

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Gulf War Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1406

JANE KAPICS

Interviewed

by

Angella Cellio

on

November 7, 1991

JANE KAPICS

Jane Kapics was born in Lowellville, Ohio, the daughter of John and Catherine Hvidak. She is one of four children. Following graduation from Lowellville High School in 1959, Mrs. Kapics was employed at Lustig's Shoes and also worked for a mechanical engineer. She and Ronald Kapics were married on September 11, 1965, and they moved to Youngstown's West Side the following year.

Mrs. Kapics currently resides in Youngstown with her husband, two sons, Thomas and Michael. A third son, Jeffrey, is married and lives in Austintown. He is a Gulf War veteran.

An active member of St. Christine's Church, Mrs. Kapics is also employed part-time in the church's religious education office as a secretary. In her spare time she enjoys baking, crafts, and reading.

--Angella Cellio

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INTERVIEWEE: Jane Kapics

INTERVIEWER: Angella Cellio

SUBJECT: Gulf War

DATE: November 7, 1991

C: This is an interview with Jane Kapics for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Gulf War Project, by Angella Cellio, on November 7, 1991, at 3270 Cricket Drive, at 3:45 p.m.

Mrs. Kapics, I'd like you to tell me a little bit about yourself. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

K: I was born in Lowellville, on October 14, 1941. My parents were John and Catherine Hvidsak. I have an older sister, Shirley, and two younger brothers, John and Robert.

C: Did you live in Lowellville most of your life?

K: I lived in Lowellville until I got married. My husband and I lived there for one year, then we moved. We got married in 1965 and moved to the West Side in 1966.

C: Tell me about your husband and family now.

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Mrs. Kapics, I'd like you to tell me a little bit about yourself. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

K: I was born in Lowellville, on October 14, 1941. My parents were John and Catherine Hvidak I have an older sister, Shirley, and two younger brothers, John and Robert.

C: Did you live in Lowellville most of your life?

K: I lived in Lowellville until I got married. My husband and I lived there for one year, then we moved. We got married in 1965 and moved to the West Side in 1966.

C: Tell me about your husband and family now.

- K: We have three sons. Jeff is 25, Thomas is 24, he works at Tamco, and Michael is 13 and goes to St. Christine's School. Jeff and Tom were both born and lived in Lowellville. Jeff lived there for two years and Tom for six months.**
- C: Did you go to Lowellville High School?**
- K: Yes. I graduated in 1959.**
- C: What did you do between the time after you graduated and the time you got married?**
- K: I worked down at Lustig's [shoe store] for a year, and then I went to work for Anthony Gambrel. He was a mechanical engineer, and I worked for him until I got pregnant with Jeff.**
- C: Do you work anywhere now?**
- K: I work part-time at St. Christine's in the religious education office.**
- C: That must be an interesting job.**
- K: Yes.**
- C: Do you teach children?**
- K: No, I'm a secretary. I've been there for four years.**
- C: You have a child right now who is in the military. Would you tell me about him?**
- K: Jeff is 25. He'll be finished with his four years next Friday, which will be November the 16th. He left December 13. [He left] right before Christmas, which was hard. He went to Chicago for his basic training, then straight to Virginia. He has been stationed in Norfolk for all that time. He did go to the Mediterranean two years ago. He got to go to Italy, France, Spain, Israel. He really enjoyed that.**
- C: He's in the Navy, right?**
- K: Yes.**
- C: Do you know what made him decide to go into the Navy?**

- K:** No, I don't know. He just came home one day and said he had joined. He had finished New Castle School of Trades, hadn't found a job in the two months since he'd finished, and decided to join the Navy.
- C:** What did you think when he told you?
- K:** I didn't believe him. My nephew had been in the Army and hated it. He constantly told my boys he hated it. So, I really never thought any of my boys would join the service. I was really surprised.
- C:** What did you say to him when he announced he was joining? Did encourage him, discourage him, or neither?
- K:** Probably encouraged more so because there really wasn't a lot of work around here at the time. I really think they learn something. I know Jeffrey didn't like it a whole lot, but I think he gained a lot. All of what he got to see is knowledgeable. I know that aspect of it he really enjoyed, and he made some nice friends. He gained more than the part that he didn't like. There was more to gain from it.
- C:** When he was in Virginia, how often did you get to see him or talk with him?
- K:** The first couple of years it was quite a bit. He would come home and we went down a couple of times. We went down on a family cruise type thing. That was nice. We got to go out for 11 hours on a ship. It got to be a little boring because there's not much you can do on that ship, but they tried real hard. They had a cook out on deck. I don't know how they do it. He was on the water last year 200 and some days out of 365. I really don't know how they do that. But it was nice being on the ship and seeing what they did. We all got to go, so that was nice.
- He went for the Mediterranean cruise. He was gone six months. He got back, I believe, in April and then [he] left for Puerto Rico. I believe he only got home one night around Easter time. Stephanie [Jeffrey's wife] turned Catholic and she had her thing at church to do. He was gone again in August for the Gulf and never got back again until April. So, we only say him one night out of two years.
- C:** That cruise took up a lot of time.
- K:** Yes, and the Gulf War took up a lot. It just all ran together. That was hard. He did call, he called from all over the world.
- C:** That had to be interesting.

- K:** Yes, it was. It was great when he was calling from Italy and France because he was having such a good time. You're feeling then are great because they're enjoying it.
- C:** In places like that, Italy and France, did he get a lot of recreation time?
- K:** Not a whole lot, but he did get to Rome and to the Vatican. He went all over Jerusalem. The time they did have, I guess they must have made good use out of it. They saw a lot.
- C:** That's a great opportunity to travel.
- K:** Yes, it is.
- C:** That was one of the benefits of the Navy?
- K:** Right. When they went to Puerto Rico, he didn't get off the ship because a hurricane was coming, and he had duty that one night they were there. Then they had to pull out, so he didn't even get off the ship in Puerto Rico.
- C:** How long were they in Puerto Rico?
- K:** Two nights, I believe.
- C:** Would it have been longer if there was not a hurricane?
- K:** I'm not sure, but probably.
- C:** Following Puerto Rico he was in Virginia for a little bit?
- K:** Yes. he was to come home to have leave in August for two weeks. Stephanie left on a Friday night to go pick him up because he had called and said he was still coming home. By the time she got down there, the orders had already changed. They were to leave in 10 days. So, she decided to stay the weekend. She left Monday morning and by the time she got back home, they were leaving Tuesday morning.
- C:** For the Gulf?
- K:** Yes.
- C:** Did he leave in August or September?
- K:** [He left on] August 14.

- C:** So there really wasn't much of a chance of build up over there for you to start anticipating that he might go? It was more like it started and he was gone?
- K:** Right. He was one of the first to go.
- C:** Did he call you up that weekend and tell you his orders were to go to the Gulf?
- K:** Well, he called Saturday and said that it was going to be 10 days. I don't even remember how we found out that they were leaving Tuesday morning. I'm sure he called.
- C:** Did you think he was going to have to leave sooner than in 10 days?
- K:** Well, they were supposed to leave in 10 days and then the orders got changed within two days. They were leaving the next morning. That's how the Navy is. Well, I'm sure all branches of the military change their plans, especially during a war, within a minutes notice.
- C:** If you can, could you tell me what you felt like then when you found out he going there? What did you expect to happen over there?
- K:** I'm not really sure. I just felt that it was so crazy. You just couldn't anticipate what was going to happen because you just didn't put anything. . . It's just hard to put into words. I really didn't know what to expect. You were scared, you were worried. I think I was telling you before, the hardest part for me was there was nothing I could do about it. It was probably the first time in my life there was nothing I could do to help [him]. I had a hard time, I think, dealing with that mostly.
- C:** How did you deal with it?
- K:** Not very well. It was difficult, it was hard. Church helped, although, that was the place that I had the hardest time. I even had to stop going to Novenas for awhile because that's where I broke down the most. Other than that, you have family, you have friends, and everybody tries to help. You pull together, and it does help.
- C:** Did your family get closer, do you think, when this happened?
- K:** Yes, yes. I can't even explain. I know my second son, who's only 14 months younger than Jeff . . . I did notice every time Jeffrey came home or left again he was here. He waited for him. He was always here when he left to say good-bye. You say things and write things in letters that you normally

wouldn't. You know, how you miss them, how you care about them. It's not something you do every day when your that age. It is a good opportunity to say those things.

C: It probably made everybody's family realize that no one should be taken for granted.

K: Right. It's just amazing how fast things happen and how fast your life can change. A lot of good comes out of some of this stuff, not only for the families but the country. It just seemed to pull the whole United States closer. I've never seen people so supportive. I thought it was great.

C: That huge amount of support gave you a better feeling about everything?

K: Oh, yes. You felt like everybody cared. I'm sure during other wars people cared, you just didn't see it on TV. You weren't right there looking at it so it was sort of out of sight out of mind, I guess. When it's right there and you're watching it, it's different. I don't know, maybe it's my age, maybe it's because my kids were involved, but it just seemed so different.

C: Speaking of TV, how did the media coverage affect you and what did you think of it?

K: That was hard because you really didn't want to watch it, and yet there was no way that you could tear yourself away from it. I really don't know if it's good or bad, because not everything they were saying was true. Yet, I think you felt closer knowing you were watching. I don't know, you're torn both ways.

C: How long was Jeff over there?

K: He was there from August 14 until April 17 when he arrived back in Norfolk.

C: I know there was something else going on the whole time he was gone, that is he was engaged to be married. Were there some problems with that?

K: They were to be married September 8, 1990, but he got notice that he was supposed to go to Norway for the whole month of September. So, he had to postpone the wedding. That really didn't have anything to do with the war, but he did have to postpone it. They told him at the time the ship would be in dry dock, which means they would be working on the ship and wouldn't be able to go anywhere from November until March. So, they told him to go ahead and plan his wedding anytime in between there. So, they replanned it for February 16, 1991. Well, of course, the war came up and his fiancée's mother wrote to the captain. He wrote back saying their orders were to leave

the Gulf January 15. So, we went ahead with the wedding plans. Even though President Bush came up with the January 15 deadline, we had to wait until the 15th to see if they were leaving, which, of course, they did not. So, that wedding was canceled. Then when the war was over and he was on his way home they planned a third wedding, which has gone through.

C: Were you anxious about the third one?

K: Of course, but I didn't think anything could happen that they would have to cancel that one. His captain was really excellent about it. The only thing was, in the middle of the war they had to change captains. So, I was a little worried about the second captain because the first one was extremely nice. He had written two letters home to us and from what I understand, captains don't just write letters home to the parents. But he did and it made us feel better. It worked out.

C: Jeff mentioned that while he was gone you and Stephanie became really close. If anything good could come out of it, that was probably one of them.

K: Stephanie is very easy to be close to. She is a very caring, very thoughtful person. It helped me to know that she cared that much.

C: Did you draw a support from her?

K: Oh, yes definitely. Her family was very supportive [also]. That really helps.

C: You both had mentioned that you went to a support group. Could you tell me about that?

K: We went to the Red Cross right when the war started, and they started that support groups. I really thought it was going to be . . . I really wanted Stephanie to go because she was really having a hard time, but they really didn't have much organization. They were getting started into it and they were looking for people to go to the grocery stores and ask for stuff to send over. I didn't mind helping, we did what we wanted to do on our own, like getting magazines to send over to the boys. I was working so it was hard to try to do something like that. So, we really did not go back to that support group I'm sure they did a lot of good, but the first meeting was a little bit unorganized so we basically did what we could on our own.

C: Did you get involved in any other activities besides the support group?

K: No, not really. [I] just basically went to church and sent over our own boxes of what we could.

- C:** What did you send?
- K:** We sent lots of cookies and food. We probably thought they were starving, but they weren't. They were getting a lot of stuff. [We sent] things that we thought they would like--pepperoni, crackers, a small Christmas tree. As a matter of fact, we sent so much pepperoni they called Jeffrey "Sausage Sam". It really is all you can send. You couldn't send clothes because they couldn't wear them. They weren't out on the fields, you know, they were getting their basics, so there really wasn't too much you could do. We sent cookies and snacks and magazines and cross word puzzles and things like that. We sent a game of checkers but he said they even had that aboard. So, there really wasn't a whole lot you could send.
- C:** Do you know what he did on the ship as far as his duties?
- K:** He's an operation specialist in combat intelligence so he was up in the control room a lot. He told us he was working 22 out of 24 hours for awhile, so he didn't get a lot of sleep. The only good thing was that the room was air conditioned because it was so hot in there. I know he was tired, but I think the air helped a lot. It kept him from being really bored with nothing to do.
- C:** Did he contact you quite a bit?
- K:** No they really didn't get off the ship a whole lot. He called three or four times when they pulled into dock. I think that first time he had been gone, I think it was 90 days before they pulled into dock in the United Arab Emirates. They really only had leave for I think two or three days and then they were back on the water. I don't think they got up extremely close [to the fighting], though they had marines on ship because they were an amphibious ship and at one point they thought they would have to let the marines off to land. They didn't even have to do that, though.
- C:** So, he would call when he could and write letters. What kind of things did he say?
- K:** Just that they were doing a lot of training. Basically that's all they were doing, training for combat [and] staying ready. He missed home. I really can't even remember a lot of the things that he said right now. You really couldn't talk a long time because it was really expensive. He would call here and it would cost him 15 or 20 dollars for three or four minutes. Then we had to call him back through their operator, which was sometimes difficult. I know I had to call Nebraska once so that his friend's mom could call back at the same number, but they never connected. It was tough. He just told us

a little about what they were doing. And like I said, we didn't really talk real, real long because there were four of us and by the time we all got to talk to him it was 20 or 30 minutes. I'd guess everyone asked him the same questions.

C: I know the whole situation was dangerous, but he wasn't in immediate danger, was he?

K: Other than the mines, no. I was afraid of the mines because they had so many set up and it just seemed like every time I heard something, it was the Navy guys who had been coming back from leave. I remember when they all went into the water and they lost about 22 of them. I can't even remember why, it was just rough water and they [the sailors on leave] were coming back to the ship and one was hit. So, a lot of the feedback here seemed to be Navy stuff happening. I was scared, but I don't think it was as bad as the guys on the front line. A lot of that hadn't even happened. From August to January it was more anticipating what was going to happen and worrying.

C: Was the anticipation worse than the actual war declaration?

K: They were probably equally as bad. One was as bad as the other. Like I said, you didn't know what he [Sadaam Hussein] was going to pull or do next, but watching it on TV and seeing the SCUD missiles and stuff, that was just as bad. I think not knowing what was going to happen next was scary.

C: Well, that war declared in January didn't last long considering how long it could have lasted. That had to have made you feel a little bit better.

K: Oh yes, it really did. At first you really thought it was going to be over sooner than it was. I got scared because it wasn't and you didn't know how long it was going to drag on. I thought he [Hussein] had a plan and that he was just playing cat and mouse for awhile. I really thought he had something, but he didn't.

C: Sadaam Hussein?

K: Yes. You just couldn't figure him out. No how, no way. You didn't know what to think.

C: Finally it did end and things started to wind down. Had you known even before the war ended that Jeff was scheduled to be there until April? If you didn't, when did you find out he would be there until April?

K: I really can't remember. I believe he called us, probably around March, and told us approximately when it would be. It took about 30 days for them to get home. They stopped in France. He could have flown home, but he chose not to. If they were going to leave before January 15, he was going to fly home for the wedding, but they didn't. It was Spain they stopped in, not France, and he decided to just come home on the ship. I know some of his buddies flew home, they couldn't wait to get back. I guess he would have lost a lot of leave time and he wanted to have it when he got back. We did go down to Virginia when they came in.

C: Was that a good day?

K: Yes, it was. Feelings you could never, never explain. It was just very emotional. I really don't think I could put the feelings into words because you didn't see the ship coming until it actually turned a corner past the other ships. It was just great.

C: What did you do when he came off the ship?

K: They did not come off. A lot of the ships had boys come off the ship, but the Trenton had us go up onto the ship. There were quite a few of us. Stephanie was there with a friend of hers, her mom and dad,, and her brother. Of course, my husband and I, Michael, and my sister Shirley were there. We all got separated because of the crowd and everybody trying to get up the steps.

C: I know Stephanie made the comment that she wanted to push everybody out of the way.

K: Everybody was really pushing and shoving , but it was single file up the steps of to the ship and you really couldn't because it would have been dangerous. You just had to wait your turn. You know, it those few minutes were very long, and it mattered, but it didn't because they had to put safety first.

C: Did everything that happened make you wish he would have never joined?

K: No, no. I think he gained an awful lot, and I think we gained an awful lot. I know he's real anxious to get back home. It'll be great to have him back, but I really think we all gained a lot. I think it was a long four years for him, but for me it seemed to go a little bit faster than I'm sure it did for him. I would care to live on a ship for four years, and I know that he didn't like it. Maybe if he had an apartment and he was married for the last year, it would have been like a job. It would have been a little different. But living on the ship has to be tough, especially being on the water almost a full year.

- C:** Do you think that the Navy has changed him at all? Besides benefiting from the travel and work experiences, do you think it's changed his personality at all, or your perception of his personality?
- K:** I don't think so, unless his inner feeling have changed. But I really can't see a whole lot of personality change. He seems to still be the same. He seems to be very happy. I know he didn't like it, but I don't think he is bitter. No, I don't think it has.
- C:** Do you have any feelings, any bitterness, toward the war and why it occurred?
- K:** No, because I really do feel that everything happens for a reason. Even if something would have happened, I always try to hold on to those thoughts. It's hard sometimes to perceive the reasons, but I'm sure things happen for a reason.
- C:** What do you plan to do when he comes home next week?
- K:** I'm not sure, I haven't gotten that far yet. I know when he came home from the Gulf we had everybody up, all the family and all his friends. That was nice. I think he's basically ready to just settle down and get back to being normal again.
- C:** One last thing, what would you do if he re-enlisted?
- K:** Nothing. It has to be his choice. If he re-enlisted and he was happy, that's all I would care about.
- C:** Is there anything else you would like to add that we may not have covered?
- K:** Not that I can think of. It's over, and like I said, I think there was a lot to be gained by it--family-wise and country-wise. Other than that, I can't really think of anything else.
- C:** Well, thank you for your time.
- K:** You're very welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW