YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Gulf War Project

Personal Experience

O H. 1407

JEFFREY F. KAPICS

Interviewed

by

Angela Cellio

on

November 26, 1991

JEFFREY F KAPICS

Jeffrey F. Kapics is one of three boys born to Jayne and Ronald Kapics Jeff was born in Lowellville on August 6, 1966 His family moved to Youngstown where Jeff attended St Christine's Elementary School Following graduation from Chaney High School in 1984, Jeff attended Youngstown State University for one year. He received an Associate's Degree from the New Castle School of Trades in September of 1987 Lack of employment prompted Jeff to enlist in the United States Navy in the December of 1987.

A naval operation's specialist, Jeff has traveled quite a bit of the world due to naval cruises. His ship, the USS Trenton is stationed at Norfolk, Virginia and was the first ship to pull out for the Persian Gulf on August 14, 1990 He is a Gulf War Veteran after serving in the Middle East from September of 1990 to March of 1990

Jeff is currently on terminal leave from the Navy while waiting for his permanent discharge on September 14, 1991. He lives at 4604 Rhode Island Drive in Austintown with his wife Stephanie whom he married on September 14, 1991. He is a member of St. Christine's Church and the VFW Post #4237. He enjoys Gulf and baseball His service awards include the National Defense Medal, the Southeast Expeditionary Award, and the Humanitarian Award

---Angela Cellio

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INTERVIEWEE: JEFFREY KAPICS

INTERVIEWER: Angela Cellio

SUBJECT Gulf War Experience

DATE. November 26, 1991

C This is an interview with Jeffrey Kapics for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Gulf War, by Angela Cellio, at 4604 Rhode Island Drive, Austintown, Ohio, on November 26, 1991, at 4 20 p.m.

Okay Jeff, if you could tell me a little about yourself--your family background.

K· Let's see, I'm on terminal leave from the Navy. In about 27 days it's going to be time to find a job I just got married about seven months ago I married Stephanie. Most of my days are filled with trying to find a job That's about it really

C. What kind of job are you looking for?

K Well, the kind of job I did in the Navy--working for eight hours in communications and intelligence There's not a lot of jobs for that. Really, anything to start I'm trying to get back to school, but I have to get a job first

C What did you study at school, or where did you go to school?

K I went to the New Castle School of Trades for two years for electrical technology. There's not a lot of jobs in this area, so I really don't expect to find anything in that field

C Where do you plan on going back to school?

K Probably Youngstown State. I want to stay close to home I'm tired of being away from home

C What are you going to study there?

K I don't know. I don't have any idea I got the G I Bill when I was in the Navy I got about $13,000 for school, so I have to figure out what's good for around here.

C: How about a little bit about your family--where you went to school as a child.

K I went to St. Christine's from kindergarten through eighth grade Then [I went to] Chaney High School. That's where my dad went to high school I've got two brothers, Mike and Tom, and my mom and dad Then there's Stephanie and our dog Campbell I went to Youngstown State University for one year, and that's about it for school.

C. When did you graduate from high school?

K: In 1984

C Did you go to Youngstown State first, or to New Castle [School of Trades]?

K. [I first went to] Youngstown State.

C So you went to Youngstown for a year, and what happened after that? Did you join the Navy? What happened following YSU?

K I worked for a few months, then I went to New Castle for about 15 months I got out of New Castle and tried to get a job. There were just no jobs around here for that I was working with another guy. There wasn't anything worth staying for, so I joined the Navy and got the G.I. Bill That was $10,000 for school, and for being in the Gulf War they gave us another $2,000-$2,500 So, basically I was in the Navy to quit school I did not like school. Plus, you got to see a lot of neat stuff

C· Like what?

K I have been to Spain and an island in Spain I've been to Italy a couple of times, France, Marce, and Tumoin I've been to Hythe, Israel, and Televive. I've been all over Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and all of those places. I've been to Panama in South America In

the Gulf War I went to Amon and a couple of places I saw all those places

C So, you basically tries to pay for school Did you have any idea what you would be doing in the Navy?

K Yes When you go in they give you a test and they tell you what you are good at Then they offer you different jobs I took the operations specialist position, which is working with radars, communication, and navigation It was nice I could go to air traffic control school and do real well, but I don't think I will do that.

C. Is it only an option now?

K Yes I might go take the test I don't know [yet]

C So, when did you join the Navy?

K I joined in October of 1987 That's when I joined I actually went on December 14 of 1987.

C: How did your family react when you told them you joined the Navy

K. My dad was happy. He wanted me to either join the Air Force or the Navy I don't know if my mom liked it or not

C: Did she get upset?

K Oh, yes. She cried

C Did she encourage you?

K Oh, yes, she encouraged me I couldn't find a job

C. Tell me about some experiences in the Navy and what you were doing before you went to the Gulf What were your tasks or duties? [Tell me] what a typical day in the Navy was like.

K Revelry is at 6 00 a m That's when you get up They ring the bells and you get up and sweep up and all of that You take a shower, eat breakfast, and then we had to muster our quarters That's when everybody eats together, and they count to make sure that everybody is there. It is called muster That is at about 7 00 a m So, you have about an hour to get ready You could get up at any time, but if you got up at 7 00 a m you have to be ready at 7 10 You get up and muster, and I'll tell you what you've got to do for the day You clean the bathroom, paint something, or whatever you have to do, they tell you

what you have to do. You just do it. Normally I worked with charts. I had to work for my charts. If there was a crack in them, I ordered new ones. I did that all morning, and then at lunch we would have about an hour and a half. Sometimes you ate, sometimes you didn't. Usually we watched *The Price is Right* for lunch. We went back to work at 12:30 or 1:00 p.m We would then have training on something that had to do with our job That was for about a half an hour. Sometimes we would get to go do a quick 15 minute little clean up of our area that we were responsible for Sometimes we had to stay until 3:00 p.m., and sometimes we had to meet at 12.30 p.m Sometimes we would get off at 10:00.

C Where were you stationed?

K· Norfolk, Virginia.

C So that was in port Was that how it was when you went out to sea?

K. We were in a room called CIC (Combat Information Center) Then we were in two different ships. I'd go on watch from 6 30 in the morning until noon. Then I would be off from noon until about 5 00 p m I normally slept or watched television or did something. It depended on how long I would be off for I'd go back on watch from 5:00 in the afternoon until about 11 45 at night Then I'd go to sleep until 6:30 in the morning Then I would do the same thing. After a long time, you kind of forget if it was day or night because you would just do the same thing.

C: What were the purposes of your cruises you went on before the call

K: We did a Mediterranean cruise. We went over to the Mediterranean to do exercises with the Spanish Navy We had to teach out own how to really do stuff We did exercises with the Tunisian Marines We brought them over to our boat and showed them how to land on foreign land and how to invade another country We did exercises with just about everyone--the Italians, the Spanish We went to a lot of ports, too A lot of countries went too. We always had Navy ships over there. You just rotate every six months It's kind of cool.

C. That was enjoyable then?

K Oh, yes. It was real nice We went in the winter time There would have been a lot nicer if we would have went in the summer time, with all those beaches (Laughter) It would have been a lot more fun There would have been a lot more stuff to do It was nice, though

C. Where else did you go?

K: We went to Savanna, Georgia We were down there for a couple of days. It was nice. We pulled in there and ended up jogging. there were crowds out there waving at us They had a lot of respect for us.

We went down to the Panama Canal. We helped the Marines out from when they had trouble down there and out Marines were sent down there. We went down there and got them out, and we had a couple days of liberty down there. That was nice. We had to get escorted through boats, though That was a lot of fun. I wouldn't mind going back there. That's about it Well. then there was other stuff. We would go off coast and do practice and work. That was about it.

C When you joined the Navy and also during this time before the war, sis you ever think that you were going to have to use these exercises you were practicing? Did you ever think the country would go to war?

K No. We didn't know until about three days before we went. We were out when the United States invaded Kuwait. So, we didn't really find out until we got back. We were getting ready to go on a North Atlantic Cruise We were supposed to go to Copenhagen, so we didn't know

C Where were you at the time that the build up of the war was going on in the Summer of 1990? What were you doing then?

K We were off for two weeks off the coast of North Carolina We pulled out on the 14th, so we had pulled in that Thursday before hand. We found out on Friday that we were going.

C. So, there was no time for build-up, for you to anticipate going?

K. No.

C You went right in the beginning?

K. Yes, right at the beginning. We were the first ships to pull out

C Oh, I didn't know that When you found out you were going, what did you feel like then?

K See, we found out on Friday the 11th of August. I was supposed to go on leave and go back there for two weeks on Monday Stephanie was driving down on Friday to pick me up, so I was trying to get off early We found out at about 2 00 on Friday afternoon that we had 10 to 14 days to be ready to go. So I waited until she got there to tell her, which was about 6·00 p m I told her then

C What did you tell her?

K: I met her somewhere. When she pulled in she saw my face and asked, "What's wrong?" I said, "I can't come home. We have to be ready to go to the Gulf in 10 to 14 days." That's all we knew. So I had the whole weekend off and we stayed together the whole time. On Monday morning she left I said, "I'll call you tonight and let you know when we're going." I called her that night and said, "I'm going tomorrow at noon "

C That really must have been hard

K. Yes

C So what day was it that you left?

K: August 14, at noon

C: How about your mom and dad? How did they feel when you told them you were leaving?

K. I had to tell them by phone. I just told them I wanted to fly home, but they said, "Stay there with Stephanie " So I just told them, "We don't know where we're going." I told them I would call them Monday and let them know When I called them Monday they asked me if there was anything I needed They would send me anything I needed. They told me to make sure I write to them and call them whenever I could There was nothing I could do.

C Is that how you felt, that it's got to be done?

K: Yes, there is nothing you can do

C: Does that make you feel more frustrated knowing that there's nothing you can do?

K. No, there's nothing you can really do. You have to do it If not, you get in trouble. It is not worth the trouble.

C· When you left, did you know where you were going, where your ship was going to?

K No We just knew we were going over, but we didn't know what for We didn't find out until we got there, until other people got there We were the first people to pull out, so we just had to get over there

C So, when did you get there and when did you find out what your mission was?

K It takes 29 days to get over there When we got there, we just had to wait until everybody

else got there We got there and just steamed around.

C How long did you wait?

K· We were waiting until somebody told us what to do. We waited for about two and a half months. We say there.

C What did you do during that time?

K [We did] squares. We went around in squares and circles We left her on the 14th, and we didn't touch land for 110 days.

C: That is hard to believe I can't imagine doing that

K. [It was] 110 days. We worked, though We practiced while we were there doing what I do. We were working eighteen hours a day at least We got used to it. By the end of the week, I couldn't keep my eyes open. Then it kicked in and we were fine

C So it became routine like anything else?

K Oh, yes [First it was] wake up call, [then we would] march, [next we would] go out, [and finally we would] go to sleep. I saved a lot of money, that's about it

C. That is one good point.

K The best one

C. So, you waited two and a half months What did you finally do? After all that waiting, what did you finally do there?

K· In the summer we started stopping Iraqi ships before they went into Iraqi ports That's what we did on Christmas Day We stopped an Iraqi tanker They are called Mythofs Force Those were fun to do We worked with Australian ships and French, too Those were fun

At the beginning of January, we went down to Somalia. We rescued all the ambassadors The Somalian rebels tried to overthrow the government and we rescued all the ambassadors the Russian ambassadors, American ambassadors, ambassadors from Kuwait, et cetera There were about 70 ambassadors that we rescued There was about 250 people altogether We sent in Marines. Actually, we sent in the SEALS and a Marine Recon force from our ship They took a ship, the Helos, in. They are kind of like baby SEALS They got them out and run them to our ship We dropped them off at Amon and we brought them to where they had to go That was a lot of fun

C· That is interesting. So, you kept busy during the day and you did have several things to do. Did you always have several missions?

K Oh, yes We always did stuff. Sometimes we went to anchor and tried to get a little break We had practice invading Kuwait We did fire practices. They area called c-soldier assignments It was a lot of fun. I was on one of the small boats When we would do it--on our boat--we had a low deck. The boat opens up and we spit out little boats. We were practicing those. I was on one of the small boats. We'd go in real fast and undetected, and we would mark where other boats would have to go in between us We were kind of like markers That was a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun with stuff like that.

C. Were you able to get in touch with you fiancee or your family at all when you were over there?

K. Yes. After 110 days we pulled into Abadabee That is a city in UAE (United Arab Emirates). We pulled in there for about four or five days. The major hotels there have phone services You go there and pay them ten dollars and they will connect you with the United States

C: Ten dollars?

K: Yes. That's actually pretty good, really. They will connect you to New York, and then you pay for a long distance call from New York to wherever you are calling So that was not bad. They had a lot of clubs there, too. That's where most of them were at, as well as hotels. Everybody wanted a drink after we had been on the ship for 110 days.

They had little places, and little shops called the Suke. It was an outdoor flea market That was nice. You got a bargain with everything you bought. You could get a lot of cassette tapes real cheap, [some costing as low as] one or two dollars. [These were] things that just came out on the black market. There was a lot of stuff you could buy You could buy things like souvenirs really cheap There was a lot of gold. They had a gold Suke, and it was at least the size of the Boardman Plaza (in Boardman, Ohio). [It was] probably as big as the mall (Southern Park Mall, Boardman) It was full of gold shops. You could buy gold dirt cheap. We would buy 14 karat gold over there. That was nice A lot of people bought gold

C: Did you buy any?

K Yes

C You were allowed to bring it back? It was no problem?

K Oh, yes We don't pay customs We had a lot of breaks on customs So, we licked out,

or the military paid it. I don't know how it works, but we just had to write down what we were bringing back.

C: So that was the second benefit, I guess?

K Yes

C Well, that's only for a couple of days.

K. Well, we pulled into Abadabee once and Devy twice. We may have spent a total sum of ten days in Devy. I pulled into Nescatomoin for about four days So, it was total of not even twenty days There was a lot to do there.

C Exactly how long were you in the Gulf, so that I can have an idea? From August or September .

K I went to the Gulf in September and we were back in April We were gone a total of eight months and four days.

C· You travelled around a little bit Was your main position very dangerous.

K. No, not until January We didn't do anything until January When we were on the coast of Amon we were practicing Then we moved up closer, to about 12 miles out of Kuwait There was a lot of mines and everything There were so many ships there, so it was too crowded to have everybody up there We just rotated

C. Were you afraid of mines and all? Did you think about it?

K: Yes. Since I was in charge of charts, I had to mark where all the mines were at and everything on me charts. I had to get little briefs from everybody, updates and everything. Yes, because where we slept at we could have ran right into a mine

C That is really amazing Did you ever think while you were over there that you were going to not ever come home?

K No.

C How about the mail system over there? I've heard stories from people Did you get letters quite frequently?

K Yes, we got mail. They would pick up mail on Sundays and Wednesdays, I believe We got so much mail! They had everybody writing I used to get bags and bags of stuff People sent all kinds of things Stephanie wrote every day From the day I left, she wrote

every day. My mom and dad wrote and sent all kinds of stuff. Everybody sent food and stuff that you needed. They would send canned food. At Christmas there were all kinds of boxes. I actually got too much stuff.

C: Did that help, though? I mean, especially being away during the Holidays?

K. Oh, yes. [It helped] on the Christmas before we were gone, too

C: This is your first Christmas home in how long?

K. Three years. It is actually the first one in the United States (Laughter)

C. If the war ended in January, why is it that you had to remain there until March? Why is it that you remained there for a while after

K: Because they told us we had to, really just to see if anything else was going on They had to decide who was going home first.

C: How did they decide who went home first, so you know?

K: I have no idea. We were the first ship to pull out, so that kind of had something to do with it. Our ship was on schedule for the last two years We had been out constantly, so we were kind of the dictator, coming home first

C: Yes, I would think you would be

K: We deserved it.

C. So you finally got to leave in March and it took you a month to get back.

K: Yes We stopped in Spain for a few days. You kind of always stop in Spain at the Navy base there.

C. When you were over in the Gulf, were you aware of any television or news coverage going on over here?

K Yes. They sent video tapes and stuff to us We got the news and everything regularly That's what I got. In our job we got all kinds of updates, depending on what you had Most of the people there did. People, like wives, would send tapes and stuff over there, People would make home video tapes and send them to you.

C I know your being gone there resulted in the postponement of your wedding plans a couple of times--three times.

K. It was postponed twice. We had scheduled it three times.

C: What do you think about that? What did you think at that time?

K: There was nothing we could do. You get mad, but there was nothing we could do We were stuck. When you join the Navy, the Navy comes first, or so they say We were supposed to get married, but there was nothing we could do

C: So you came home in April from Spain to the United States. Is that right?

K. Yes.

C: Tell me about your homecoming

K. We pulled into Morehead City, North Carolina first. There we dropped off all our Marines Everybody was glad to see them leave (Laughter) We dropped them off, and people weren't allowed to come onto--it's not a base--the civilian compound. You can't have civilians on that We pulled in, and we weren't supposed to get off or leave it because we had out dungaree uniforms on. We weren't allowed to wear those out of town. But everybody left The whole town--everybody knew we were coming back They knew we were the first ship to go and the first ship to come back. People were out there giving away free hotdogs and pop and all kinds of flags. You walked down the street and people were beeping. It was pretty nice.

We were there for maybe five hours. We did a tire cruise from there to Norfolk. Since it was an overnight one, it would take 20 hours. You could have brothers, friends, your dad, or any males come on board and stay over night. I didn't have anybody this time, because they were already meeting me in Virginia. It was kind of hard to plan that, too. So we had lunch with them on board It was pretty nice to have them on board they were all excited We left Morehead, and we were about to come back. I forget what town we pulled into It was the early afternoon The port we were going to had a lot of people waiting. I was surprised to see all of those people, actually. They had all kinds of signs, [there were] radio stations, TV stations, and tents set up It was really nice There were all kinds of people. We made signs, too, and put them on the side of the ship.

C What did you feel like when you saw you mom, dad, and Stephanie?

K: I think I saw them first It was pretty funny I just wanted to leave, really I had two weeks leave

C Is that when you got married.

K No

C. Oh, that's right. That was in April. I got my timelines screwed up. So that two weeks leave was in April. What did you do from there? You had to go home to Norfolk?

K: Yes It was back to the same routine. I took another two weeks. I had all kinds of days saved up We got 30 days a year I had all kinds of days saved up. I took two more in June or July I had two more weeks in September for the wedding

C Were you glad to get out early?

K Yes The earlier, the better

C. So you were actually discharged on what day?

K December 14, at midnight

C So you are still in the Navy right now?

K I'm still getting paid. (Laughter) They could call me back if they wanted to. They won't call me back, if they haven't by now

C That would be tragic

K You're telling me!

C You're glad to be out

K. I'm glad to be getting out.

C: You're not going to enlist for anything?

K· Not at all I was in there for four years. We had a good enlistment in Youngstown It is not worth it to me I think it is $20,000 to reenlist, to get a job out there

C· Do you think--just to kind of sum this up--the experience as a whole was beneficial? Do you regret any part of it? Do you look at things differently now

K. Yes, I have a different attitude now

C How's that? How did it change?

K I don't know I think they are better. If people have to stay in the military, most people think, "God, you can't get a job " That's why I was in the military I think it makes you want to do better so you don't have to go back to that (Laughter) I guess it gives you a

little edge against someone else out there.

C. Do you have anything else that you'd like to talk about that maybe we haven't talked about?

K: No, not that I can think of.

C. Okay I want to thank you for your time I appreciate it

K You're welcome

END OF INTERVIEW