

# **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

**Charles H. Kurtz**

Conducted by Deb Barrett

August 30, 2005

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library  
In partnership with the Library of Congress

## **Part 1: Introduction:**

**This interview is being conducted on August 30, 2005 at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Deb Barrett, and I am speaking with Chuck Kurtz. Mr. Kurtz was born on May 2, 1938 in Chicago, IL and now lives in Downers Grove, IL. He is a retired Computer Systems Analyst with Amoco and he learned of the Veterans History Project through the Genealogy Club here at the Indian Prairie Library. Mr. Kurtz has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project... Here is his story:**

**Where were you living at the time you entered the service, and what was your life like at that time?**

I was living at home with my parents. They had a regular (?) home. I was unemployed and I was between employment and something else, and in January of 1961 the draft started, and I got notice to go in for the draft, the draft physical, and all that sort of thing. Well, I didn't want to be in the Army, so I took the Air Force tests and went into the Air Force as an enlisted man.

**How old were you at the time?**

23.

**O.K.**

I was older than most

**O.K. So you enlisted because you would be drafted into the Army.**

The draft was coming after me, yes.

**O.K. And why did you pick the Air Force over some other branch? I know why you didn't choose the Army! (Laugh) You could have been drafted into that.**

Yeah, well, I just thought the Air Force would be a good idea. So I did. I took their tests, and I came up with very good scores on almost all, there were four sections and I had good scores on all of them. When I enlisted, they wanted me to enlist in Mechanical which was the worst score I had, so I said, "No, I'm not going to do that."

**O.K.**

I wanted to get into air traffic control, but my eyes were not good enough for that, so I got into Intelligence Operation.

**O.K. Now, where were you inducted?**

Chicago.

**In Chicago? What were your first days like?**

Kind of hectic. We were inducted down town on Van Buren Avenue and then they moved us out. As we were getting ready to move out, a guy handed me an envelope and said here, you can carry this down to the base down in San Antonio and hand it to the guys when you get there. I guess it was all the records that we had. All the guys that went with me.

**O.K.**

They put us on a bus and took us to Midway Airport, and they had a contract flight - I think it was Presidential Airlines or something like that. The weather was not real good. It was a stormy night.

**Had you flown before?**

No.

**So this was some first flight.**

First flight. Ever. And we all got on the plane, and we took off, and they stopped in Indianapolis to pick up some more.

**How many passengers did the plane hold?**

I have no idea.

**A big plane?**

It was a pretty big plane. At that time, it was probably a predecessor of a 707 or something like that. I don't even know what kind of plane it was, but we stopped in Indianapolis and picked up more and then we flew down the front of a storm - all the way to San Antonio. There were a lot of guys lying in the aisles, and there was a lot of upheaval.

**Yes! (Laughter)**

I was just about to upheaval and we landed.

**O.K.**

So I didn't do that, but I had to step over a lot of people and a lot of others that did.

**I'll bet.**

It was unbelievable.

**Welcome to the airport!**

Yes, I guess. And then they got us off the plane, I think we had to walk down some stairs off the plane, and they put us on a bus and took us to Lackland, into the processing center there.

**O.K. When you got... How long were you in Lackland?**

I think it was five or six weeks.

**So that was your basic training.**

Just the basic training, just the basics.

**What was your basic training like? What did you concentrate on?**

I think it was just the regular basic training. As I remember it they had us doing everything. We did KP and all that other kind of stuff.

**O.K.**

I know we did KP at least twice, and then they...we all had, of course we all had to go down for a screening and all those other kind of stuff and beyond that there was just regular basic training, lot of training, lot of physical training.

**What kind of physical? Callisthenic kind of stuff?**

Calisthenics as well as running.

**O.K.**

We did a lot of running and a lot of marching, a lot of marching. And while I was down there, they had us march in the Memorial Day Parade in San Antonio.

**O.K.**

So that was interesting.

**O.K. ever been in a parade before?**

No, that's the only one.

**So you had a lot of firsts.**

Yep.

**Do you remember anything in particular about your instructors or the classes you had**

**or...?**

Well, we had a crusty old guy named Billy, Billy Joe King, I think, and he was an old-timer, I mean a real old-timer, so other than that I don't remember much more about any of the other instructors or anything else.

**What did he teach?**

He was squadron leader for our recruit group, our recruit squadron and he was our basic first line leader.

**Crusty old guy about how old?**

I have no idea at this point. I would guess he probably was in his forties or fifties.

**Ancient guy.**

For me, he was.

**Were you able to stay in contact with your family while you were in training?**

Oh, yes. I think I made one phone call. They didn't allow us too many phone calls, and they always had us writing letters back home. I wrote to everybody at home, but that was about the only contact I had with the family at that point. I was 23 years old - what contact did I need?

**Did you get any kind of leave after your basic?**

No. After those weeks at Lackland, I was shipped directly to technical training at Shephard Air Force Base.

**In Texas.**

In Texas, Wichita Falls, which is just south of the Oklahoma border.

**O.K. Tell me about that training.**

There I got the basic training for Intelligence Operations and did more KP and more marching and more of all that kind of things and a lot of Airmen's Club kind of things. Always went in there. There had a band in there that was just wonderful, at least I thought he was. *(Name of band is not understandable due to "talk-over" by interrogator.)*

**Tell us about that.**

Well, I don't remember much about him except one song, and that was called "Cherry Pie." It was a double meaning. That's all about I remember about that. After about three or four weeks down there, I think, we were allowed to go into town. I went into the USO Club, walked around town a little bit.

**How did they receive you in the town?**

I had no trouble with anybody there, but I was not in town that much, just a couple of times, and I figured I couldn't do too much in the area I was going to go into anyway.

**What did you do at the USO Club? What was there?**

Oh, I think I just sat in a rocking chair, an overstuffed rocking chair, and read books or something.

**Just to get away from the base.**

[...] I didn't talk to many people or anything like that. I was not very outgoing at that time.

**O.K. What can you tell us about the training that you had there, what sort of thing?**

Well, there was all had to do with Intelligence Operations and the use of maps. We had to study how maps were made, how to read them and all that kind of thing. We had to study airplanes what airplanes, we had to study visual recognition of airplanes and that kind of thing and then we had to -- I've forgotten now, I've forgotten a lot of the things we did. We did some of those kinds of things, and then for some reason I think I had a little breakdown of some kind and they got me in working on a special project down in the area that [...] I was making a layout for some kind of radar training for navigators or something like that. And they were building up some kind of mock geographic thing for that purpose, and I was in there carving out all these little corners from the lakes and all that kind of stuff. I got to do that.

**How long did you do that?**

I don't remember, probably a couple of weeks maybe. In my free time down there. Beyond that we were in a barracks, open barracks all of it so there wasn't that much there.

**Were you segregated from the guys who were not doing the intelligence type work?**

I don't remember that we, whether we were with the same guys or not. I don't think we were.

**O.K.**

I don't think we were. We went up as a group, and I think we pretty much - no - when we got there they separated us out depending on what we were going to be doing. So we must have been in the same barracks with the guys we were training with. Or at least guys similar, in the same area.

**How long did that training last?**

Let's see. We went there in late April and I left in July. I think it was twelve weeks or something

like that and we didn't get started right away. We had to wait for a little bit before classes started.

**O.K. So that's when they had you do a little more marching and...[?].**

We did all that and then for graduation my parents came down when we graduated, although I don't remember when they got in, see we had a separate little graduation because of our classified thing we were working on. We were separate.

**Did you graduate with the group and then separately?**

No, everybody graduated, we all went in together, and then they gave us our graduation papers and [???] what we were going to do, and then they told us where we were going and my parents were there at the same time. They came down and picked me up. I went on leave and went home with them.

**O.K.**

I had them in the barracks for visitors.

**What did your friends think of the fact that you were going into Intelligence work?**

I don't remember they said anything. I think I probably just said I can't tell you what I'm doing.

**When you went on leave, you went home?**

Yeah.

**How long was your leave?**

Well, probably...I think I took a couple of weeks, and then I drove my car out to Ellsworth, South Dakota to Ellsworth for my permanent (???) base.

**And when you got to Ellsworth, what did you do?**

Let's see, what did we do? I signed in, went to the processing center, and then they put us out to the place where we were going to be. We had a brick three-man room barracks out there.

**Three man room?**

Three man room. That's what we had, and my roommates seemed to be gone most of the time, so I had almost a private room.

**Was everyone there with you doing the same type of work?**

No. No. My one roommate was in Maintenance somewhere and the other one was in Administration area somewhere. They were all mixed up. In fact there were only a couple of...I

think most of the guys I was working with in my work station, most of them were married, so they had their houses or something else [...].

**Somewhere else. Right.**

Maybe one or two of us were bachelors at that time.

**So what did you do when you were there? What was your responsibility? Were you going to class, were you working on things?**

No. I was in the 28th Bomb Wing Headquarters Squadron, and we ran the Intelligence Operation there. I worked in the Map Library and part of our job was producing materials for all of the bomber and tanker groups that were stationed on the base. Most of that work was done by the Captain I worked for, Captain Starling, but we all assisted in it, and we had to produce materials for, I forgot how many airplanes, and tanker crews.

**And these were maps for??**

For their missions. Materials for their missions, all classified material, and all put in a sealed box on the airplane until such time as they needed to open it. They got instructions to open it.

**So they had to get verbal instructions to open it?**

They had to have verified, some kind of verification over the air, instructions, before they could open that thing, and there had to be two of them to do it.

**O.K. Why two of them? Just to verify that the instruction had been given?**

Well, so that one guy couldn't do it by himself.

**Oh, was it fixed so that two people had to do it?**

Um-hmm.

**So one person couldn't physically do it himself?**

That's right.

**How did they fix that, was it...?**

We had aluminum boxes made that we had locked up and sealed and we put all the material in there.

**And so, the way the box was sealed required two people. O.K.**

The other thing was we supplied the materials that the crews had to study for their missions.



They changed crews every three days on the bomber pad. On the first day of every crew change we had to take the materials out to the bomber pad so that they could study their mission, and I always helped with that. Eventually we also had to do the same thing with the tanker crews. We had to take the materials out to the tanker pad, wherever they were stationed, and sign it out to the crews and let them study it. They'd bring it back in, we'd check to make sure everything was there again, and sign them back in. And then we'd haul it back to our safe.

**So this was...**

And this went on every other day, regardless of day of the week

**So you gave them the materials they needed to prepare for their missions, and you also put together the materials they needed on the mission.**

Yes. I helped, I helped with it, and the captain was responsible for all of this.

**And this was all out of Ellsworth?**

Um-hmm.

**O.K. How long did you do that?**

All the time I was there.

**How long were you there?**

Almost two years.

**O.K.**

Now that was...I got there in October of 60..., no July/August of '61. I think was it '62, the Cuban crisis? We were part of that. We had bomber crews up in the air all the time, and tanker crews. I went on vacation; I went on leave about five days before that happened.

**Did they call you back from leave?**

They did not. Not me. I had a cousin who was also in the Air Force at the same time. He was out in the mountains doing hunting, and they sent somebody out to get him, but they didn't call me back. Or maybe they couldn't find me, I don't know, because I was on vacation with my parents. We had gone out to Los Angeles and San Francisco, out there, where my Dad had medical meetings to go to, so I went with them and when I got back, they said, "Oh, good to see you. Here's your duty roster, you work twelve hours a day," and we did it for, I don't know how many weeks. Twelve hours a day, seven days a week, during that crisis.

**How did you feel about your work? Did you enjoy it?**

I had a wonderful time. I enjoyed everything I did, everything.

**What was your favorite part about that job?**

I don't know that there was a favorite part. I just enjoyed working with the maps. I had to order them from the (???). Supplies, to get them supplied, and keep the supplies up to date in our vault, and eventually I was given the combination to the vault so I could handle it myself. At one point every other day I was going in getting the materials for the tanker pad, and taking them out to the location where they were located. It wasn't too far, but in order to do that, (I couldn't drive a vehicle because of my eyes) I had to order a van to come and get me and take me out there and then bring me back, and I was the only guy doing it. I was by myself. I signed all this stuff out to them, checked it back in, brought it back, put it in the vault and then took off. Especially on weekends, Saturday and Sunday, we'd just dump it in the vault and go. But during the week we'd just put it back where it should be.

**What was your least favorite part of that job?**

Probably doing KP. (Laughter) I think once or twice we had to do that. Let's see, what else. I enjoyed my time in South Dakota, played softball for the team.

**Were there any funny incidents, anything that happened?**

Well, a couple of things I remember. Just shortly after I got there I was down watching a softball game and the catcher, who was wearing glasses, got hit in the face and the glasses broke and he got glass in his eye, and they had to take him to the hospital. I remember that incident. When I got eligible for promotion to Airman First Class (that's E-4) I was told to go to the First Sergeant's office. I got over there, and there was whole bunch of guys there. They said, "Alright guys we're going into the Colonel's office." We all got in there, lined up; I was on the other end. The Colonel started on the other side, came all the way around, he got down to me and looked at me and [???] and walked away. And then all of a sudden my colonel that I worked for came in, "What are you doing here, Chuck?" I said, "I'm not sure at this point." He said, "Oh, here," and handed me my new orders. So, that was an exciting thing.

Other than that not much else happened. I did a lot of bowling; I loved to bowl out there. And I actually made the Base Bowling Team one year. And we went to Dyess in [Abilene] Texas for the 15th Air Force Tournament. I had a good time down there. We rode down in the General's airplane. He wasn't using it, so they sent us down in his airplane. It went on while the tournament, it went somewhere else while the tournament was on, came back and picked us up, had some engine problems of some kind, so we stayed an extra day. Then they finally decided they could go, but they had to go pick up a part somewhere, in Denver I think, so we flew to Denver from Dyess Air Force Base, picked up the part and then came on to Ellsworth, South Dakota, on the general's airplane. That was fun too.

Other than that, not much. I went into town a few times. I bowled in town too, with some guys I knew from the Air Force Base.

**So, it sounds like you really enjoyed your time in Ellsworth Base.**

Um-hum, I did. I had a car in lead, so I got around a little bit, and my parents came out and visited me and we went up to Leeds, South Dakota, went through the gold mine up there, and we saw the play about, a, Dangerous Dan McGrew or something up there. They had some kind of Passion Play or something up there and we saw that. I've forgotten what it was now. And of course we went out to Mt. Rushmore and one time while I was on Labor Day weekend one time a buddy and I, they allowed us to drive 400 miles over a long weekend, so I pushed it a little bit and went to Colorado Springs, Colorado where my uncle lived. So we went down there and visited him and then came back, and on the way back my car broke down. So we pushed it off the road and left it there, and then we went into the next town, stayed over night, then we went back, saw the people where we left it, and they'd left it there, and I went back later and picked it up. It was the middle of the night when that happened, and we were right on the road, no lights, no nothing, and then a truck come up behind us. Luckily he saw us and stopped so we pushed the car off the road, he gave us a ride into town - I think it was a town called Lincoln{?}, or Lusk, I'm not sure which one- Wyoming. The next day we hopped a bus, headed up north somewhere, or no, we started thumbing, that was it, and we thumbed our way all the way to Ellsworth Air Force Base. We did some walking too!

**You got back to the Base in time?**

Yeah, we got back to the Base in time, believe it or not, but we did. I don't know why, but we did.

That was an interesting trip. Other than that, let's see what else happened? One time I got the chance to take an airplane ride up to Minot, North Dakota. The 15th Air Force Headquarters in Riverside, California was sending us some classified map stuff, and the airplane was going to Minot. It was not coming to our base, but it was going to Minot, so we had to go up there and pick it up and bring it back. And my Captain and I went. That was a neat trip too, 'cause one of the guys I went to school with was stationed at Minot, so I got to see him.

**Were a lot of your friends from school in the Armed Forces?**

You mean high school?

**Yeah.**

Oh, I had nobody. It was five years after I was out of high school that I enlisted.

**So when you said a friend from school, you mean, uh...**

I mean from training.

**Oh, from basic?**

No, not basic training, from Intelligence training.

**O.K. So, when you left Ellsworth, what prompted that?**

Well, I had put in a request to go to Germany with the possibility of extending another year enlistment, but it got to the point where I would have had to extend more than that. I didn't want to do that, so I withdrew that.

**O.K.**

And almost as soon as I withdrew that I had orders to go to Okinawa.

**O.K.**

And then I went to Okinawa.

**O.K. How long were you supposed to still have in the Air Force?**

About two years, I still had two years.

**You still had two years? O.K.**

But, well, not quite, not quite two years, I think, maybe, no - it was two years, yeah - no, it was less, it was about 18 months I think.

**About a year and a half.**

Yeah, about 18 months. No, about 20 months. It was 20 months.

**O.K. How did you get to Okinawa?**

Through a Mats contract flight out of Travis Air Force Base, California. I took a... My uncle was in...He used to live in Tooele, Utah, which is just south of Salt Lake City, south and west of Salt Lake City. He was home back in Illinois, and I needed to go out there, so I rode out there that far with him and then took a bus the rest of the way.

**What year was this?**

That was in 1963, in the summer of '63.

**Things were well under way in Vietnam at that time?**

No. No. Nothing had been going on yet. There may have been some advisers and things like that down there, but as far as the major outbreak, nothing yet.

**O.K. So, what did you think about your transfer to Okinawa?**

It was just another base. It would be another experience so that was fine. We took the plane, we went up, out of Travis, and we went to Anchorage, Alaska International. We were able to get off the plane so we were in a lounge area there, and it was the first time I had been to Alaska, another first. And then from there we flew to Tokyo, Japan, Narita I think, to refuel. The wouldn't let us off the airplane there, and then we went to Okinawa from there. I got down there in August; I guess it was, late July, early August. We were in an air-conditioned airplane. I walked out the door and immediately my glasses fogged up with steam.

**Hit by a blast of humid air!**

It was a SOG! Oh, boy! And I started walking down the steps, and I heard someone say, "Airman Kurtz." It was the sergeant that I was going to work for; he was meeting me at the airport. He got me set up, put me into barracks and in a couple of days he got me into permanent barracks and he sort of just facilitated me into getting onto base.

**So what were your living conditions like in Okinawa?**

We had two- man barracks, two-man room barracks, and there were lots of them and beyond that, it was fine. The laundry was handled by some of the native people, and it was real nice that way and uh, beyond that not much else. They had a bowling alley, I bowled there a lot, and that kind of thing, and uh, didn't try to get on any base's teams or anything like that there.

**Was your work the same type of thing you did in Ellsworth, or?**

Similar, but I was generally working - we were in the 313th Air Division Headquarters, and we were, this was keeping the colonel who was in charge up to date on things. We had to keep a little panel out in the hallway up to date with events that were going on, and we got lots of publications, and I had to file and keep those and try to get information we could put up on that.

**So it was sort of taking information in the opposite direction than you had been doing before.**

A little bit. And then while we were there, we had uh, as an Airman I had to go down occasionally and stand overnight duty at some central location, communications location, with no training. They didn't tell us what to do or anything. They just put me in there. I guess I did O.K. because I never heard a word about it.

**So how long were you in Okinawa?**

My total time in Okinawa was about 13 months. And I spent 88 days in Thailand.

**From?**

On temporary duty from Okinawa.

**What was it like in Thailand?**

Well, let's not go that far that fast.

**O.K.**

In Okinawa I had the chance to take a leave and go on a Navy ship from Okinawa to Taiwan to Hong Kong and back, and that was interesting, to watch what the Navy men did. We got involved with some bosun's mates who were - their reputation was rowdy.

**Was that their reputation?**

That was their reputation to me. And we got involved with them, we went out with them in Hong Kong, got drunk with them, that kind of stuff, and on this trip I got together with two other guys, and we didn't stay in the seafarers' hotel which was not very nice. We went out and got a hotel room near the race track in Hong Kong which was really nice, and we operated from there. We didn't have to stay on the ship, because we were on leave, but all Navy personnel had to go back to the ship every night, and we were there for, I think it was a week, but I'm not sure. It could have been five days. While we were there we of course went up to Victoria's Peak, the highest peak on that island, and we took a tour all the way around Victoria Island, and then we also took a trip out into the new territories which is across the bay from Hong Kong Island. We went up and looked at the Chinese border to an area they had placed there where sometimes trains would come through with dignitaries and things, but there wasn't much activity otherwise. But we looked at the border. There's another thing I can tell about that later.

**O.K.**

So we had a good time there, bought some things, you know, ivory and jade and all that kind of stuff, and then took the boat back, and while we were out to sea they actually did some of their stuff like the rescue, man overboard, and stuff like that, and they had a sharpshooter going on showing what they would do if there was a shark in the area, things like that. We ate Navy food, it was alright.

**So, how did Navy food compare to Air Force food?**

I didn't notice a great deal of difference. It was military food, what can I say. So, that was fun. And then, while I was in Okinawa I got involved with SCUBA diving.

**Really!**

And I took training as a SCUBA diver. I never actually got out in the sea, ocean, as a SCUBA diver, but I did get out there snorkeling through the, over the reeds and what not.

**How did you like it?**

Oh, it was fun. Interesting. Iridescent fish down there. Unbelievable. So, uh, I never, I was, at the point I was going to do my first dive I was getting ready to go home, so I never made it that way.

And I never kept it up after I came back. But it was fun while I was doing it.

**Oh, I bet. And then snorkeling in Mexico.**

Ah, yeah. Basically that's the only time I've been snorkeling too. Other than the lake in Wisconsin where we have a cottage, but other than that, not much.

Well, let's see, what else happened?

Then I found out that the, my sergeant said they're looking for people to go temporary duty in Thailand. This was Sergeant Lyon that I worked for in Okinawa. But - I don't have enough time to go. I had less than six months overseas time, but, he got me in anyway. And I had already signed the papers that I was going to get out, so, they sent me on temporary duty to Thailand.

**And what was your duty there?**

I worked in what was called an ASOC - an Air Support Operations Center. I don't remember a lot about it. But that was - I had a good time there too.

**Were you passing information to pilots and things, or bringing information...**

*[Interviewer and interviewee talking at same time - cannot decipher.]*

**Or were you bringing information back into ---**

I really don't remember what we were doing. We just seemed to sit around a lot. We did make some communications checks with other locations, but there wasn't an awful lot that I remember. The one thing I do remember is when we first got there we were staying in what was used as a [??SEATO??] base for one of their exercises. It has been abandoned, and we came down there and we reopened it. They had barracks that were off the ground, they had them lifted up on stilts 'cause there were poison snakes down there - and, uh, they re-habbed them, put new screens on it, put floorboards on it and all that kind of stuff. The boards were, had slats in them, in these things, so I think they covered them eventually with plywood or something like that, and we had barracks with mosquito netting, and when we first got there, they took old C-rations, broke them apart and put everything together so they could cook it up. They had big pots of water that they cooked the main meals in, and had all the other stuff laid out. That was interesting to see that, I had never seen that before or something like that. That's what we ate when we first got there, was C-rations.

**O.K. How many of you were in the barracks then?**

I don't know, probably ten or twelve, something like that. These were just little huts they had off the ground, and we built ramp-ways between them, up off the ground, 'cause there was flood area too, so we had to keep out of the water, and we did that. Other than that, that's about it.

While I was there we had a couple of escapees come out of there, out of Laos.

## **Escapees from?**

*[cannot decipher, both people talking]*

And they had come through our base. I didn't see any of them, but I knew they were there. Other guys in my job, classifications were debriefing them and all that kind of stuff. That wasn't my job. There were other people doing that.

## **O.K.**

So, that was interesting, to see that. Then while I was down there I was with another guy who was from Japan, a guy named Joe Fugate. He was married, he had had more than one enlistment, and October 1st promotions came out. I was promoted to Staff Sergeant, and he wasn't. The promotions came out of his base, and I was from Okinawa, and both of were on TDY (Temporary Duty) in Thailand.

[Thirty plus years later I learned that my great-grandfather had been promoted to sergeant in October 1864. One hundred years before I was promoted. He was with 116<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry, Company B in the Civil War.]

## **And you got promoted, and he didn't.**

I got promoted to Staff Sergeant in less than one hitch, less than four years, almost unheard of. Not very many people, I knew one other person who had it and he was, I knew him in Ellsworth, so, but I thought that was rather unusual.

## **How did he react?**

I don't recall he had much to say about it. But, uh, I didn't know about it because my orders came from Okinawa. The orders came out there. One of the sergeants I worked with wrote me a letter and two pairs of stripes, said, "Here's your orders, put them on. "One pair of stripes was not enough."

## **So, while you were in Thailand you could see things happening in Vietnam that was...**

No, not really. Not really, huh-uh. What happened is the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. Remember those? There were two of them. I went to Thailand between the two of them.

## **So what was your perception of what was happening?**

I really don't remember that I thought much about that, other than the fact that I, we went down to that area from Okinawa through the Clark Air Base on a-uh, as passengers on some airplane, it wasn't a regular flight, and then we got to Clark Base. We were there for about two or three hours and an officer that I was with knew all the ins and outs on how to get flights out and everything. He got us on a C-130 that was scheduled to go from Clark Air Base to Da Nang to



where I was going to be at Udorn in Thailand. He got us on that flight, and we were out of there in very short order and we got over there, we stopped in Da Nang for a little bit, and I got to the PX and bought a camera and all that kind of thing, with some film... Or no, I bought that in Thailand actually, but I had to get some more film, and I think one of the officers that were going back somewhere got me a couple of rolls of film. And then we stopped at Da Nang and they said, "You see those mountains over there? They're fighting over there. That's where all the activity is, and sometimes when we fly out of here, we get shot at." So that was a little exciting there, and then we flew into Udorn in Thailand where I was going to be, and in the back of it was a C-130 I think, the back of the airplane went down. I started to get up and someone said "Mr. Kurtz, where are you?" I looked up and it was Mr. Mears from Ellsworth Dakota, a fellow I had bowled with in South Dakota. He was a warrant officer, and he was a flight master, I think, and he was there unloading the airplane, and he happened to see me as I was getting off the airplane. Unbelievable, to meet somebody I'd known elsewhere.

**We talked a little bit about your life in Thailand and how you went over there. You were only in Thailand for six months?**

I was there for 88 days.

**88 days?**

And, as part of this temporary duty going down there, for two days spent down there I got one day cut off my tour of duty overseas. So instead of going home in January, I went home in December, and I was discharged from service on December 7, 1964.

**O.K. Well, let me ask this, before we get to your discharge. While you were in Thailand, did you communicate with your family, did you send them letters?**

Letters and cards all the time. I have some of those. I sent cards to my grandparents, and they saved them, and I now have those cards that I wrote, so, things like that - I was always writing and, somehow I implied something that I had a surprise for my parents when I got home, and they thought I was going to bring home a wife.

**That would have been a surprise!**

That was what they thought I was going to do, but I didn't.

**When you were in Thailand, on whatever free time you had, what did you do?**

Well, in Thailand, we were in Udorn, Thailand, and they had a nice little town there. Well, I'm a stamp collector, so I went in and got stamps, as many as I could, and I got some coins, things like that, and of course there was night clubs, a few things like that. And there were always pictures to be taken; I was taking pictures all over the place. They had some nice temples down there. One night we went to some kind of service at one of the temples where we walked around the temple three times.

### **Buddhist temple?**

Yeah. Somehow I'd met somebody that lived there, and we walked around the temple three times as part of some kind of ceremony they had. I really don't know what it was, but it was interesting to see that and to see the temple and all that. They have some fabulous temples that they put it with all the fancy roof work and ornamentation. It's unbelievable.

**Right. So, while you were there, you did a lot of this sort of stuff on your own? You know, one of the things that we always see were things like USO shows and stuff like that. Did you get to any of those?**

I think there was one while I was there, but I was on duty when it was there, so I never saw any of those. I never saw a USO show [...???

**So most of your free time - you didn't have a lot of time there, but most of, any free time you had was mostly out on your own?**

Not always. Well, yes, I guess I was, most of the time. But they had what called the rickshaw kind of thing where you could hire a guy to peddle you around and take you around places, and we were outside of town maybe a half a mile or more, so they always had a few of these guys at the base at the gate, you'd get one of them, give them a couple of BHAT and they'd take you out on the town and the same coming back out. Then you would walk in from the gate on the regular part of the base.

**So you were there for 88 days, and then you got your orders to return...**

No, what happened is they sent in permanent party people who had to stay there for a year, and once they got enough, somebody in there to replace me, they released me, and I went home. I worked with a guy named Vargas-Himinez He was a Tech Sergeant, I believe, at that time, and he was from Puerto Rico, and he and I got released at the same time, and we went back to Clark Air Base. I was an N.C.O. now, so I went in the N.C.O. Club. I was still wearing my stripes, and I still had my ID card as an Airman, not an NCO, so I was also carrying a copy of my orders, and when we checked in there, they asked for them, because they wanted to make sure I was an NCO. So that was interesting then too. I was never much interested in the NCO clubs or the Airman's club. I think I was in the Airman's Club in Okinawa once or twice. They didn't have an Airman's Club in Ellsworth, as I recall. There was an NCO Club, but no Airman's Club, so it never bothered me much.

**So you came back, you flew back to Clark?**

Well, we went back to Clark, yeah, and then I'm not sure how we went back from there to Okinawa, and I'm not sure where Hymie went, I'm not sure where he was stationed, but I went back, I had about six weeks left, and I went back in the middle of October and immediately started processing for getting out, going home. I had to take, get my stuff packed, get all the arrangements to have my stuff shipped, and they shipped - because I was now an NCO I didn't have to pay for anything to go home. They shipped it all for me. If I'd still been an Airman

whatever I wanted to take home I might have to pay for it, so that was one of the benefits I got out of that, and they came in packed up my gear while I was over there, and they shipped, packed that up, packed up my bowling balls, packed up whatever else I had other than what I needed to take with me on my own, my military gear and stuff, and they shipped it back. They packed stuff in three big crates, and it went on a ship by the name of "Pine Island," and it went through the Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, up into New York to be unloaded and the stuff was shipped from there out to Fort Sheridan. Once it got to Fort Sheridan then we made arrangements to have it brought down. They brought it down and uncrated it for me in my back yard, where I was, right at my parents' house, so that was neat. But it took, I got out in December, I didn't get that stuff until April.

**Took a little while to get there.**

Yeah, it took a little while for it to get there.

**Now, where were you formally discharged?**

Travis Air Force Base, San Francisco. I think it was Fairfield, California. I think is the name of the town.

**That sounds about right, I've been out there. What's the date that you got discharged?**

December the 7th, a famous date.

**And what was the year again?**

1964.

**Because of the type of work you had, the Intelligence work, did they do anything special when you left?**

They may have, I just don't remember.

**O.K.**

I've never talked much about what I did, to anybody, other than the fact to tell them that was what I did, Intelligence Operations. I don't think I ever talked much about what I actually did, up until now at least, and I haven't said much here I don't think.

**So they didn't have any special procedure because of the type of work you did?**

They may have. I don't remember.

**O.K.**

But I do know that I had a permanent secret classification, and while I was on base I had a top

secret classification, but I did not have a top secret communications classification.

**Your rate when you were discharged was Staff Sergeant?**

E5, yes.

**Do you remember what it was like the day you were discharged? How did you feel?**

Oh, we were all happy! We took a bus into San Francisco, went straight to the airport and took a flight home. I got in - my parents didn't know I was coming, I didn't let them know, and I got up to O'Hare Field, and I called home and made like it was the place where my Dad worked. They were calling him to come in and work. My Mom answered the phone, and my Dad got on the line and I said, "Dad, I'm at O'Hare Field. Can you come and pick me up? Leave like you're going to work." I came home, in my uniform, [First Class A's?]. I walked up to the door, knocked on the door, I had my hat in my hand and I said "Ma'am, you got a room?"

**Your Mom must have been so excited!**

She was amazing. And the good thing about it was a week before her birthday.

**That was some birthday present you gave her. She must have been so excited to have you back.**

I got home before Christmas. Her birthday was December 15th, and I was home. Well, actually I was home about the 7th or 8th, I guess. We had an overnight flight, cheaper that way.

**So what was it like right after, when you got home for those first couple days, weeks?**

Just rested. I didn't look for any jobs or nothing. Coming in January I went to get unemployment compensation which I had for a little while, for about three or four months, and then I started looking for a job, and my neighbor who worked for Western Electric in Hawthorne Plant Cicero, [IL] said, "A couple of our guys are being drafted. Why don't you come and and apply for a job as a computer operator?" And I did, and I got the job. I was a computer operator there for about four and a half years, both on a 1404 computer and a 7080 computer. And then I had [the opportunity to change companies and work] downtown and work with Standard Oil of Indiana as a computer programmer, and I stayed with Standard Oil. Eventually Amoco, for 23 years.

**So you just retired, just...?**

1993. I retired at age 54.

**So you've been retired for about twelve years now.**

Yes, something like that. I was... Amoco had a nice, or Standard Oil had a nice 401K plan where you put in 4% of your salary and they matched it. I put in 10% of my salary for 23 years, came out with a nice chunk of money, and I have not spent a dime of it yet.

**So, in the time that you've been back in the civilian world, have you had any contact with the people you met in the military?**

None, absolutely none.

[One, Robert Lanscak, who enlisted at the time I did.]

Nope. Air Force really didn't have reunions because it wasn't that cohesive a unit. The guys were not together all the time, there was coming and going individuals all the time, so there was no real unit by itself.

**Did your military experience influence the way you looked at the world when you came out?**

Probably, but I'm not sure how. I really don't know how, I was just there, as far as I was concerned. I enjoyed every minute of it though. I had a great time. I enjoyed it and did some studying, learned how to use a slide rule and learned how to read maps and all that kind of thing.

**So it was a good learning experience for you.**

Oh, yeah.

**A good chance to see some parts of the world you wouldn't have seen.**

And it helped me later on with the jobs I got. Because I was in Intelligence Operations, that helped me. And I got into the computer operations area, and then later on I impressed enough people there doing that, that they helped me get into programming with Amoco. And I did not have a degree. I flunked out of college!

**Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like to say?**

Let's see, what else is there? I don't think so. Probably is but I can't remember what they are.

**O.K. In that case I just want to thank you for sharing your story, and we're going to go off the record.**