

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JIM KASPAREK
Radar Operator, Air Force, Cold War.

2004

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Kasperek, Jim, (1938-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Jim Kasperek, a Medford, Wisconsin resident, discusses his service as a radar operator in the Air Force during the Vietnam era of the Cold War. Kasperek states that he joined the Air Force after working on a farm for one month following his graduating high school in 1956. After completing basic training, he was stationed with the 676th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron in Osceola (Wisconsin) as a radar operator before serving for a year in Sioux Lookout (Ontario). Kasperek remembers “things being pretty edgy in those days,” and recalls an incident where his unit was issued live ammunition because of a suspected attack from the Soviets. In 1958, he transferred to Truax Field in Madison (Wisconsin) to serve with the Chicago Air Defense Sector. Kasperek describes witnessing the completion of the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) building and details some of the other buildings on base. He describes some of the Training in Battle Simulations (TBS) and live trainings with T-33 training aircraft mimicking Soviet bombers. He also touches upon mingling with Madison residents in bars on State Street and mentions not getting along well with the college population. After serving stateside for four years, Kasperek says he “was ripe for an overseas assignment” and transferred to Clark Field, Philippines in 1962. Kasperek states that he generally enjoyed his time at Clark Field and with plenty of social activities on base. He provides a description of his assignments working with Filipino Air Force soldiers, comments that he generally found them to be undisciplined, and recounts having an incident with one Filipino soldier who accused Kasperek of verbal abuse. While in the Philippines, he was assigned to a mobile radar center in the 5th Tactical Air Control Unit and was also sent to Thailand to participate in training exercises. Kasperek reveals that he was supposed to have been assigned to a radar unit based in Can Tho, South Vietnam, but a mix-up in orders had him return to Clark Field instead. He details constructing six 1948 shelters and three F80 shelters for a command post. He recalls his unit seeing a large buildup directly related to Vietnam. In 1964, Kasperek was transferred back to the United States and given leave. He recounts his journey back to the United States, which took him to Alaska, San Francisco, and Chicago before meeting his parents in Green Bay (Wisconsin). Kasperek was then assigned to the 93rd Radar Squadron in Gettysburg (South Dakota) where he served as a crew chief for a SAGE unit. He touches on using height finders. He comments on being placed on alert once in Gettysburg due to protesters, and states that he couldn’t believe he had to watch out for both Russians and Americans at the same time. He describes receiving on-the-job training for electronic warfare countermeasures in 1966 and being stationed in Antigo (Wisconsin) until leaving the service in 1969. He states he left the military because of the stress it put on his family. He says that he generally didn’t get along with lieutenants because he generally knew more and cared

more than his superiors, and feels that if he had just played politics he would have had no problems. He states his dislike of Vietnam protests. He explains that the wars in Vietnam and Iraq were expensive, but necessary to show America's strength. Kasperek reveals that he never joined any veterans organizations because he wasn't technically in an armed conflict and he was focused on his family. He mentions witnessing flatbeds with coffins on the tarmac at Clark Field in 1964 that were from Vietnam and states they didn't bother him at the time, but now thinking back they were thought-provoking.

Biographical Sketch:

Kasperek (b.1938) was born in Chicago and moved to Medford, Wisconsin in 1945, where he lived until he joined the Air Force. Kasperek spent twelve years in the Air Force serving as a radar operator. He married his wife, Carol, while on extended leave after returning to the United States in 1964. He currently resides in Medford.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2004.

Transcribed by Mary Lou Condon, 2006.

Transcript edited and abstract written by Andrew J. Baraniak, 2010.

Interview Transcript:

Kurtz: June 21, 2004, and my name is Jim Kurtz, and I'm interviewing Jim Kasperek. Is that pronounced right, Jim?

JP: Right.

Kurtz: Jim, where were you born and what date?

JP: I was born 16 May, 1938 in Chicago, Illinois.

Kurtz: And where did you grow up?

JP: We left Chicago about 1945 when I was about seven years old and moved to Medford.

Kurtz: And did you grow up in Medford and go to high school there?

JP: Yes, I did.

Kurtz: And what year did you graduate from high school?

JP: 1956.

Kurtz: And what did you do after high school, Jim?

JP: For about a month I worked on a farm and then I joined the Air Force.

Kurtz: So you joined the Air Force in 1956?

JP: Yes, sir.

Kurtz: And where were you sent for initial training?

JP: Parks Air Force Base in California.

Kurtz: And how long was your basic training?

JP: It was 11 weeks, but 6 weeks at Parks and the remainder at Keesler.

Kurtz: Keesler in Mississippi.

JP: Yeah.

- Kurtz: And after you completed—is there anything in your basic training that sticks out? Did you meet any friends or any people you crossed paths with later in your military career?
- JP: Yeah. We were in the AC&W—
- Kurtz: What was the AC&W?
- JP: Aircraft Control and Warning. And people I went to school with I met later on out in the radar sites.
- Kurtz: And did any of them stick out as interesting or unusual or despicable characters?
- JP: Oh, we had a couple despicable characters, but the ones that I acknowledged were pretty decent fellows.
- Kurtz: After you completed your training at Keesler, that puts it up roughly to Thanksgiving or so of '56?
- JP: Yeah.
- Kurtz: What happened then?
- JP: I had a ten-day leave, and I was assigned to the 676th AC&W Squadron in Osceola, Wisconsin.
- Kurtz: And Osceola is over on the Minnesota border. What were your duties at this station?
- JP: Radar operator.
- Kurtz: So there was radar. And what was the purpose of this radar?
- JP: To detect, identify and destroy anti-aircraft.
- Kurtz: And in 1956 there was a concern about anti-aircraft coming to the upper Midwest?
- JP: Over the polar(?), over the top. Yes.
- Kurtz: How long were you there?
- JP: About seven months.
- Kurtz: Did anything happen when you were in Osceola that stands out?

- JP: Well, we had a couple of scary alerts. We both thought it was the real thing. People were pretty edgy in those days.
- Kurtz: And when they had these alerts were there planes identified at radar stations farther north? What caused these alerts, if you know?
- JP: One was a screw-up on MCL line.
- Kurtz: What was that, the MCL line?
- JP: Mid-Canada line. It's a series of radio towers. I don't know exactly how they work; they were pretty much unmanned. They passed out live ammo that day and it was kind of scary. Nobody got shot.
- Kurtz: Ammo for anti-aircraft guns?
- JP: Carbines. We had the M-1 carbine.
- Kurtz: Did you get back to Medford at all when you were in Osceola?
- JP: Yes. It's about 125 miles, and we worked a rotating shift. Like we had nine days on and then three days off, or sometimes it would be six days and then two-and-a-half days off, or a split crew. There were different kinds of mechanics on that. And on break I could sign out and come home.
- Kurtz: And how long a days did you work when you were there?
- JP: Usually eight-hour shifts. Usually from mid-shift it's a seven-hour sometimes; sometimes the day shift would be a nine-hour.
- Kurtz: When you left the unit in Osceola where did you go?
- JP: I went to the 915th AC&W Squadron in Sioux Lookout, Ontario.
- Kurtz: Sioux Lookout?
- JP: Mm-hmm.
- Kurtz: And what were you duties there?
- JP: Same thing.
- Kurtz: And were you just moved because they wanted to move you?

- JP: Well, there was a controlled tour up there, a year tour, and they had the replacements.
- Kurtz: And the same duties there. You were there for roughly—
- JP: Twelve months.
- Kurtz: And that ended, I'm thinking in my brain here—
- JP: September 1958.
- Kurtz: Where did you go from there then, Jim?
- JP: Truax Field, Madison.
- Kurtz: Oh, close by here. And what were your duties at Truax?
- JP: The SAGE was just starting to become operational. It wasn't operational when I signed in, but they were just finishing up.
- Kurtz: Can you describe the SAGE building, please?
- JP: The SAGE building was out west. Truax was a big cement building. It had no windows. And the bigger one was the direction center, the smaller one was a control center for the 30th Air Division. And I was assigned to the Chicago Air Defense Sector that's named for the largest city in the sector.
- Kurtz: And how big an area was the Chicago Air Defense Sector?
- JP: Oh, down below Chicago and all the way up to the Canadian border, I think. And it was kind of oblong shaped.
- Kurtz: And were your duties the same at Truax? Were you detecting—
- JP: Basically yes, except I was in a training section. I helped train crews. And it was different than the manual site. The manual site was word-of-mouth reporting. SAGE stands for Semi-Automatic Ground Environment, and that was all electronic. Each radar site had digital data transmitters that would digitize the data down to a huge computer down here, and it would flash up on the screen similar to the screens that you see on TV where the FAA is using.
- Kurtz: Did they have aircraft at Truax Field that would be utilized with this radar?

JP: Two squadrons of F102s.

Kurtz: And were they National Guard or regular Air Force?

JP: Regular Air Force. All regular.

Kurtz: And how long were you in Truax?

JP: Four years.

Kurtz: So that would be—

JP: '62, October of '62.

Kurtz: And were your duties the same the whole time you were at Truax?

JP: Pretty much. We ran a simulation program called TBS, Training in Battle Simulation, and I was the air base simulator. The real-life controllers and director would call me up to scramble aircraft, and I would pass the information to intercept pilot simulators. We had a room about twice as big as this one with scopes on it, and the guy made believe he was an intercept pilot and he put directions into his scope. It was like a big video game.

Kurtz: Right. So there were no planes actually involved in it then.

JP: On the TBS, no. Occasionally, in fact regularly, they would take T33 jet trainers and fly them up to northern Minnesota, and they'd turn around and they'd come back and make believe they were a bomber. I think they had, I'm not sure, I think they had devices on there to make them pink(??) or reflect like a big aircraft. And they used live aircraft to intercept them.

Kurtz: So that was part of the training.

JP: We had simulated training and we had live training.

Kurtz: When you were here at Madison and Truax, did you meet any people in the local area?

JP: Civilians?

Kurtz: Yes. That's why I asked the question.

JP: Sure. I was young, single, had too much money, and I howled at the moon regularly.

- Kurtz: Did you ever go down to State Street?
- JP: Regularly.
- Kurtz: One a hundred years from now, what was the name of the place you went to on State Street?
- JP: Jeske's(??).
- Kurtz: Yes. Know it well. For the record, that was a tavern that doesn't exist anymore, about mid-State Street, which had a lot of people from the Air Force there.
- JP: I didn't get along with the college kids worth a darn. I can't understand why. I got along with working people, working girls, beauticians, nurses. And word got around that I lived up north and I went up there regularly, and I would be taking some girls up north. I enjoyed the company, you know. It was a full hour trip. And one time in particular I picked one up from Mendota State Hospital, a student nurse—
- Kurtz: I'm glad it wasn't an inmate.
- JP: No. And she asked me when would we get to Medford. Her dad was going to pick her up from Cornell, which was about 57 miles away. And I _____ in front of the Avon Theater and did exactly as I said. Got up there, pulled onto Main Street in front of the Avon Theater and there was her dad. And the look on his face was frantic. And I didn't think anything of it. He wanted to pay me, I didn't want any money, glad to have the company. And we have a daughter now, and I'd go nuts if something like that happened. That sticks out in my mind.
- Kurtz: So when you completed your tour at Truax where were you sent?
- JP: I volunteered for overseas in the Far East.
- Kurtz: And at that point did you re-enlist? I think you
- JP: I re-enlisted in 1960, this was in '62.
- Kurtz: So you volunteered to go to the Far East. What were you thinking about? You just wanted to go to the Far East?
- JP: I don't know what I was thinking. Four years here and I was ripe for an overseas assignment, and I thought I'd rather choose, and I did. And it was a short time later, maybe a month, I got orders to go to Headquarters 13th Air Force.

Kurtz: And where was that?

JP: Clark.

Kurtz: Clark Field in the Philippines.

JP: Yes.

Kurtz: And what were your duties at Clark Field?

JP: I was in the control center. We had radar sites reporting into us manually, and I worked with the Philippine Air Force.

Kurtz: And what was the Philippine Air Force doing at that time? Were they concerned about being attacked? Did they have guerilla problems?

JP: Well, this is only an opinion. They were a very undisciplined bunch, and I was kind of a black-and-white guy. If it's not right, it's wrong. And there's politics involved. And we had a confrontation with one of the people that was responsible to me. I had responsibility but no authority; very uncomfortable. So I went in, and after it calmed down a little bit I went in and I told them I wanted to go to the 5th Tac. And they sent me there. Just a mobile radar outfit.

Kurtz: Could you explain what the issue was when you said that you had—and I understand responsibility but not authority was, but what rank were you?

JP: Staff sergeant.

Kurtz: And what was happening that you couldn't make happen?

JP: The Philippino Air Force behind a plotting board were joking around, undisciplined, and we had an unknown aircraft come down, and it was cause for a great deal of concern, unidentified aircraft come down from the northern Lausanne. And it was identified friendly, and when an aircraft is identified friendly the color in which it's plotted goes from orange to white. So I told them, I got on the phone and told them it was friendly.

They didn't do anything, kept plotting it in orange, and it went on for several minutes. The senior controller was looking over at me. How come? How come? It's friendly. So I got on the board and I yelled at him. I got on the phone and I yelled at the guy, the damn thing is friendly. And he went ballistic and he said I swore at him and you can't do that, this is my country and all that. I felt I didn't have the backing, so I

thought it was a no-win situation. And we worked on a rotating shift, and that was a nine and three, and that was no good.

Kurtz: So you went to the 5th Air Tac—

JP: Tactical Control Group.

Kurtz: Fifth Tactical Air Control Group. And what were your duties there?

JP: We had a mobile radar, and we had a mobile air command center that we would set up, tear down, put on trucks ready for deployment. Did that for about a year.

Kurtz: So that would be roughly—what point in time are we there?

JP: See, I left the 13th Air Force in the spring of '63. I don't know the exact—

Kurtz: That's fine. And you state this went for a year or so, roughly until the spring of '64.

JP: I was in 5th Tac for about a year.

Kurtz: And did you ever get back to the United States when you were in the Philippines during then? So you were in the Philippines now for about two years?

JP: No, it was an 18-month tour.

Kurtz: An 18-month tour. I'm sorry. So did you complete your tour, then, in the 5th Air Tac?

JP: Yes.

Kurtz: Then what happened after that?

JP: We went TDY. We had a radar over set in 1948 shelters with associated personnel equipment and low-ground(??) trucks, and we were supposed to go to a place called Can Tho, South Vietnam. And they dragged on. There was some politics involved. First, I think we had to have a passport to go there, then we didn't have to have a passport. And they dragged it on and dragged it on, and then they found out that I couldn't go because I didn't have enough retainability. So I went instead, we had another operation of mobile command post, I think it was called Air Operations Center, AOC. We went to Bangkok for the Cedo(?) exercise _____(??).

Kurtz: And how long were you there?

- JP: Thirty days.
- Kurtz: You mentioned that the unit you were in was going to be deployed to Can Tho. What was the feeling about the Vietnam situation in '64 in the Philippines, anytime you were in the Philippines?
- JP: We were ready to go. We weren't spoiling for a fight, but there was no question in anybody's mind that if they send us we'll do it. We'll get the job done. Unfortunately, when they deployed they were overrunning the strike(??).
- Kurtz: Is that right?
- JP: Yeah. But it was rebuilt.
- Kurtz: So in other words, these are all friends of yours that you worked with for nearly a year or thereabouts, and they got sent to Can Tho, which is south of Saigon in the Delta area.
- JP: Yes, out in the Delta.
- Kurtz: Out in the Delta area. And they set up at an airfield there.
- JP: From what I understand, over the Internet I got pictures of Can Tho, but it wasn't when I was there; when I was gone. It's right on the edge of the river. And they had to fill. They put an awful lot of fill in. And you'll see pictures downstairs of the radar at Clark. We were setting up an exercise. It was a double 1948 shelter. Do you know that?
- Kurtz: No, please describe it.
- JP: It's a shelter, a 1948 shelter comes, I don't know where it got its name from, it comes in boxes. The boxes open up, and they're the floor of the shelter. Inside the boxes are blankets. They're thick blankets about maybe two, two-and-a-half inches. Also, the ribs are in them. The ribs are held together by hinges, like a Quonset.
- Kurtz: Okay, then I know what they are.
- JP: And it goes up easy. And you can theoretically, without the end frame, go forever, just add on and add on. And this was a double.
- I met one survivor in Mississippi later on. He got the Silver Star, I think. I didn't talk to him. He was an instructor and I didn't get along with him very well to begin with. And then a friend of mine, they said he was

trying to drink some Naval Air Station in Florida dry. He was a basket case. From what I understand is they depended on the South Vietnamese army to protect them, and they didn't.

Kurtz: So their mission was to help both the South Vietnamese Air Force and whatever United States Air Force planes were operating?

JP: Plus ground support, right.

Kurtz: And so tactical air support groups are not necessarily associated with an airfield, they're associated with air operations?

JP: Yes. We could set up anywhere if the ground was level and the terrain was conducive to radar. You don't want to set up in the valley.

Kurtz: So that's why they were set up on this river bank, then, at Can Tho because they were controlling the operations in that area around there then? But you were in Thailand on a Cedo(??) exercise. Could you describe what that was all about?

JP: We deployed an air command post. It consisted of a half a dozen double 1948 shelters and about three F80 shelters, and there was basically a command post.

Kurtz: What did it command?

JP: It commanded theoretically an exercise that went out throughout the country, out of Thailand. They had the radar sites up in Shanghai and Korat and I don't know where else. We didn't operate, we just erected. They brought in a crew to do the operations.

Kurtz: Were they worried about Vietnam? Were they worried about Chinese? Were they worried about guerillas? Or all of the above?

JP: All of the above. We were there for 30 days, and when the exercise was over—the King came to visit. I've got pictures of the King. They're kind of interesting. When the exercise was over we started tearing down and packing up. And we were in such a big rush hurry to get back to Clark that we beat a message from 13th Air Force for whoever was in charge at Clark to deploy to Vietnam. Because we got back at Clark and they said, What are you doing here? You're supposed to be in Vietnam.

Kurtz: So this was the unit that you were TDI(??) with. This was different than the other unit that went to Can Tho?

JP: Yes. It was the same unit but a different group.

- Kurtz: Right. So what happened in your situation where you couldn't go the first time?
- JP: Well, if the message had gotten there sooner we'd have deployed and set up in Vietnam somewhere, I don't know where.
- Kurtz: So you would've gone even though you weren't eligible to go by the rules because you were there?
- JP: Apparently. I lived day-by-day, I didn't worry about tomorrow.
- Kurtz: Sure. So how did you get to and from Clark Field to Thailand? What kind of an aircraft did you go on?
- JP: A C124. The funny thing about that, it took a long time. That's a big lumbering aircraft. We were intercepted by the Navy going across the South China Sea. I think they were just playing games with us, I hope. And we came back. The guy I worked for was a tech sergeant. He got the commendation medal for what he did. And he said, Jim, do you want to go on a 124 right now or do you want to go on a 130 two hours from now? And I said no, I'd just as soon go now. So it took us a long time. We left 10:00 in the morning and got to Clark at 5:00. The time's local when you're flying against the sun. And I walked off the nose of the 124, the jaws open up, and I looked and there was the cargo from the 130 that passed us. He was laughing all the way to the bar.
- Kurtz: So when you got back to Clark after Thailand did you stay in Clark or did you go back to the United States?
- JP: I got back the first of May and I didn't leave until—my goodness, I don't know. I had 30 days at Clark—
- Kurtz: So roughly June of '64 when you left Clark?
- JP: May 28th. I came back Memorial Day weekend. We got back to Clark on a Friday from Thailand, and our outfit had built up big. It had gone from maybe 100 to 400 people, just guessing. And Monday morning, we'd go out by trucks to the area where we had our warehouse stuff, and the guy I worked for, his name was McVey, called him Mac, a no-nonsense fellow, a good man. I really respected him. I looked and they had two brand new S80 shelters and a bunch of new guys trying to set them up, so I was going to go down and show them how to do it. And Mac got in my face and said, Get out of here. And he talked to me kind of unusual, so I was kind of angry. So I went back up to the warehouse and thought, What the hell is going on? And then Mac came in and he said, Jim, you did a good job.

Take the month off. And if the first sergeant asks you what you're doing, tell him that I got you doing something. So I had 30 days off. And he said, Jim, I don't want you out here. You're going to work, and these guys aren't going to learn anything. I'd just as soon go to work, you know, taught them. So I got 30 days off.

- Kurtz: That's good. **[End of SIDE A, TAPE 1]** . . . famous 30 days off?
- JP: Drank a lot.
- Kurtz: What was available to drink there?
- JP: Everything. Clark Air Base was like a resort. The NCO clubs had USO shows. I got to see Bob Hope when I was there.
- Kurtz: Oh, that's nice.
- JP: Yeah, that was no too shabby.
- Kurtz: While you were there, what kind of living facilities did you have at Clark?
- JP: We had big single-block, two-story barracks. The non-comms had rooms, two- or three-man rooms. I had a room by myself most of the time because there weren't too many of us. The E4 and below lived in open bays, but they could make cubicles out of big metal lockers. I didn't have walls as such, they had movers. It was quite pleasant.
- Kurtz: Was the big buildup you talked about in your unit directly related to Vietnam?
- JP: Yeah. They were spoiling for a fight for a couple years.
- Kurtz: So in '64 already they were starting to build up.
- JP: Yeah, they were kind of building up in—I knew a captain who was at Truax here, he went to Vietnam, and he was senior controller of the air(??) site in Saigon. And he wrote back and said it was just a matter of time. Do you remember, who was that Prime Minister or King or the head of government that got assassinated about 19—
- Kurtz: The Army you were talking about in South Vietnam?
- JP: Yeah. This captain was part of the crew that was on duty, and they had a minor revolt that was unsuccessful. And that thing was spoiling for a long time.

Kurtz: Then, after those 30 days you came back to the United States, could you describe how you were received back in the United States in the spring of '64?

JP: I got on a turbo-prop aircraft, Slick(??) Airlines, a contract flight from Clark to Tokyo, then across to Anchorage. Uneventful. I remember the airport at Anchorage was in a little bit of disarray because it just had an earthquake. And I went through customs there and got on the same aircraft and went down to Travis.

Kurtz: Which is in San Francisco.

JP: San Francisco. Yeah. It's the air base north of San Francisco. I bought a ticket there to fly nonstop to Chicago. I think it cost about \$95, something like that, stand-by. Then I got bussed down to the airport, which is south of San Francisco. I was tired. You don't sleep on airplanes. I got on the aircraft and I had trouble understanding two young men. They were right at the entrance to the aircraft, a bit of a _____ going out, and I said is this for my ticket? And he said to pick a seat, and I didn't understand what he meant, and he was kind of abrupt with me. And what I was supposed to do, they had a punch-out silhouette of an aircraft where you pull out your seat. I went out and I sat and got to Chicago. It was dark and I was tired.

It was Memorial Day weekend and I bought a connecting flight to Wausau. I got down to North Central and the lady told me that we're not going to Wausau today and I asked her how come and she said, It's Memorial Day weekend. I said, Well, how far north can I go? You can go to Green Bay. So I bought a ticket to Green Bay, which was cheaper than going to Wausau. I got a refund. She was going to ship my baggage to Wausau, and I said I'd like my baggage with me. I had a B4 bag. And they had to and at Milwaukee and then up to Green Bay. It was cold, it was about midnight. It was about 85 degrees when I left Clark. It was kind of cold in Tokyo, but I had my blues on, and a fellow was sweeping the floor inside the terminal. I was trying to get some coffee and something to eat, and shutting the lights off, and I said, What's going on? He said, You have to wait outside because I have to shut down the place and lock it up. So I waited outside. I got my itinerary logged in, it's in the records back there. I waited outside an hour and 50 minutes before my folks came to get me.

Kurtz: So you must've called them from Chicago and told them that you were going to Green Bay.

JP: Yeah, I did.

Kurtz: That's a long poke across the state of Wisconsin from Medford.

JP: Yeah. What I should have done is just hunker down someplace, got a motel and just stayed. But I was standing outside. It was like guard duty. You stand, you do what you do. And the police kept coming around and shining a light on me and driving away, and I thought what the hell am I doing here? First chance I get I'm going to sign in in South Dakota and put in a volunteer statement and go back over where things were happening. And that's it.

Kurtz: So how long were you back on leave in Wisconsin?

JP: Thirty-nine days.

Kurtz: And what did people feel about you? I mean, was there any interest in what you'd done?

JP: I came to Madison in civilian clothes, met my wife, then everything changed. I didn't care what other people said. It didn't bother me. Nobody bothered me up north. I was Joe's boy. I fished, and that's about it.

Kurtz: So when you completed your leave what happened?

JP: I asked my wife to marry me, and then I went out to South Dakota.

Kurtz: What did she say?

JP: Yeah. I was surprised. Grateful.

Kurtz: So you got to South Dakota. What—

JP: The 93rd Radar Squadron.

Kurtz: Where in South Dakota?

JP: Gettysburg.

Kurtz: And how long were you there?

JP: Oh, I was there about a year. Then I went four months TDY to Mississippi.

Kurtz: And you were just doing the air controlling stuff there?

JP: It was SAGE over there. And from the manual site, from the active _____, and I was crew chief. And about all the operator would make sure that the proper data was going through the digital data transmitter to division, and the we operated height finders.

Kurtz: What are they?

JP: It's a radar that measures the height of an aircraft as opposed to the geographical location.

Kurtz: Was there still a concern about attacks across the Polar ice cap?

JP: Oh, yes, big time.

Kurtz: So you then had the same type of training that you had in Truax, simulated attacks?

JP: Oh, yes. We had tests. The mission of the Air Defense Command in peacetime was training. That's all it is. It just had a little different aspect. Every time I'd go to work or report for duty, and I worked a rotating shift then, we had kind of a threat assessment, and it was my responsibility to, you know, what's the alert status and this, that, and the other. Intelligence summaries we read.

One weekend I came to work and there was a note that some lady was bringing a bunch of peace activists up to Gettysburg, to be on alert for them. So here I was watching for the Russians, now I've got to watch for the Americans, and I thought, What is going on? But I was just married and I had a family, so that's what the focus was on.

Kurtz: Were they protesting the Vietnam War or nukes?

JP: I don't know. I assumed the Vietnam War. Anybody in uniform was fair game.

Kurtz: This was in '65 probably, early '65?

JP: Yeah, early '65.

Kurtz: So then you said you went four months TDY to Mississippi. What were you doing down there?

JP: Well, I was OJT, on-the-job training for electronic warfare counter countermeasures. We had equipment there, and the radar there was fantastic. It's hard to describe. It was AN/FPS27, ten(?) being radar. And it had ECM capabilities. I'm telling you this now because you can find it

on the Internet. It's obsolete. Obsolete no, that's 40 years ago. And then all of a sudden they had a slot in school, and you're going to school. And I said well okay. I don't want to go to school. We had a young baby and my wife had just had kidney surgery. But we do what we do, so I went to school.

Kurtz: Where was this school at?

JP: Keesler Air, Mississippi.

Kurtz: Same place. Okay. So how long was this school?

JP: Four months, December to April.

Kurtz: So that puts us into '66?

JP: Yes, I believe it was '66.

Kurtz: So what happened after you completed that school?

JP: We went back and I worked at the same thing except I had credentials. There was a semi-isolated site, so it was a controlled tour. It's like a forecast for an assignment, a forecast for Antigo because I like this part of the world. It was a good place to raise a family. So we went to Antigo in November of '66, wasn't it? Feel free to jump in anytime you want.

Kurtz: Just for the record on the tape here, Jim's wife Carol is sitting next to him and he just said she could talk if she wants to, and she will, I'm sure.

JP: You focus on the military man. There's half of a family that takes an awful lot of dirt, and that's one of the reasons I got out is it was too hard on the family.

Kurtz: What did you do in Antigo?

JP: Same thing, electronic warfare, counter countermeasures. They had AN/FPS35 radar, which is a little bit different. Awesome power.

Kurtz: And how long were you in Antigo?

JP: Had to be November of '66 until I got out in February of '69.

Kurtz: So you completed your tour in Antigo.

JP: Yeah.

- Kurtz: And did you live in the economy or military facilities?
- JP: We rented a house for a short time in Antigo and then we rented leased housing. The government was leasing houses and we lived there for a while, but it didn't work out. So I had asked for and I was given base housing. We lived in unit two right on the base.
- Kurtz: And where was the base at Antigo?
- JP: It was about 12, 15 miles south southwest of Antigo. It's near—what's that small town?
- C. JP: Aniwa?
- JP: Aniwa, yeah.
- Kurtz: And how big was the base?
- JP: All these radar sites are about the same, about 200 men maybe.
- Kurtz: How many officers?
- JP: Half a dozen.
- Kurtz: Through your 12-year career, do you have any impression of the Air Force officer corps?
- JP: Second lieutenants, and I don't want to step on any toes, I think I met two that I thought were pretty decent. One was an Academy man, one of the first ones out of the Academy; he was a standup guy. And somebody that came up from the ranks, his name was Marcus Birdsong, he was okay. He talked to me twice in 18 months and I figured that's good. The lieutenants are just putting their time in and they're getting out. If they stayed in, they get to be captains, then they got something on the ball. My problem was I knew more about what was going on than the people I worked for. And I cared more. So I was my own worst enemy. If I had just laid back and played politics, no problem.
- Kurtz: When you were in Antigo, Wisconsin, from '66 through '69, it was a pretty contentious period in Wisconsin. How did people treat you being in the military?
- JP: Pretty decent up there in Antigo. Very nice. The northern Wisconsin people are pretty basic. When we came to Madison, when we visited Carol's mother or a friend of mine, didn't have much to do with anybody else. I never came in uniform. Civilian clothes, so nobody knew I was—I

think a discerning person could tell my haircut and my demeanor, but they didn't.

Kurtz: What was your reaction to what was going on with the protestors and stuff like that?

JP: I thought it was terrible because how did—how can I put this. It gave aid and comfort to the enemy. And public figures, high-profile public figures actually went to North Vietnam. In my book that's treason, but they got away with it. In fact, she won an Oscar.

Kurtz: You're probably talking about Jane Fonda.

JP: Hanoi Jane, yeah.

Kurtz: What was your view of the Vietnam War?

JP: Well, was expensive. It drew a line in the sand that the American people won't stand for this, so the rest of the world better take notice. Now, that sounds kind of like really right wing, but what would've happened if we didn't have the Vietnam War? You see?

Kurtz: That's a good question.

JP: Supposing the thought at that time was that if you don't stop them here we'll be fighting on the streets of San Francisco on the West Coast. I've got an uncle who told me once there ain't no bad thing happened that some good comes out of it.

Kurtz: I understand what you're saying. Did you join any veterans' groups after you were out of the military?

JP: No.

Kurtz: Is there any reason why?

JP: Well, I saw no reason to. We had the American Legion up there, but that was fading. I don't think we have it now. The VFW wouldn't take me because I didn't serve in an armed conflict. And I put my 12 years 8 months in and I did my time, and I did it and it was a job. I thought I was doing something worthwhile. That's debatable, I don't know. And I focused on my family and earning a living.

Kurtz: Do you have any thoughts about what's going on in Iraq now in light of your experience in Vietnam?

- JP: Again, what would happen if they hadn't have done it? The only thing that, I believe, it's an opinion, the only thing that the people of the world respect is strength. And we should be careful how we use that strength, but use it.
- Kurtz: Do you have anything else you'd like to share with us? I think that we've kind of gone full circle here, Jim and Carol. Is there anything that Carol would like to say about this?
- C. JP: [Unintelligible.]
- JP: If I hadn't met her I'd be dead.
- Kurtz: Because?
- JP: I'd have gone back. And I perceived myself as ten feet tall and bulletproof. I was reckless enough to do as I'm told without thinking.
- Kurtz: That's one thing I forgot because you said this when we weren't(?) on the tape. Back when you were at Clark you tried to extend to go with your unit to Vietnam.
- JP: That's when I talked to this Academy man. I went and talked to several people, and I had already forecast for a state senate assignment, and my request was at PACAF, which was Hickam in Hawaii. And he said no, we're not even going to bother. And I talked to a chaplain about it, kind of stupid, but I talked to a chaplain. You know the old adage Tell it to the chaplain?
- Kurtz: Yeah.
- JP: And he said, you got a girlfriend in the States? I said no. Well, we don't like to have our men over here, our single men over here longer than is absolutely necessary. And that was the end of the conversation right there. If they wanted me they could've extended it. They didn't.
- Kurtz: They had enough other people in the pipeline.
- JP: They would've had a bunch. Yeah, they built up big time.
- Kurtz: Well, I'll ask you one more. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you think you should cover, Jim?
- C. JP: You often talked about seeing the coffins and the bodies.
- JP: Oh yeah, yeah.

Kurtz: Go ahead.

C. JP: You've talked about that a lot.

Kurtz: Was there an impression you wanted to share with us, Jim?

JP: We would go down to the flight line. Every Thursday a Pan Am flight would come in and we'd get to see stewardesses, which was fun. But at the same time there would be a flatbed out on the tarmac loaded with coffins coming back from Vietnam. And the morgue was going full time.

Kurtz: This was in '64?

JP: Yes sir, '64. And I remember one time we went down there to just look around, I was off, and there was a flatbed out there about 100 yards away that it was obvious had about a dozen big silver metal boxes on it. They were coffins. And there were people dying over there before the Bay of Tonkin, which was in August of '64. That's when they got out(??). And that was kind of thought-provoking. It didn't bother me at the time, but thinking back now it's kind of awesome; horrendous; sad. That's all I got.

Kurtz: Well, thank you very much, Jim.

[End of Interview]