



What a Small World ! *(A letter from James "Bronco" Lane to Nate Hill, dated Dec. 1, 2001)*

I was very surprised upon receiving the TAC TANKER application, that it was to be returned to Lancaster, OH. I was born in Fairfield County, just north of Lancaster on August 28, 1923. I grew up on a farm and went for years to a one room school. In later years my father, who is deceased, and the rest of the family moved to Lancaster to 218 So. Mt. Pleasant St. I graduated in 1941, from Lancaster HS, which was then located on Mulberry St, up on the hill. My father was Asst. Postmaster at the Post Office for 47 years.

While attending HS during the thirties, I worked after school at the East End Plant of Anchor Hocking Glass Co. loading box cars for their Shipping Dept. I In 1941, after Pearl Harbor, I along with many others was called upon to serve our great nation. I was selected to serve in the old Army Air Corps. There weren't too many airplanes in those days and for just a farm boy, this was awesome. I flew B-17s over Europe and after completing 27 missions, I returned to be retrained on B-29s, but Japan surrendered and I was discharged. I went back to Lancaster, and went one year to OSU in Columbus on the GI Bill. But my heart was committed to flying, so I re-enlisted for Germany to see the country we had bombed. I got caught up in the "Blockade of Berlin," and ended up flying C-54s in and out of Templehof.

I returned to US in early 1950, assigned to 92nd Bomb Group flying B-29s at Spokane, WA. In June 1950, North Korea decided to attack South Korea, so this bomb group left for Yokota, Japan, and on July 6 we dropped our first bombs on North Korea. In October, we were replaced by another bomb group and we returned to Spokane AFB to retrain on a new larger bomber, the B-36, "Peacemaker," also known as 6 turning and 4 burning, a real awesome aircraft.

In the early 50s, I was selected to an assignment at Wright-Patterson AFB, with the Air Research and Development Command. I was privileged to be selected as a crew member to go to England to view their refueling of aircraft in-flight. When we returned Larry Bassett was selected to improve and do prototype refueling techniques. He was a design engineer. I was privileged to deliver the first B-29 to Hayes Aircraft, in Birmingham, AL to be retrofitted from a bomber to a tanker, and we did the initial testing of this. Then later because of the need for a faster aircraft they selected the KB-50. Then they saw the addition of the jet pods and developed the KB-50Js

I left Wright-Patterson and was reassigned to Travis AFB and was introduced to the C-97, which in my opinion was the Cadillac of aircraft. But this was short lived as I was selected because of my B-29 experience to return to the Far East, this time to Okinawa, to fly another tour over North Korea. When this 6 months was completed, I was reassigned to Lake Charles AFB and was flying KC-97s, refueling B-47s. Then one day, Personnel called me and asked about my experience with KB-50s. I told them about the early days experimenting with B-29s and then moving to a more powerful B-50 and adding the jets. They said they were in need of Flight Engineers to fly KB-50s at the 4504th Air Refueling Wing located at Langley AFB VA. So I shipped to this facility and was assigned to the 429th AREFS. It was a great time and experience. My A/C was Maj. George Gebhardt, who later was promoted to Lt.Col. Charles (Chic) Wright along with John Grandinetti were the refueling operators. Col. Gebhardt and the rest of his crew, along with two other KB-50 crews, with the Colonel as detachment commander, were sent to Saudi-Arabia to train their fighter pilots in in-flight refueling.

When they closed up the refueling operation at Langley, I was reassigned to McGuire AFB, NJ and was flying C-135s. I was Department of Defense qualified and if they were short staffed in DC, we were called to make up the shortage to fly dignitaries. I was later reassigned to Dover AFB, DE and was checked out on C-124s. They called this bird "Old Shaky." I spent most of the time flying in out of Viet-Nam. So after 24 and a half years and having been given a certificate for flying over three million miles safely over the world's air routes, I decided to give it up and try civilian life, retiring in 1968.

I went to work for NASA, in Dover, DE, building space suits in preparation for the "Moon" landing. This began to wind down as far as funding, so I decided to look for something else. They built a new Correctional Center just North of Dover, so I went there as a correctional officer and retired after 20 years with the State of Delaware as a Deputy Warden and a rank of Lt. Col. I guess I have rambled on long enough. Enclosed is my application and dues for 3 years. I am looking forward to the meeting Langley next year. I am excited about meeting someone from Lancaster, we will have lots to talk about.

James Lane

