

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
Oral History Interview with Ronald Kacsmar
Civilian employee working with Nike Missiles
1962-1972

Interviewed by Billy Yirce, Monmouth University student intern
September 14, 2003

Transcribed by Mary Rasa 2010



Image of the Nike radar equipment at Fort Hancock. Ronald Kacsmar serviced these and others on site while employed with the U.S. Army Ordnance Department.



Ron Kacsmar at Sandy Hook on Cold War Day in 2003.
Photos courtesy NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

BY: This is an oral history interview of Ronald Kacsmar taking place on September 14, (2003) at Sandy Hook National Park. First off, when and where were you born?

RK: Bayonne, New Jersey. 7-3-37.

BY: And how did you end up coming to work around Fort Hancock and the other Nike sites?

RK: Well, I was in the Army.

BY: Okay.

RK: The Army on the Nike Ajax and Nike Hercules systems. I joined the Army and they sent me to Fort Bliss. Learned the system there. Went through the (Nike) Ajax School. Went through the Hawk (Missile) School. And then they dropped the Hawk and we went to the Nike Hercules School. I was at Fort Bliss for 18 months training for the Nike sites. And after that I was on McGregor Range (New Mexico) teaching the troops and setting up systems and firing. And after that they put packages together for Tooley, Greenland to install systems. So, there were three, three sets of packages going out: one to Formosa, Thailand, one to Alaska and one to Tooley, Greenland. We went up to Tooley, Greenland to install systems up there.

BY: How was it up there?

RK: Oh, it was cold. It was no place you want to be.

BY: Yeah. I could only imagine. What did you, did you know anything about this area, about the whole thing before you joined the Army?

RK: No.

BY: Nothing about it. Do you remember anything specific about when you were serving here and when you arrived at Fort Hancock doing work?

RK: Specifically?

BY: Yeah.

RK: We did a lot of work here because the systems always needed maintaining.

BY: But what was your job then? What was your specific job?

RK: Mine was radar. I worked the IFC (Integrated Fire Control, also known as the Radar Site) area which is those vans here plus the Hi-powered radar (HIPAR Tower) that sat over there (referring to its location at the IFC area at Fort Hancock). We worked with anything to do with radar.

BY: Okay.

RK: Acquisition Radar, Battery Control Van, the RC Van which is Target Tracking, Target Missile Tracking and Target Ranging and the Hi-Powered Radar which was the big one. So that's....

BY: Anytime anything went wrong you came in?

RK: They called us in case they couldn't fix it on-site. And we...

BY: They'd send you right in.

RK: Any of the sites that ringed around New York.

BY: Did your job...what did you go onto doing after that? Or did you do that your whole career?

RK: Well, I worked on that until 1972. Then they closed the place down.

BY: They shut it down.

RK: We closed down a couple of these sites and then the maintenance organization at Camp Kilmer was closed.

BY: MmmHmm.

RK: I closed that out and after that I got a job at Fort Monmouth.

BY: Oh, okay. Now, did you ever spend a night here or just in and out when you were doing your jobs fixing stuff and you just bounced out of here?

RK: No. 8 hour shifts. We would be here at night, morning, you know. You mean spend the night overnight?

BY: Mmmhmm.

RK: Maybe once or twice.

BY: Nothing long term?

RK: No.

BY: Did you ever go to the beach when you came here?

RK: Sure. All the time.

BY: Which beach did you go to? Do you remember?

RK: Yeah. The one up there it used to be the Officers' Beach over there by the Fort.

BY: Yeah.

RK: We used to go to the Officers' Club for lunch.

BY: Do you still keep in touch with any of the guys that you worked with?

RK: Yeah. Ron Hyers.

BY: Okay.

RK: The rest of them are all retired, gone onto something. I don't know where any of them are anymore. Very few... the only reason Ron Hyers is because he works at Fort Monmouth. I see him down there.

BY: Okay, do you still live in the area?

RK: Eatontown.

BY: Okay. Good for you. Do you remember anything specific that you want to share from your experience working with the radar sites? Or anything?

RK: When the Cuban Missile Crisis went.

BY: What was that like?

RK: Well, everything had to be up.

BY: Everything.

RK: Everything had to be up. This place was on 24 hour "A" status and everything else. We came to fix it whatever it was and we got the heck out. Of course, and then they shut the gates and everybody that had to lived down here.

BY: Clearance.

RK: No, they lived here. Gun operators, the maintenance people they all lived here. The only time we were called is if it (the Nike system) went down. But they kept the systems

up and maintained. A lot of times they used to run up to us, up to the maintenance shop for parts (located at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey). We used to fix them. We had systems up there to repair all the modules. And they were like, I forget what they called them anymore, all these (inaudible) you used to see they used to bring them up there and we put them into system simulate. Everything would have holes and we used to fix them and repair them and give them back to them.

BY: Okay. Now what do you think of the radar stuff they use now? How much different is that?

RK: Phew. About ten years ago I got involved in some radar, some new radar stuff. Because when I went to Fort Monmouth, I worked in the Signal School. I got to see different things and then about ten years ago I got to see the new radars especially. And they are all solid states and all small and everything else. It's that I hadn't really bothered.

BY: What have you been doing since you retired?

RK: Flying a desk. Doing desk work. (laughter)

BY: Good for you then.

RK: Working on a computer. (I) can't climb these towers like it used to be.

BY: Did you ever go to the city a lot when you were working in the area? Since you worked on the east coast and the New York area did you guys ever take...?

RK: I'm from Bayonne.

BY: So did you go to the city a lot?

RK: I used to work in New York City when I got out of high school.

BY: Oh, did you. What did you do there?

RK: Went to college over there, Brooklyn Polytech. I worked downtown New York, John Street as an engineering draftsman.

BY: Oh, okay.

RK: So, I joined the Army.

BY: What made you join the Army?

RK: Got tired of sitting at a drafting desk. (laughter) One day I went down there and said, "What have you got?" I don't know. Everybody was joining the Army or Navy or

something. So I went down to Whitehall Street and joined down there. They gave me tests and said they would send me to school at Fort Bliss.

BY: Alright. I think that is about it. Thank you for your interview.

END OF INTERVIEW