Japanese and being shot at in return.

Before being sent to the CBI, he was in charge of a training

squadron stationed at an Army airfield near Washington, D.C. At that time, my mother, with her husband the naval officer serving overseas, accompanied by my brother, sister and me, lived with her parents at their hilltop farm in northern Virginia. Every couple of weeks, her brother the pilot would commandeer an Army airplane at his Washington station and fly the short distance south. He would buzz the hilltop. Sometimes he would appear overhead in the famous, twin engine Douglas DC 3. "C-47" was its formal, military name; the C stood for "cargo." The airplane was also called the Gooney Bird. Usually C-47s had at least two in crew, pilot and copilot, and sometimes there was a third man. He was a military mechanic, called crew chief. Free spirit that he was, the uncle wasn't shy about bringing the full crew with him when he came down to buzz us. He was casual about his flying, also. I remember one day seeing the passenger door of his Gooney Bird standing open as he banked around the farm house.

On other occasions he would buzz the hilltop in single-engine fighter planes, frequently the well-known, big, radial engine Thunderbolt. Its military designation was P-47; the P stood for "pursuit." Later, P would be changed to F, which stood for "fighter."

The Thunderbolts that the uncle flew were always painted green, ready to fight. As he turned low over our heads, he would have the airplane's canopy open so we could see his big smile. Once he buzzed us in the equally famous Mustang, the P-51. It was silver, perhaps fresh from the factory. It was more graceful than the Thunderbolt. Every time he came to see us we all—grandfather, grandmother, mother, brother and sister and I—would rush out into the field behind the house and wave.

So, when I arrived at Princeton and was thinking ROTC, the unit I wanted to join was the one that had to do with airplanes. It was the United States Air Force (USAF) unit. The name was no

longer Army Air Corps. During the war it had changed to Army Air Force. After the war, the fliers had separated altogether from the rest of the Army and had become the United States Air Force, independent and free standing. As it happened, the Air Force ROTC unit that I found at Princeton in the fall of 1951 was, like me, brand new. The Air Force and I were arriving together.

It seemed the brass of the Air Force were determined, as new kids on the block, to make a big impression at Princeton. The idea was to at least match the appeal of the other ROTC units, the Navy and the Army. I don't remember the history of the Navy unit. But I do remember that the Army unit was well established and well regarded. It had been on campus since 1919. It had a reputation for turning out competent artillery officers. Army ROTC boys were proud to go off to summer camp at Fort Sill in Oklahoma to learn to fire big guns. The Air Force had to go some to match the Army's standing. One of their first moves was to put a full colonel in charge of the new unit. The insignia full colonels wear is a silver eagle, clutching arrows. Accordingly, the nickname for full colonel was bird colonel, or bird. Everyone in the military game knew that only generals were bigger than birds. Army ROTC at Princeton had never had a general in command. So the boss of the Air Force ROTC unit immediately either outranked or at least equaled in rank the Army's senior man.

And what a fine specimen that Air Force bird colonel was. I remember him as being 6′2″ inches tall or perhaps 6′3″. He was blond. He stood very straight. He had a barrel chest. He was a fighter pilot. His eyes seemed to sweep the horizon. In the war, he had served in the same CBI as my mother's brother. In that theatre he had flown the famous Mustang. He had shot down Japanese airplanes. His uniforms were handsome, especially the summer one. It was striking in color, light tan with a silver cast. Of course he wore not only his birds on his shoulders but, on his

left breast, silver pilot's wings. They rested atop a grand patch of many colored ribbons. And those wings weren't just ordinary, pilot wings, the ones I would earn five years later. Where my wings consisted only of a shield in the center with wings extending to left and right, the wings the colonel wore had a star on top of the shield and the star was surround by a wreath. The extra decoration signified that the colonel had accumulated lots of flying hours, perhaps as many as 3,000. Earlier, when he had collected something like 2,000 hours, his shield would have been surmounted with the star alone.

Working for the colonel were three majors. Two also were pilots, but not fighter pilots. I think their shields may have had stars on them. They had done plenty of flying, although not as much as the colonel. In the war they had piloted Gooney Birds, carrying paratroopers and cargo. They chomped cigars. They did the dirty work of the colonel's unit, teaching the dishwater dull subject called military science. They hated it. But they knew their pensions depended on their sticking it out, collecting the additional years of service needed to get them to the target twenty, when they could retire with an Air Force paycheck. The third major wasn't a pilot. He was a navigator. His wings were different. Their center piece was a globe instead of a shield, appropriately. I think there might have been a star on top and he too wore lots of ribbons.

Unlike the other two majors, he seemed to enjoy teaching. Because he occasionally managed to make military science interesting and had a sense of humor about being stuck with school boys, we liked him and the feeling was mutual. Happily for all three majors, a portion of the ROTC curriculum they were obliged to teach was quite painless for them and a treat for us. It consisted of gun camera films from World War II. The majors' job was simply to get the movie projector going. We were

delighted. What we saw was Thunderbolts and Mustangs shooting at things. Sometimes their targets were other fighters, occasionally with men clambering out of cockpits as their airplanes were shredded around them. Sometimes they shot at structures called flak towers, which frequently shot back. Our favorite targets were trains. Frequently the shooters would hit engines and make them explode. Then whooshing up out of their smokestacks would come columns of white smoke, rising faster and faster. We would cheer.

Supporting the colonel and his majors were enlisted men. One was a cheerful sergeant who managed, on our graduation day, to be the first person to salute me as an officer. That morning I had just sworn to uphold (or was it defend?) the Constitution of the United States. I was striding off to find my girlfriend when the sergeant suddenly appeared, with a big smile on his face, announcing that he would "pop me a big one." Of course I returned his flamboyant salute and, answering his smile with a big one of my own, handed him a five dollar bill. That was the ancient military custom. Brand new officers gave money to the first enlisted man who saluted them.

There also was a master sergeant assigned to the unit. His rank was the highest enlisted rank at that time. He was a big, normally quiet man. He had enlisted in the Army before the war and transferred to the Air Force later. Occasionally he would brief us on some technical subject. I think it was he who told us about the 1911 model Colt 45 pistol.

In the course of one such briefing session, something one of us asked apparently reminded him of a ghastly time in his military life. He had been brutalized by the Japanese in the Bataan Death March. Suddenly, standing in front of us, in the middle of his talk, the big man was weeping. Then he was shaking, and cursing "those dirty little yellow bastards." We did

not know what to do. Fortunately, one of the majors showed up. He comforted the distraught big man. Then led him away.

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Soon after joining the Air Force ROTC unit at the start of my freshman year, I was issued a uniform. It was the winter model. Air Force blue. Its centerpiece was a formal blouse, or jacket, that extended down to the hip and was closed up the front with silver buttons. Underneath was a light blue shirt and blue necktie. Blue trousers, brightly polished black shoes and a dress hat with a leather bill and silver insignia front and center completed the regalia. I do not remember what insignia we, as officer candidates, wore. Officers and enlisted men had different insignia and I suppose ours was yet a third style. Soon after every candidate had received his uniform, we were told to assemble. This was to be the first time the brand new Air Force ROTC unit would come together. We were to meet on one of the beautiful Princeton playing fields. They were absolutely flat, carefully tended, lush green. One was to be our first parade ground.

When I arrived there, I was surprised at what I saw. First, there were boys in Army uniforms shouting. One of them strode up to me and yelled something like, “Form in that rank, candidate.” Second, there were dozens and dozens of boys in Air Force blue. And more were arriving every minute. As the Army boys herded those of us who wore blue into ranks, the size of our contingent was startling. There were at least two hundred Air Force ROTC boys on the field. Because the freshman class in total numbered only eight hundred, this meant fully one quarter of them had chosen to join the Air Force ROTC. Did they all have fathers, or uncles, like mine?

Over time, I would learn that more than a few had fathers like mine. My Princeton roommate’s father, for example, had been

even more adamant than mine. Where my male parent had been relaxed enough to wait until summer to ask me what I intended, his father had challenged him on the day he graduated high school. Informed by the flustered boy that obligation to country didn't ring a bell, the father went immediately to outrage mode. He demanded that his son agree on the spot to join the United States Navy, doing so by joining the Princeton Naval ROTC unit as soon as he arrived at the University. In World War II the father had served for several years as an officer on the staff of Admiral Chester Nimitz, first at Pearl Harbor and later on the island of Guam, taken back from the Japanese. Cowed temporarily, the son assured his father he would join the Navy ROTC as soon as he arrived at Princeton. Three months later, when he got there, however, he regained a measure of self-respect and independence—joining not the Navy ROTC but, instead, the Air Force, determined to serve his country as a pilot. The father did not object.

Six years later the son spent two years in an Air Force Air Defense Command squadron as an active duty fighter pilot. His job was to protect the United States against foreign air attack. He flew a war plane every day. It was the F-86L, cousin of the beautiful Sabre. His father was proud.

The presence of the Army boys herding the boys in blue that afternoon on the Princeton parade ground was quickly understood. Because all the Air Force ROTC kids were freshmen, none knew how to drill or march or salute or do other, simple, military things. Because it would have been beneath the dignity of the colonel and his majors to chase us around a parade ground, and inappropriate for the enlisted men, the unit had borrowed older Army ROTC boys who had had some military training.

As to why there were so many kids in Air Force blue? One reason was indeed the influence of fathers, and uncles, like mine. Another reason had to be the widespread awareness at the time that the government was considering reinstating the draft that had been in

place during World War II. So boys could conclude that it would be better to fly in Korea than to serve there in the infantry and, whether you could fly or not, it would be better to serve as an officer than as an enlisted man. Also, the colonel's men had done a good job of spreading the image of the Air Force around the Princeton campus. There were lots of posters of fighter planes, and horizon searching fighter pilots (some wearing G-suits, which I would learn about later) on display. They were to be found outside lecture halls and dining halls and on the way into the library and even at the entrance of famous Nassau Hall, where Madison and Wilson had sojourned.

Stepping into the rank as directed by the Army ROTC boy, I received shouted guidance. "Get that toothpick out of your mouth, candidate! And the next time I see you, candidate, you damn well better have that haircut. You look like a shaggy dog!"

Later in my Princeton days I came to know the fellow who shouted at me that first day. He was from a well-to-do coal mining family in West Virginia. Like me, he had been sent away to boarding school. His was a military school. So when he arrived at Princeton he already knew how to do military things. After he graduated, he served in the artillery and had a good record.

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Just as the Army ROTC boys went off to Fort Sill, Oklahoma in the summer of their junior year, so we Air Force ROTC boys had a summer camp experience. In the summer of 1954, ours was at Greenville, South Carolina. The Air Force base there was Donaldson Air Force Base (AFB). The airplanes stationed at Donaldson were multi-engine craft. Some were newer versions of the venerable, twin engine Gooney Bird. Those were called Flying Boxcars. They had a strange look. The cockpit and cargo compartment was a sort of pod. It did not have the usual fuselage. Instead, it had two booms sticking out the back. Rudders to make

the thing turn and elevators to make it go up and down were attached to the ends of the booms. We learned at Donaldson that sometimes the Flying Boxcars were called Flying Coffins.

The other airplanes that lived at Donaldson AFB were bigger, four engine creatures called Globemasters. They seemed huge, much larger than any airplane I had ever seen. They looked to be four stories high, or maybe even six. When they taxied around the airfield they moved slowly, their four engines humming. They were grand. Dignified. They were silver. We never knew exactly what they did for the Air Force. We supposed they transported people. But to what end? Both airplanes had numbers, of course. The Boxcars were C-119s. The Globemasters were C-124s.

Our summer camp activities were mainly drilling, exercising and playing games. At Princeton we had learned the rudiments of marching. I had been taught to call out, “To duh reahh, harch, by duh leff flank, harch, a bowut face” and so on. I even knew esoteric commands like, “Right ohh blee eek, harch.” Every morning at Donaldson we spent two hours marching. It was hot. And the fields were not as flat as at Princeton and they were much dustier. Elderly Air Force captains supervised us. I must have made a favorable impression on some of them. Because frequently I was ordered to lead the formations of marching boys. I counted cadence (“Hup, hup, hup, leff rite leff”) and gave commands and walked at the head of the parade. I have an ancient photograph of a formation that summer. I am in the front rank, calling out something. We all are clothed in jump suits of some sort. On our heads we are wearing pith helmets.

When the morning’s marching was done, we would be ordered to change into T shirts and shorts for exercise. For an hour we would do pushups and jumping jacks and side straddle hops. Our contingent consisted of Princeton boys and an equal number of kids from Colgate University. We, haughty Ivy Leaguers, thought we

Plaque commemorating Donaldson Air Force Base, Greenville, South Carolina.

were superior. In marching and doing exercises, as best we could tell, we were. Our comeuppance came after lunch, when it was time to play softball. Naturally, we split up by school. The Colgate team turned out to be far superior. They had hitters who hit home runs. We did not. Also, from time to time they turned double plays. We never did. So we never won. As a final embarrassment, their players were not only more gifted athletically. They also were better looking.

When we finished summer camp, we could not escape the idea that we were one down to Colgate. They impressed us. We felt sure we would see them again, once we graduated college and our real Air Force days began. But we never did.

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There were two other memorable moments that summer in South Carolina. One was a two part occasion that happened in downtown Greenville. Four of us Princeton boys were strolling on a Saturday, checking out stores. We came across a Ford dealership. In its showroom there was a car none of us had seen before. It was a gorgeous, first of its kind, Ford Thunderbird. Its lines were spectacular. It was painted bright yellow. One of the Princeton boys in our group was from a famous, Pittsburgh steel family. He had his checkbook with him that day. He bought the Thunderbird right off the showroom floor.

Later that same day we somehow learned that a girl was screwing all comers in a little apartment above a coffee shop on a Greenville side street. The Pittsburgh boy, flying high with his wonderful new car, went up to have a look. One of our softball players climbed the stairs with him. The girl told them how happy she was to see them. Her aunt, who was keeping her company, explained that she was just getting started in the business. A little while later the two boys descended the stairs, wearing big smiles. The third Princetonian and I were waiting for them at the bottom. We had been too timid to join in their escapade.

A year later, traveling in England, the Pittsburgh Princeton boy was introduced to an RAF fighter pilot who had fought in the Battle of Britain. The RAF fellow took a white scarf from around his neck, a scarf he said he had worn while flying in combat, and gave it to our classmate for good luck. When he arrived at USAF flight school (in his yellow Thunderbird) in the spring of 1956,

he was wearing the scarf. Cleverly, he thought, he had that winter taken private flying lessons to prepare himself. So he was cocky when he started. The foot he got off on was the wrong foot. Neither the scarf nor his private flying lessons could save him. He washed out by summer. Washed out was the Air Force way of saying dismissed, dream of flying dead and gone.

The other memorable moment came and went quickly. One afternoon after softball we were informed that we would go flying in a C-124 that evening. After supper, a group of us were marched to the flight line. There we were told to climb up onto the bed of a flatbed truck with seats along the sides. We were driven out onto a runway where one of the monster Globemasters waited, propellers turning quietly.

Once inside the big airplane, we were seated on what seemed to be a lower level. We couldn't see out. But after a while we could tell that the big airplane was speeding along the ground and then it was flying, very smoothly slanting upward. For about an hour we sat talking to each other, wondering what would happen next. Then an officer came down a set of stairs that ran up one wall of the space we were in. One at a time, we were invited to climb the stairs and enter a little room. It turned out to be the Globemaster's cockpit. Two pilots were seated in it. They looked like boys, not much older than us. Each of them held onto a steering wheel of some sort. In front of them were windows on top of banks of gauges. Clouds could be seen through the windows. As each of us approached, the pilot on the left motioned us over. He told us to put our hands on the wheel that he held, saying, "I want you to be real careful. You can bank it a little bit. But just to the right." Then he moved his hands a few inches away and said, "Go ahead. Real smooth."

I did what I was told, or at least thought I did, turning the wheel slightly to the right. To my surprise, the whole huge airplane quite noticeably tipped in that direction. The pilot immediately said,

“That’s enough.” My flying experience was over. At least for the time being.

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In the year I graduated Princeton, 1955, the Air Force had too many newly commissioned ROTC officers in its manpower pipeline. The boys who had signed up in that big wave in 1951 would have been useful to the Air Force had they gone on active duty right then, or even if they had done so a year later, or even two years later. But their deal was that they were allowed to finish college first, and by 1955 the Korean fighting had come to a stop. An armistice had been signed. So the need for the 1951 entrants was diminished. The Air Force told us to wait. The summer and fall went by. Finally, in the spring of 1956, a summons was issued.