

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

JOHN WIEDOW

Airborne Radio Operator, Air Force, Korean War

2015

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1918

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1918**

Wiedow, John., (b.1934). Oral History Interview, 2014.

Approximate length: 58 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

John Wiedow, a native of Wausau, Wisconsin, discusses his service as an airborne radio operator in the Air Force during the Korean War. Wiedow comments on why he enlisted and how his family felt about him doing so. He details his basic training at Lackland Air Force Base (Texas) and attending Electronics School in Biloxi, Mississippi. He outlines being stationed at Yokota Air Force Base (Japan) with the 98th Bomb Wing, 421st Air Refueling Squadron. Wiedow describes serving as an airborne radio operator aboard B-29s and gives an anecdote about a failed mission during which he was ejected from the plane and parachuted to the ground. He discusses deciding not to reenlist and his jobs following discharge. Lastly, he comments on receiving disability from the Department of Veteran's Affairs for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Biographical Sketch:

John Wiedow (b.1934) served as an airborne radio operator in the Air Force during the Korean War. He was stationed at Yokota Air Force Base (Japan) and then Hill Air Force Base (Utah) until he was discharged.

Interviewed by Rick Berry, 2014.

Transcribed by Steve Thaw, the Audio Transcription Center, 2015.

Reviewed by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Abstract written by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Interview Transcript:

[Tape 1]

Berry: Today is May 30th, 2014. This is an interview with John Wiedow, who served in the United States Air Force during the Korean War. This interview is being conducted at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Rick Berry. John, we thank you for agreeing to do this interview with the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Can you tell me about where and when you were born?

Wiedow: I was born in Wausau, Wisconsin on March 15th, 1934.

Berry: And what sort of education did you have before you entered the Air Force?

Wiedow: High school.

Berry: High school? And now, was that Wausau High School?

Wiedow: No, that was a GED.

Berry: Okay, and can you tell me about your family situation before you entered the military service? How many sons—or how many brothers and sisters you had, and so forth?

Wiedow: I had one sister and no brothers and otherwise cousins, and so forth.

Berry: And how did you come to enter the United States Air Force?

Wiedow: I enlisted because a friend of mine was also interested in going, and we went together.

Berry: Now, was this a high school buddy, or—

Wiedow: Generally.

Berry: Now, how did your family feel about that?

Wiedow: They felt it would be good for me.

Berry: [laughs] Okay. And where did you enter service? Did you go through a recruiter in Wausau, how did that work?

Wiedow: We went through a recruiter in Merrill, Wisconsin, and then we were sent to Milwaukee, where we were sworn into service.

Berry: Okay, and you had, like, and induction and physical there, and so forth?

Wiedow: Yes.

Berry: And your first duty station, obviously, would've been your Basic Training. Where did that take place?

Wiedow: Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.

Berry: Okay, now how did you get there? You take a train there, or—.

Wiedow: Yes.

Berry: Okay, and tell us about the experience when you arrived. Were you welcomed with open arms? What happened when you showed up there?

Wiedow: I will always remember, everybody else on the ground saying, "You'll be sorry!" [laughs]

Berry: So, and you and your buddy, did you—when you enlisted, did you enlist with any understanding that you could stay together through your—.

Wiedow: We enlisted on the buddy system.

Berry: Ah, tell us about that, how did that work?

Wiedow: Well, they told us we were on the buddy system, and the last time I saw him was when we got off the bus at Lackland Air Force Base, until we were discharged.

Berry: Wow. You know, the buddy system didn't really turn out the way you hoped when—.

Wiedow: Maybe they had a different buddy in mind, I don't know.

Berry: Were you unhappy about that, or—.

Wiedow: No.

Berry: Okay, could you describe the camp at Lackland and the facilities? Did you live in barracks?

Wiedow: Yes, we lived in barracks. I was a member, A-Flight, as opposed to being X. And we did very little marching, mostly all classroom. And I don't know it was interesting.

Berry: What sort of subjects did you study?

Wiedow: General.

Berry: General military, sorts of courtesy, and etiquette, and that sort of thing?

Wiedow: Primarily mathematics.

Berry: Ah. Did you enlist for a specific field in the Air Force, or—.

Wiedow: No, sir.

Berry: Okay. How about the food, did you have good chow there?

Wiedow: Yes.

Berry: What about recreational time? Did you have any time to yourself, or—.

Wiedow: I don't recall, it's very much time to—.

Berry: Okay. How long did the Basic Training take?

Wiedow: I don't remember.

Berry: Okay, not a problem. Do you have any, oh, special things you remember about the Basic Training experience?

Wiedow: I—nothing special. I learned different things.

Berry: How about lasting friendships? Did you meet people there that stayed with you the rest of your life, or not?

Wiedow: I had a few friends, but then we didn't stay together in the rest of it.

Berry: Okay. So, that was your Basic Training, you completed that then you went on to some sort of advanced individual training?

Wiedow: Electronics school at Biloxi, Mississippi.

Berry: Biloxi. Okay, did you choose that as a career field, or did the Air Force choose that for you?

Wiedow: The Air Force chose that for me, after taking all of the tests and so forth.

Berry: So, you went south. What sort of facilities did they have there for you?

Wiedow: The classrooms were in a very large hangar, with the rooms all the way around. And we lived in barracks, and I was on—they had two shifts, and I was on the first shift.

Berry: And you were learning to be a radio operator?

Wiedow: That is correct.

Berry: And you enjoyed that training?

Wiedow: Yes, sir.

Berry: Okay. How well do you think that training prepared you for your first actual duty assignment? Was it good training?

Wiedow: Well, first of all, I was number two in the class. And I had a choice of—well, first of all, they picked out what field I was going to go into as to Intercept Operator, Airborne Radio Operator, or Ground Point-to-Point Radio. I was to go into a counseling session to make up my mind, and I was ill, and had to go to sick call when everybody else did this. So, I missed that. And next week, I went into counseling with a different group, because on the first—probably sick, but also, I would've automatically, since I was second in class, become an Intercept Operator. On the second week, the Commander came in and said, "John, we don't [inaudible] here." And he said, "I got a different question for you. You have a choice of two subjects—services. One is Intercept Operator, and the other one is Airborne. Which one would you like? You've got a choice." Obviously, I chose Airborne.

Berry: And why did you choose that?

Wiedow: That's why I went in the Air Force, I wanted to fly.

Berry: You wanted to fly.

Wiedow: The only one in my class that wound up flying.

Berry: Okay. And did your training then after you choose what—which field you wanted to work on —.

[break in audio 08:12]

Berry: So John, you chose to be an Airborne Radio Operator, which means you're going to fly in an airplane. And did your training then from then on kind of focus on that area?

Wiedow: Yes, sir.

Berry: And what's your—how did you communicate on the radio? Was it all verbal, did you use Morse code, or how did that work?

Wiedow: Morse code. I passed 30 words a minute, and—well, Morse code, and I later was also NCOIC of the communications section then overseas. Well, wound up using the Python machines, and so forth.

Berry: Yeah, explain what a Python machine is, for—.

Wiedow: That's a coding machine that is very difficult to break the code.

Berry: So, the transmissions, then, you would encode—.

Wiedow: The transmissions are coded.

Berry: And would you enter Morse code into the Python machine, and then it would put it into code? How did that work?

Wiedow: No, it was setting up the machines; that was the difficult part.

Berry: How were the messages decoded? Did you send them, like, to another—?

Wiedow: Came to another machine.

Berry: Ah. Now, were these messages between aircraft in a formation, or—.

Wiedow: No. No, it was ground.

Berry: Ground, air to ground. And you mentioned earlier that you ended up serving with B-29s.

Wiedow: Primarily B-29s. I went through Randolph, Texas, the B-29 Combat Troop training. Well, a couple other places.

Berry: Okay, so your Radio Operator School in Biloxi, do you remember how long that lasted?

Wiedow: Very close to a year.

Berry: Oh wow, so it's about a year long? And then did you have any choice in your first duty assignment after you completed the Radio School, or—

Wiedow: No, sir. I was assigned to Randolph, Texas, and everybody assigned to Randolph, Texas wound up going to Korea.

Berry: Okay. Did—when you went to Randolph, Texas, did you then join a specific crew for a B-29, or—

Wiedow: First of all, we went through further training for B-29 equipment, and so forth. And then we were, a group of Radio Operators, went to a, like, a football stadium, and were told to sit up in the seats, which we did. And Officers, enlisted men, all could fill the facility. And they called people, as an example, for Aircraft Commander. Maybe Second or First Lieutenant, or Captain so and so. Pilot, so and so, and rank. And they came to almost everybody I listened to, you know, whether in the Lower Officer ranks, a Captain maybe high. And they called one Aircraft Commander, Colonel John Steele, I kind of tuned out because I thought there ain't no way I'm going to be on there. So, I was sitting there, and the guy next to me poked me, he says, "Aren't you Wiedow?" And I said, "Yes, why?" "They're calling your name, they called it twice already!" So, I was a Radio Operator on the Colonel's crew. And the pilot was a Major, the navigator was a Captain, and so, yeah, so on.

Berry: How many crew were on the B-29?

Wiedow: Eleven. Eleven.

Berry: Eleven? And where was your position on the aircraft?

Wiedow: Directly across from the navigator.

Berry: So, you were in the forward portion of the aircraft?

Wiedow: Right at the forward end of the tunnel.

Berry: Ah. Tell us about the tunnel.

Wiedow: I wouldn't fit through it now, I don't think. Last time I saw the tunnel was when I was in service, but it was—it's a chore to crawl on your hands and knees from one end of the plane to the other.

Berry: Why was the tunnel in place?

Wiedow: So we could get from one end of the aircraft to the other.

Berry: Was it true that the forward and the rear ends of the aircraft were pressurized?

Wiedow: That's correct.

Berry: And the tunnel would lead you from one to the other?

Wiedow: Yes.

Berry: Was there any concern when you were in the tunnel about what might happen if the aircraft depressurized, or anything?

Wiedow: Well, you had it far—one end or the other, because you've got oxygen there.

Berry: Okay, and tell us about your typical day as a radio operator on a B-29? What sort of duties did you have?

Wiedow: Well, it depends on what you're doing. The one that we're probably going to talk about most today is on a KB-29, which is an air refueling tanker, as opposed to the regular Bomber. Right after the war, they started the—or actually even before the war ended, they started a squadron that was called the—I have a problem in my speaking. Detachment 4. Detachment 4, a couple months later, became 421st Air Refueling Squadron. And that's where I was when the—most of the time I would operate the radios. Keep contact with the ground, to give positions, the—.

Berry: Where were you stationed when you were doing this?

Wiedow: Yokota Air Base. Yokota Air Force Base in Japan.

Berry: In Japan? Okay, well, tell us how you got from Randolph to the East. Did you join a particular crew and go over there in a unit?

Wiedow: No, that's the crew we're talking about when I said Colonel Steel. That—we went over as a Command Troop. In other words, I was in charge of the Communications Section. And the navigator was in charge of the Navigator Section. We were a standboard crew, we were a test flight crew. So, we had several hats.

Berry: What sort of Bomber unit was this? Was it a wing, or a squadron, or—.

Wiedow: Squadron.

Berry: Squadron. And your—.

Wiedow: The wing is 98th Bomb Wing.

Berry: Okay. And you moved from Randolph Air Force Base to Japan in the aircraft when the whole squadron moved over? How did that work?

Wiedow: We all were on the same plane, flying over as passengers.

Berry: Ah, so it was a commercial airline, or military airplane?

Wiedow: I believe it was military.

Berry: Yeah, so passenger aircraft?

Wiedow: Yes.

Berry: And your—the B-29s that you actually served on were already in Japan when you arrived?

Wiedow: That's correct. That's correct.

Berry: Okay. Tell us about the facilities in Japan, the base you lived at, and so forth?

Wiedow: Well, in Japan, seven miles north of Yokota Air Base was Johnson Air Base. That was a fighter base. Seven miles to the south of Yokota Air Base was Tachikawa, which was a military air transport base. So, kind of self-explanatory to what we did.

Berry: Had the Korean War ended when you arrived there? Or was still ongoing?

Wiedow: It's still tailing out. I believe it ended the—I've forgotten. But anyhow—.

Berry: When did you—when did you actually arrive in Japan? Fifty-three, maybe?

Wiedow: Yeah, right, '53, July 7th?

Berry: That's close enough. Okay, and so you arrived in Japan, you started your operational work as a Radio Operator?

Wiedow: Yes.

Berry: How well did your training prepare you for your job there? Did you feel comfortable?

Wiedow: I felt comfortable, and I guess the indication was I must've been doing alright, because I was put in charge.

Berry: Okay. And what rank were you at this time?

Wiedow: At that time, I was an Airman First.

Berry: Airman First. And tell us about a typical mission you flew.

Wiedow: Which one. Well, let's go with air refueling. We will — let's use this particular one if that's okay.

Berry: Yeah, that'd be okay, but understand we're going to have people—a person listening to this tape, so we've got to describe pretty well what they're talking about.

Wiedow: Okay, yeah. Well, then we better do this one for sure. In the morning, we get up, we go out to the flight line, we pre-flight the aircraft, which means we check all our equipment. I check all the electronic equipment, and the engineer checks the engines, etc. It takes approximately an hour. And if everything is okay, then we crank up, and we take off for our mission about five o'clock, six o'clock, somewhere in there, and we fly out to wherever we're assigned. And in this case that I'm thinking of at this time, we were assigned to go to Nagoya, Japan, and refuel F-14s, six, I believe. So, we had five thousand gallons of JP4 on board. After we took off, we headed for Nagoya, and then—the military name for Nagoya is Kamaki. The Japanese name for Nagoya is Nagoya. [laughs] And we arrived in the area—well, on the way, I kept contact with the ground, picked up instructions, any problems, communicated with the fighters that we were going to be refueling, giving information to our Aircraft Commander, and communications around. When we got to Kamaki, of course, I had to help hone in the fighters so that they could find us on the radio.

Berry: And did you have a beacon that they would hone in on?

Wiedow: Yeah, we had a honer, a frequency. And we leave then in—we were the milk cow, of course, and they were the chickens.

Berry: Now, this must've been kind of real early in the concept of air-to-air refueling, was it not?

Wiedow: This one here, I have a picture of that you're looking at right now on the lower-right corner, is tail number 734. It's called "Triple Nipple" by us, because it refuels three fighters at the same time. And this is a YKB-29, so it's experimental.

Berry: Now, did you have, like, a drogue that a fighter would plug into?

Wiedow: Yes, hose-drogue operation. The hose was left out, the drogue was at the end of the hose, the fighter comes up and enters the drogue. The pressure goes on. We have a six-inch line feeding the jet fighter. Of course, it has to be continuous contact, and since I'm supposed—telling you what I had to

do. We keep the—our—Parkinson's. We keep the contact going, and in this case, the main fuel line gone through the Bombays ruptured. It's a high-speed, high-pressure fuel line, six inches in circumference. We didn't know it until the fighter being refueled says there's a lot of fuel spraying out of your aircraft. And of course, then we had to establish contact with more people, and I was listening in as to what was happening, and the Aircraft Commander was alerting everyone that we had a problem, and we were going to go, probably, back to Yokota Air Base where we were round robin, and abort the mission. However, he would like us to drain the fuel out of the—our aircraft, because it was approximately six to eight inches of fuel all over the aircraft. It was—had ruptured in the rear bulkhead, and they were going to try and drain it, however, they needed tools, so the Flight Engineer went back through the tunnel that we have previously described, and took spark-proof tools back so they could possibly drain the fuel. When he got back there, he was back there maybe a total of a little better than a minute, maybe. And was looking and he called, and that it was at the rear bulkhead. And almost at the same time, the Right Refueling Operator, and Scanner, and Gunner called in, "There's a flame in the rear!" And he never got Sir out, because it was an explosion which blew off the tail of the aircraft, which didn't give us any navigation prop for things. What's the word I'm thinking of? We couldn't control the plane, because there was no tail on it. And that was explosion number one. Then as this was happening, we had—I mentioned earlier, we were also a standboard crew. That meant we had students along who were being checked out to make sure they were capable of doing the missions. We had a student navigator, who was seated almost touching my back, and right after the first explosion, of course, we were in the—I was in the process of slipping—oh, we were using the navigator eye, and the Engineer had chestpack parachutes. The rest had backpack parachutes. You understand the difference?

Berry: Yes, I sure do. Were you wearing those parachutes as a matter of course when—.

Wiedow: We always wore the harness. We always stowed the chestpack. As soon as there was any kind of alert that we might have to go out, we would—I always had mine up on top of the radio equipment. I would reach up, snap it on to two snaps, and be ready.

Berry: And you were in that situation?

Wiedow: So, I did that, I was ready. And while I was doing that, I could hear the student navigator, his first flight, screaming, "I can't find my chute! I can't find my chute!" And about that time, there was a second explosion. And the second explosion, the next thing I knew, I was thinking what's going on, and I can't see anything. And I look down, there was nothing down, nothing up, I realized I was falling. I had been blown out, and he also,

because the plane blew out in an area. He unfortunately blew out without a parachute. The first explosion apparently killed everybody in the rear section. The second explosion was fatal to the student navigator. I was fortunate, in coming out, with some small injuries. Just for information, we were flying at fifteen thousand feet; we were carrying nine thousand gallons of fuel that exploded. The distance of fifteen thousand feet is approximately the same as three miles up in the air. And something I didn't realize is that it takes a long time to fall three miles. And I thought thoughts such as there must be an updraft or something, because I'm not falling down, and what should I do? [laughs]

Berry: Now, did the chutes open automatically, or—

Wiedow: No, no the chutes opened by D-ring. And what also happens is when you open the chestpack chute, your risers are tacked on with thread, Okay? When you hit the slip screen, the slip screen tears the risers loose, so that your chestpack, which is snapped on to the harness, carries it away from you, far away, until you run out of harness, straps. About the distance, maybe ten feet, fifteen feet at most. And I didn't see the parachute. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, I forgot to snap on the chute". And I thought, no, I got lots of time to think about this. So, I—no, I remember snapping it on, and I looked up, and there it was, coming—you know—

Berry: Now, did you open the chutes shortly after you woke up, essentially, so you were at aptitude?

Wiedow: No, first of all, I had passed out, then I looked around and saw that I was—nothing above and beyond me, so I knew I was falling. Then I had to get the chute down close enough to me, so I could pull the D-ring, because the D-ring is floating on the parachute, which is up above me about ten feet or so, more. Maybe a little bit. But anyhow, all of us that had chestpacks had the same experience. And we had, since then, have reached, you know, this is what happens to you, so you don't get screwed up like we did.

Berry: Did you have training in the use of the chute?

Wiedow: They told us that they would not train us, because you had to do it right the first time. If you didn't do it right the first time, they'd give you a different chute. So, of course, jokingly, but no, they told us—

Berry: Was this clear weather? So, after the chute opened, you could see the ground and so forth?

Wiedow: Well, what I saw are these things that looked like little lakes, and I would think—I didn't have a Mae West on. So, as we're drifting along, by the

wind, I'm saying that's the lake I'm going to land in, because I'm not a good swimmer. Well, float by, I pass out again, you know, you're up high, so oxygen is a premium up there. So, I didn't—passed out about four or five times on the way down.

Berry: So, you opened the chute, really, at altitude. You were still—.

Wiedow: Oh yeah.

Berry: —many thousands of feet above the ground?

Wiedow: That's correct. I was—I don't know how long I was out before I came to, but it couldn't have been too long. But I don't recall seeing the aircraft anymore.

Berry: Could you see any other chutes, or your buddies on the airplane?

Wiedow: I couldn't. In fact, it was kind of scary to me, because I—my first thoughts were how am I going to get help? I'm supposed to be communications, I'm supposed to get help for us, and I got nothing. My equipment that I would normally use if we ditched or something, is in the airplane, and the airplane's gone. So anyhow, I came down and there was a group of houses, Japanese houses, about six of them, and they were kind of in a circle. And in the center of that circle, someone had—or they had made a garden, apparently. It was nice soft soil. And I landed right in the middle of those houses, not on the roof or anything, on the nice soft ground they had obviously done that day.

Berry: And you were really able to control where you would land at all, you're just kind of at the mercy of whatever happened.

Wiedow: They told us don't try and—you're going to be swaying, that they did tell us, don't try and correct yourself by pulling on it. So, I wasn't going to do that until I was swaying, and it looked like I was going to go over the top of the chute. And I tried to rectify it and it just got worse, so I left alone. And then you're at the mercy of the wind. I landed—would you like to hear a little more?

Berry: Oh yeah, please go on.

Wiedow: Okay. I landed, and the Japanese people were there immediately, and were holding me down, and I was trying to get up, because I wanted to get help, and they couldn't talk English, I couldn't talk Japanese. And they were holding me down. And I was fighting them. And they brought me something to drink, which I presume was warm sake. And I drank it, and as soon as I did, they kind of relaxed their grip, and I jumped up and ran

out to the little dirt road that was in front of these houses. And there was a big black Buick coming down this road. So, I thought I'm going to stop this Buick. So, I stopped and opened the rear door to get in. There's a Japanese gentleman driving the car and in the back seat, sat my student engineer. And until we left Japan, he had no idea how he got in that—or got ahold of that big black Buick.

Berry: Now, he was onboard the aircraft with you?

Wiedow: Oh yes. He was the other student, that student navigator and the student engineer. And so, we—I got in, and the driver took off immediately. So, I figured that he must be knowing where he was going, trying to tell him that I wanted to get help, but with no success, he took us to a shrine, and ushered us into this shrine. And when we got in the shrine, I saw a person laying there, all full of blood. And I had no idea who that was. So, I kind of looked around the outside. I could hear a helicopter coming, so I tried to stay outside, but I saw inside that the guy was pretty much—had a very bad head injury. And I looked again, and that was our pilot, and I didn't recognize him, he was on. So, we tried to get the helicopter to take him to the, you know, help. However, they weren't equipped to take him. They said they'd come—they had another one coming. And the student engineer and I got in the helicopter. And we headed for Nagoya, the hospital. On the way, we looked out, and we saw something walking on the road that had on a white kimono, that just barely covered his rear end. And he was smoking a cigar, walking down the road. And had G.I. boots on, and looking around, and it was our instructor navigator, Captain Sinergrop[sp?], who had landed in a rice patty that's fertilized with human fertilizer. So, he got rid of those clothes, borrowed a woman's kimono, and was walking to get some help. Of course, he did the same thing during World War II and walked in China. So, he was experienced. We wound up in a hospital. Some stayed longer; I was in the hospital only a night. And back to Yokota, and back to work, same thing.

Berry: So, you weren't really physically injured as a result?

Wiedow: Not really.

Berry: How many of the individuals on the aircraft were killed?

Wiedow: Five killed, six out.

Berry: And all of the—well, interesting. So, you were back on duty the next day?

Wiedow: I was in the—well, when I wasn't flying, I was in the church. [laughs] I was in the—I can't remember what the name of the—this—it was a building.

Berry: But you went back to your regular duties?

Wiedow: My regular duties, yeah, that I did every day otherwise, anyhow, so.

Berry: And you continued to fly then as your turn came up to fly?

Wiedow: Yes. I would like to tell you, my wife, who was a native Japanese that I was married to for fifty-four years, was with me in several more close situations. And when it came time that I thought I should probably reenlist, so I asked—I told her that I thought I better go in to reenlist. She says, “Are you going to fly?” And I said, “Yeah, why?” She says, “You fly, you get new wife.” [laughs] So, she didn’t want me to fly.

Berry: Now, how did you and your wife meet in Japan?

Wiedow: She was teaching dance, and I wanted to learn dance, but I never did. I married her instead.

Berry: So, you decided to not reenlist then, or did you?

Wiedow: Oh no, I didn’t want to lose her.

Berry: So, that’s, of course, one of the reasons you left the Air Force, when your active duty assignment was up?

Wiedow: That’s the primary reason, yes.

Berry: Did you have another duty station besides Japan during your service?

Wiedow: Yes, for three months, I believe it was, or two and a half months, something like that, Hill Air Force Base, Utah. I was on B-29s again. And we were doing electronic countermeasure, ECM, work on the—

Berry: Did you make any lasting friendships with your Air Force buddies?

Wiedow: Oh yes. I have had contact with three or more of the brothers and sisters of the guy that couldn’t find his chute, wanting to know what happened to their brother, or whatever. Because they had been told that he was killed, and didn’t know if it was over water, over land, or anything. So, they—the sister of this gentleman that was killed, flew to Japan looking for the place where he was killed, of which I have a copy, by the way, she wrote up. And she, in her write-up, says that we drove in the taxi, passed a group of houses that were kind of in a circle, and continued on to the shrine, which I believe was the right one, she says. I would say yes, it was the right one. And she found the place where I landed in the garden. And they came to

see me at Hill Air Force—ah, Hill Air Force, that’s not true. She came to see me at King Veterans Home here last July, they did. Three; two from Colorado, and one from Wichita, Kansas and wanted to know, so we had a nice visit. And they were very satisfied that now, they knew what happened to her brother. I should probably say that in the beginning, right after the plane crash, maybe less than a month later, his sister, the one that went to Japan later on to try and find out where her brother was killed, but her sister got in touch with our squadron commander, Colonel Steel. Colonel Steel informed her to write to me because I was the closest to him when this happened. And she wrote me a letter asking how her brother died, and so forth. I couldn’t bring myself to write to her that the last thing I heard him say was, “I can’t find my chute,” so I disregarded it.

Berry: That’s certainly understandable. Now, did you and your wife, were you able to live on the base?

Wiedow: Yes.

Berry: They had base quarters for you there?

Wiedow: Yes. Yeah. She died last year in February.

Berry: Is there anything else you’d like to say about your service in Japan?

Wiedow: It was a very learning experience, met a lot of wonderful people. And since then, I’ve met a lot of wonderful people. After I left the service, I was a Wausau police officer and police detective.

Berry: Let’s talk a little bit about your—about the process of leaving the service. So, you decided that you weren’t going to reenlist, and you came back to the States?

Wiedow: Yes, sir.

Berry: And where were you out-processed?

Wiedow: Where was I what?

Berry: Where were you discharged?

Wiedow: Hill Air Force Base, Utah.

Berry: Ah, Okay. And that was the normal process?

Wiedow: Yeah.

Berry: Okay. And then you went back home after that, back to Wausau?

Wiedow: Yes.

Berry: Okay, tell us about that.

Wiedow: I—prior to going into service, I had been the plaster with my uncle, and I went into house plastering again for three years. And then I—oh, was hired on the Wausau Police Department, where I stayed for quite a few years.

Berry: Did you seek out that job; you were interested in joining the PD?

Wiedow: It—the problem is interesting but, you see a picture on the wall here of two young Japanese kids, those are my sons. The picture was in the *Milwaukee Journal* and Chicago papers, because they were two- and one-year-old, and spoke three languages.

Berry: Wow.

Wiedow: The newspaper photographer came out to write the story, which he did, and told me that there was an opening on the police department, and he thought I would be great for it. And that's how I got on the Wausau Police Department.

Berry: What sort of duties did you have on the department?

Wiedow: Well, I was patrolman, and then I was a detective.

Berry: And that was your active career?

Wiedow: That's correct.

Berry: And you enjoyed that work?

Wiedow: Yes, and then I left there and worked as an air traffic controller for FAA for a while. However, I left there because I had a nervous breakdown while doing it. I then, later on, worked as a manager of airline services for a security company called JJ Security. I had personnel at roughly one hundred airports in twenty-two states, approximately two thousand people, and I did that for twenty years.

Berry: And you lived in the Wausau area, pretty much, this period?

Wiedow: During the airports? No, I traveled. I had one hundred airports. O'Hare is one, as an example. O'Hare is where I was interviewed regarding my job by Mike Wallace.

Berry: Tell us about that experience.

Wiedow: He was looking for problems that were happening throughout the world, with airlines being hijacked and so forth and seeing what could be done better, etc.

Berry: What time period was this? Mid-'70s, maybe?

Wiedow: No, 1985, I believe.

Berry: Ah, Okay.

Wiedow: And 1985, October, if I remember correctly. Anyhow, I happened to be at O'Hare Airport for other purposes, and he came to O'Hare and asked for the manager, and they pointed me out, and he came up to me, and he said, "Mr. Wiedow, how can you justify paying such a low wage for such a responsible position?" And I said, "Mr. Wallace, how can you justify paying a nurse \$6 an hour, and a football player \$1,000,000 a year?" And he said, "Yes." We interviewed for a little better than an hour, fifty-five minutes. And I—

Berry: Did you know that that interview was going to take place at all?

Wiedow: Not until he came up and said, "Mr. Wiedow, how come you pay such low wages?"

Berry: How did your supervisors and so forth feel about that?

Wiedow: Not much comment. My supervisors?

Berry: Yeah.

Wiedow: The owner of the company had a really no comment at all. He said, "Good job." And I then went on to Memphis, Tennessee, and encountered a newspaper people there who wanted to know if I would give an interview, and I said, "No, I just would rather not." And they said, "Well, are you supplying service to this airport?" And I said, "Yes, ma'am." "And you're giving them total service?" And I said, "No, sir." And he said, "What do you mean?" He said, "We're paying good money. You aren't giving it total security?" I said, "There's no such thing as total security, sir." I said, "If you wanted to strip search everybody and examine each cavity, then maybe you'd have total security, but that's not possible." Hit the front

pages of the Memphis papers and so forth. Then the owner of the company said, “John, no more interviews.” [laughs]

Berry: And that was your last job, essentially, before you retired?

Wiedow: Essentially, yes.

Berry: What did you do in retirement? Did you return to Wisconsin, or—.

Wiedow: Yes, I—I’m trying to think if I did anything else of any consequence. I returned to Wisconsin, and—.

Berry: Just enjoyed retirement?

Wiedow: No, I—my sister and brother-in-law had quite a large farm, and I helped there. And this type of thing, you know, you can’t hardly enumerate the whole thing, its things that you did.

Berry: How about your children, do you have grandkids?

Wiedow: I have two sons, and I have seven grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

Berry: Okay, do you belong to any veteran’s organizations, as—.

Wiedow: VFW.

Berry: The VFW.

Wiedow: Veterans Administration has seen fit to grant me a service-connected 100 percent disability from PTSD.

Berry: Now, are you receiving treatment for that, and so forth?

Wiedow: Yes, yes I am, here.

Berry: How—have you continued close friendships you made in the service?

Wiedow: Yes, but they’re all dying. [laughs]

Berry: In connection with the VFW and your veterans activities, have you gone to any reunions?

Wiedow: I—we had a 421st reunion in Orlando, Florida, however, I couldn’t go there at the time, I didn’t have enough money to do that.

Berry: Okay, did you have any, you know, other than the aircraft exploding and so forth, did—what surprised you with respect to your military service that—.

Wiedow: Surprised me?

Berry: As things unfolded, did something happen that was totally unexpected? Did just —.

Wiedow: Oh, many things. Probably, the most unexpected is I went to town with one of my gunners, and I had a motorcycle, and he sat on behind, and we were coming home, and—by the way, I didn't have anything to drink, but I was speeding, and it was raining lightly, and I forgot about a 90-degree curve, and went in one side and out the other side of a house with the motorcycle. Picture up there.

Berry: And you weren't injured at all?

Wiedow: Oh, I lost the front teeth, lost a few other things, including my shoes, and so forth.

Berry: How do you think your life was modified as a result of military service? Of course, you met your wife.

Wiedow: Definitely. My Aircraft Commander —.

Berry: This would be the Colonel?

Wiedow: No, the Aircraft Commander, he was a Major.

Berry: Ah.

Wiedow: Ah, he had the motorcycle before I bought it, and he wouldn't sell it to me because he said I was too wild. That answers your question that you said.

Berry: Are you pleased you served?

Wiedow: Yes, sir. Definitely.

Berry: You certainly sound like you are.

Wiedow: Also, in my treatment for PTSD, the VA, years ago, told me to don't think about it. It's better if you just put it aside. Well, about ten to fifteen years ago now, they've changed completely and say, talk about it, they help you, and they are absolutely right, I—anybody that listens to this, I would recommend it highly, it helps.

Berry: Can you tell us why you decided to do this oral history interview? We're certainly pleased, and thank you for doing so, but why did you decide to do it?

Wiedow: Because, I was in the library on a different reason, and the librarian asked me if I would do this, and I told her no, I had already done one interview. And she came back a couple minutes later, and she said, "Why not?" And I said, OK, why not? That's why I did the interview.

Berry: Well, I thank you. John, is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

Wiedow: Anybody has any questions that need answering, and I can help, I'll be happy to.

Berry: Well, thank you, John.

[end of interview]