

Interview with Jim Schroeder

Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Program

Allen Park, Michigan, January 6, 2010

Interviewed by Janis Kozlowski, National Park Service
Transcribed by Greg Dixon

This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Jim Schroeder was recorded with his permission on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav and wma formats and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.

The transcript has been lightly edited.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:00:00] When did you get involved in World War II?

Jim Schroeder: When I enlisted? I enlisted in the Army Air Corps on my birthday on the 27th of 1920 ... 1943. And at that time I was only about 5'6". [Chuckle] So they kept me out of service for another six months. And then in June...

Jim Schroeder: OK. In June I was shipped to Biloxi Mississippi for basic training. And after basic training, 40 of us were sent to Catawba College in Salisbury, North Carolina for cadet training. And at that time, one of the cadets, Pat Skea, turned out to be one of the, the bombardier on Watkins crew, which later on, I met up [with] in the Aleutians.

So after college training, we were shipped to Nashville, Tennessee for testing to see what we'd be qualified for - as bombardier, or navigator, because, at that time there wasn't a need for more pilots. So, at that time I didn't qualify for either bombardier, or navigator. So, I had a choice of gunnery, or radio school, and [of] which I chose ... radio school.

And then we were sent down to Scott Field, in St. Louis, for radio training. And after four months of radio training, I ended up at the top 10 percent of my class, and was given a choice of radar school, or gunnery school, and [of] which, I chose radar.

And which, after that, I got a leave - a furlough for about a week to go back to Chicago. And then I was gonna be shipped out. And after that I was shipped out to Salt Lake City, where we were put together with some other radar men - which [there] was six of us. And then we were sent from there up to Seattle, and [from] which, we boarded a ship and were sent to Anchorage, Alaska.

And after Anchorage, then we were sent on a small boat which ended up in Adak, and from Adak up to Shemya. Which, we never knew what we were going to at the time.

[0:02:19] Then when we finally ended up in Shemya, I was put together with a crew, which it was Watkins' crew - my first crew. That's where I met Pat Skea - he was a bombardier on my, on Watkins' crew.

Then I stayed in Watkins' crew: Barry Shaw, engineer; Ralph Fukes, assistant engineer; Sid Stone, radio and Hubert Altman, and Jim Sample, gunners. I know I sent you the thing [photograph] on building the model airplane in Sherman, Texas. And then Hank Kowalsky, [sp.?] which [sic] I still see - he lives only about thirty miles away from me. He was a photographer on the ship.

During that time, I flew about 10 missions with the Watkins' crew. And then I was turned over to Holland's crew later - [in] which I flew about four, or five missions. I had about 14 missions total when the war was over.

And like I said, there was a lot of time and playing cards and listening to the radio, and fishing or walking the islands - just to keep something to do. Because, flying was very sporadic because of the foul weather that we had up there.

One of my remembrances was when I was on Howlands crew and we were heading for Paramushiru, which was probably next to [the] last flight that we had. As we were getting close to the target, we were up to about 20,000', and we emptied the gasoline from the wing tanks into the bomb bay tanks. And being in the radar, I was sitting right next to the Bomb bay when I smelled gasoline. And I looked in the bomb bay, and one of the fuel lines broke. And all the gasoline was going into the bomb bay. So I got a hold of Mitch, our engineer, and he went into the bomb bay and shut off one of the valves for the line. By that time, there was about three inches of gasoline in the bomb bay.

So when they opened up the bomb bay, most of it went out. But, a lot of it flew back into the [Chuckle] back end of the ship. The crew back there was all covered with gasoline.

So after that, one of the engines quit working, so Mitch went back there and finally got the thing started. If we wouldn't have got it started, we had a choice of either flying to Paramush... to Russia and being interned for six months, or [to] try and make it back on three engines - back to Shemya.

Mitch finally got the engine started, so we flew back to Shemya. And when we got back to Shemya, the Island was covered over with fog. So we made three passes over the island and couldn't hardly see it. So we, the pilot decided to fly to Attu - which was only about 30 - 40 miles away. So when we got over to Attu - that started getting closed in. So we spent the day there, and then we flew back to Shemya.

[0:05:31] When the war was over, I was sent back to the states for a two week furlough. And then I was discharged in Texas.

And, let's see before the war, I had to take drafting in school for four years. And when I got married, my wife's brother-in-law worked at Sarge & Lundy engineers in which, he did power plant work - both nuclear and fossil. So he got me a job there. And I worked there and [at] a few other engineering firms until 1948, when I retired.

Now at the bottom and I say, "I'm a firm believer in preserving these National Memorials," so all the young men that gave up their lives for the country, I'm sorry to think that a lot of the young people today, have no idea of the young men who went through all that for their country.

Janis Kozlowski: [00:06:30] Now, you said you were a radar operator, right - that's what you ended up being trained for?

Jim Schroeder: That's right.

Janis Kozlowski: And radar was a pretty new thing at the time, wasn't it?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah, it wasn't really up to date like they do have now. It was like pips on the screen - and it really wasn't the best. But it did help you to find the islands and things like that. But otherwise, you know, it just showed how far away you were from an island. But, not like, well, dropping.... Well, the newer ships had better radar than the ones we got. The ones we got were from Africa, and they weren't up to date. And we had all the old equipment - D models. Finally, when they got up to the end of the war, we were buying, K and M model planes - which were a lot newer and had more equipment on them. So, the radar sets were definitely a lot better then.

Janis Kozlowski: And what kind of airplanes were you in?

Jim Schroeder: B-24s.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh. Always in B-24?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah, that's all they flew up there was B-24s. And the fighter planes were P-38s and P-40s. But, all I flew was B-24s - that's all they had. And the most we had was 12 ships up there. But, [Chuckle] and we always had one for a spare. But, the most we ever flew was 12 plane missions up there.

Janis Kozlowski: And you were in the 404th Bomb Squadron, right?

Jim Schroeder: Correct. Right.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. So, you couldn't really navigate with this radar in the airplane - you would just see kind of gross images?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah, that's it. You didn't, you could say, you know, the pilots that fly up close to the plane. Because you were all over water, and you aren't picking up anything until you spotted an island or some something in the ocean there that would show you - show up like a pip on screen. But it wasn't definite, like I said. What they have now is completely different than what we had back then. And seeing they were old ships, that's, that's all they had in the beginning.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you have other responsibilities, besides as radar operator, on the airplane?

Jim Schroeder: No, because I didn't have any gunnery school. That's all. There was another pio... radar man before I was, but he was transferred to another ship. So that's why I was with Watkins' crew. And then after a new crew - Howlands, came in, then I was transferred to his crew. And so I flew approximately 14 missions total all together up there.

Janis Kozlowski: OK.

Jim Schroeder: But, now Watkins' crew ended up with 35 missions, which was all they had to fly. But then they, then they were returned back to the states. But, we all went back after the war just about the same time.

Janis Kozlowski: And did Watkins' get all 35 missions in the Aleutians?

Jim Schroeder: Yep, all 35. That was a long, long time. And some of those missions were 12 hours over the water.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, but that must have been grueling.

Jim Schroeder: It is, you know - sitting there. And if you went down, you had 30, ah, 15 minutes in the water - that's all. Because, no one's gonna find you.

Janis Kozlowski: Right. I guess that's the case were they wanted you to have some sort of a life jacket on - so they can find your body later on, maybe.

Jim Schroeder: That's about it.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle]

Jim Schroeder: You aren't [Chuckle] gonna survive in that water at all.

[0:09:50] When I left service, I didn't stay in contact with Watkins' crew, until about 19 ... oh, 1990. And they used to have get-together's every so often after the war. But, I ... they didn't find me until about 1990. So, we went ... they had reunions every year. But, they kept getting further and further because, you know, we all got up in age and they couldn't make it. But, we went to Kentucky, and ... let's see ... oh, at Texas. We had one [at] Oklahoma, we had some.... So, we all got together for, I did anyway, for about five, [or] six reunions. But, then they started, you know, passing away. The bomber Pat Skag, died, and a few others - Sid Stone, the radio man. And so, there's only four of us actually left on the crew.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you have any contact with them now?

Jim Schroeder: I had a contact with the photographer. He only lives about 30 miles away, and I see him once or twice a year.

Janis Kozlowski: Is that Harry Kowalski?

Jim Schroeder: I meant Kowalski, yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Is his first name, Harry?

Jim Schroeder: Hank. Hank Kowalski.

You know, there's another person - he was the last one to go to ... he was - I guess he had problems with the engine, and they flew to Russia and was interned at the end of the war. But, he didn't spend six months there. He got a, I think he was only there about a month and a half. But ... his name is Burgess. And I - see, I haven't seen him for about a year.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:11:27] You said that a lot of your planes and equipment came from Africa, and I've heard that before. So, did....

Jim Schroeder: They were covered - they were painted pink. They called 'em Pink Elephants. So they had to redo, [Chuckle] to recover - they had to repaint all of them, you know.

Janis Kozlowski: Did they repaint them before they got to Alaska? Or did they show up here pink?

Jim Schroeder: They showed up pink. And then when they got up in Alaska....

Janis Kozlowski: And where did they paint them, do you know?

Jim Schroeder: I have no idea where they painted them, because I just heard. I saw them in the thing; that they were covered pink like that. But, we never saw them, because they had been flying there, you know, I think about - well, I don't know when they started up the bombing from the Aleutians, but it had to be at around '30, or '43, '44.

Janis Kozlowski: OK.

Jim Schroeder: And it's the same thing with the troops up there. They, all the troops were equipped with African equipment, you know. And it's pretty cold up there - so many of them had frozen feet and things like that before they got any other equipment in.

Janis Kozlowski: So what kind of equipment were you issued?

Jim Schroeder: Well, when I got up there, you know, back in '44, they were - you got regular equipment. And, first of all, they used to have the flying suites without electric heaters in them. But, when I got up there, they finally were getting heaters - because it gets pretty cold up at 20,000', you know.

Janis Kozlowski: Right. Right.

Jim Schroeder: We had boots, and the suits that we put on, which we plugged in, you know - when it starts getting cold up there.

Janis Kozlowski: So, when you went through your training, did they train you for any specific area? Like, did you, did they train you for the desert, or for the north, or...?

Jim Schroeder: We had no idea where we were going. When we shipped out of Seattle, we figured we were going up to Alaska, but otherwise, we had no idea up until that time where we were going.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:13:18] Do you remember what ship you on - that they took you to the Aleutians [on]?

Jim Schroeder: No. [Laugh] No, I'm sorry - that's been so long ago. Even, I can't even remember the small ship - I think it was about a 60 footer that we went from Anchorage all the way up to Shemya. And that was some trip that we made. [Chuckle]

Janis Kozlowski: I'll bet. [Chuckle] Do you remember much about that trip?

Jim Schroeder: Well, no. You see, we went from Anchorage up to Adak. And then we stayed there for a day or two. And then from Adak, we went all the way up to Shemya. But, like I was saying, I stayed pretty good for about two or three days before I finally got sick. But, [Chuckle] other wise, you know, in a small ship like that, we had all these guys on it, and it gets pretty wobbly up there.

Janis Kozlowski: I'll bet. That's not a very big ship to be in, in that big sea. [Chuckle]

Jim Schroeder: No, it isn't. But, you know, you remember all these little things.

[0:14:16] that flight to Paramushiru - that was something. When you get up there, and you see all this gasoline in the bottom, bottom of the bomb bay. You know, if anybody would have been smoking, we'd never been here to tell about it.

Janis Kozlowski: Right. And people did smoke in the airplanes, didn't they?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah, but luckily we were up at 20,000' and nobody was smoking. Well, I didn't have my set on either - that's another thing - because you get a spark from the set. And a set - it doesn't take much to set off 100 octane gas.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, now what kind of a set are you referring to?

Jim Schroeder: A radar set. See, its right by the bomb bay. And Mitch was up in the top turret, the engineer. So, as soon as I smelled the gasoline, why, I called him. And he took off his [Chuckle] parachute harness - a lot of good that would have done after were blown up [Chuckle]. But, he went there and turned off one of the valves that was - all the gas was coming out of. And then he opened up the bomb bay and most of it went out of the bottom of the bomb bay. But, the rest of it all splashed back on these gunners back in the back part of the plane. So, they were all covered with gasoline back there.

Janis Kozlowski: Were you scared?

Jim Schroeder: Well, you know, at the time you don't think about it. But, after you realize.... And then, one of the engines stopped. And like I said, we had a.... And once we got the engine started, we'd take, we'd be back on three engines - going back to Shemya, or going to, to Russia and being interned there. So, we had a choice there. But once Mitch got the engine started again, we decided to go back to Shemya.

Then, once we get back to Shemya, and with all the fog over the island - we flew over it three times at 25' and we couldn't find the island. So that's when we decided to go on to Attu, and we stayed there over night. And as soon as we got there, the fog moved in there. So, otherwise, I don't know where we would have gone to.

Janis Kozlowski: Was that, that was Howlands [crew], right?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah, that was Howlands crew. Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Mitch Howlands? OK.

Jim Schroeder: H-o-w-l-a-n-d-s.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. So if you, I know you didn't end up - you ended up back in the Aleutians on that trip - when the gas spewed all over. But, what would, do you have any idea what your preference would have been if you guys would have had to ditch? Would you...

Jim Schroeder: Well, you ... I don't know. See, that's up to the pilot to decide whether he can. Usually [with] three engines, you can - you lose a little bit of altitude all the time, but you have to decide to get back there if you're gonna make it or not. But, we had Russia to go to, which was only about 40 - 50 miles away. See, that was Russia and Japan weren't at war at the time. So, they would take us, and then intern the guys for six months. And then work them back into the states. But then, you know, you have a choice of one thing or the other. But luckily, we just got the engine started and we decided to go back to Shemya.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:17:18] So, what year did you actually get to Shemya? Did you tell me 1944?

Jim Schroeder: 1944, right. I think it was around December, or something like that.

Janis Kozlowski: And is Shemya the only island you served on?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah. Right. Yeah. I served just about a year on Shemya. That's the only place that we had the bombers at.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. And then when did you get shipped back to the states?

Jim Schroeder: I think it was around October ... October, it was, I think, we all went back.

Janis Kozlowski: October of what year?

Jim Schroeder: Ah, '45.

Janis Kozlowski: '45. OK. So you were in the Aleutians when the war ended - VJ Day?

Jim Schroeder: I guess. Yeah, that was what - in August, I think it was?

Janis Kozlowski: Right. Right. Do you remember where you were, or what you thought when heard the Japanese had surrendered?

Jim Schroeder: Oh, we were all [Chuckle] glad to see it over with and get back to the states. But, then, you know, you look back and it, and at the time it seemed quite bad. But, you know, you had a good time all the time with the guys up there. We did different things, you know. But, that was a good bunch of guys there. I stayed with Watkins' crew

all the time. And even when I went on to Howlands crew - I just stayed with them. And you got to know the guys pretty well, you know. So, you just hung around with them all the time. But, it was nice to get back to the states, knowing you didn't have to fly anymore missions again.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I bet. Was that - that was probably around - was that your first time in an airplane?

Jim Schroeder: Well, small airplanes, I'd been up in before. So, you know, I didn't have any fear of flying, or anything like that. But, you know - small planes. Back when I as in maybe 15, 16, I had a few flights up. And, well, you know, friends of ours took us up. So, that wasn't that much to go into.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. And ... how old were you at the time when you were on Shemya?

Jim Schroeder: Let's see, I was ... I think was ... well, let's see - '44 ... I was 19 then. Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: And were you - the crew on the B-24, were they all about the same age?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah, there was a ... Hubert Altman ... the navigator, which I still stay in contact - he's in Oklahoma City - he was the oldest one on the ship. I think he was about 24, or 25. All the rest, like Skay and Watkins, they were all around 21 - 22 years of age; very young.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I'll say. Yeah.

Jim Schroeder: Well, Sample ... I thought I was the youngest one, but he was a noise gunner. He was three months younger than I was. So, he was just 19 - just after I was. But, he's the one in Sherman, Texas with all the airplanes down there I showed you.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:20:19] So, what were your, what was it like on Shemya where you lived? What kind of quarters did you have, what kind of food, and that kind of thing. What do you remember?

Jim Schroeder: Well, we had one Quonset hut, you know. And they had, I think 12, not 12 - maybe eight guys in it. And it was just the crew, you know - the Non-Coms. The officers had their own place there. So we more or less, we had a radio, and you could listen to the old songs, you know - back in the 40s and that. And we'd get news about what's happening, you know - in the states and all over. So, we weren't without the knowledge of what was happening.

And we had ... some of the ... a couple of guys, we liked to fish. So we'd go down - we had enough line and that. And we pounded up pennies for spinners to catch fish on. And get chunks of meat and go down to the docks down there, and catch pretty good size cod fish and bring 'em home. Then we'd cook over the stove in the Quonset huts.

But, we'd go off the islands and see, you know - you'd find pieces of ... well, they had Blue Fox on the island. But they had also, not walrus, but seals. And you'd find different things with seals and stuff like that - teeth and things like that. But, we more or less, you know, spent our time. Because, you just didn't fly that much when the weather was bad. You maybe [had] three missions a month, you know. And then, you just sit there and do nothing. Like I said, I'm lucky, I didn't have to pull KP. Because, on the crews, they never had to do anything like that. So, I [Chuck] wasn't bothered with that. But, the Non-....

The officer's were very nice, you know. You done [sic] no saluting or nothing like that - you just ... they were just one of the bunch of guys with us.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, well, it's like, being 19 as you were and not having a whole lot to do, I can imagine that could get pretty darn boring for a young guy. [Chuck]

Jim Schroeder: Well, they played cards and stuff like that, you know ... listen to the radio, or, and sleep, you know. And [Chuck] when you didn't have anything to do, you'd try to find something. But, you got by, you know - you just had to find something to do all the time, that's all.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you have any recreational facilities on Shemya?

Jim Schroeder: I think they did have a club there you could go [to], you know. And we got [Chuck] rations of six cans of beer a month. Which, of course, we were on ... not many of us drank. But one, Sample, the one from Texas, he [Chuck] lived in Nuevo Laredo, which is right at the Mexican border. And he had quite an interesting childhood, really - he told us about it.

He wrote a book, and I wish I would have kept it. He sent it to me, and I sent it back. It was called, "Toys by Us." And it was one of the funniest things; of all the things that he did when he was a kid - make up things, and doing this and that. And I wish I could have got the book, because I would have printed the thing and it would have sold, because it had so many different things in there that he did.

But, like I said, he was a clown, you know. [Chuck] And when ... if I gave him my beer, you know, and ... of course, he didn't, he could hold it. But after a while ... then he'd get a little drunk. If he cut, you know, he always cut himself - I don't know why. And he'd damage his, rip up the sheet and bandage his hand with his whole sheet. And if

it was dark, he had to sit there with a flashlight under his [Chuckle] face, because he was afraid to go to sleep.

You know, you meet so many different characters like that [Chuckle] ... when you sit back and think about 'em, you know. But, Hubert Altman, he was one of the older ones on the crew. He was from Georgia. He was like a father to us, you know. [Chuckle] And he was really great. And he belonged to ... his family belonged in Congress. And I didn't know that until I tried to get in contact with him - and he had passed away, I think, six months before. And that's how I got to get together with Watkins' crew when they had the reunion - because, they passed my name on to one of the other people, and they called me to see if I wanted to come down to the reunion. Which, we had a lot of fun down there too.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, it sounds like a good way for you guys to get together.

Jim Schroeder: Yeah. And it was, you know. We always, it was about two or three days that we'd be down [at] the different places. We were down when the Oklahoma bombing was down there. So we saw the building that was really blown up down there.

Janis Kozlowski: [00:24:56] What do you remember about Aleutian weather?

Jim Schroeder: It was bad. [Chuckle] It was windy. Aleutian Islands didn't have anything but tundra on it - and nothing grew. If we had a spring, the flowers would grow from maybe mid-June to mid July. After that, there was nothing - no trees, no nothing. So, it was always windy and foggy. And it didn't really get any colder, because, you know, the Aleutian Islands go down too far - the tip almost down to where Seattle is. So, you didn't get real cold weather there, but, a lot of fog from the ocean, and that.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you remember getting much snow?

Jim Schroeder: No, hardly any snow. Well it blew so much, you know - blew! The island was two by four [miles], so it was a.... But, we had one of the largest runways - it was a 10,000' runway. So we had ... you needed it sometimes, when it was really bad weather, to, you know, to come in and find the thing. In fact, after the war, we had a B-29 come in there to land. So, it had to be a fairly good size runway.

Janis Kozlowski: OK, yeah.

Jim Schroeder: That was right after the war ended.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, so you saw a B-29 come in after?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah. Right. They came in just before we left to go back to the states. They were using those. Eventually, they were photography, and you know, after the cold

war, they were up there taking pictures all along the Japanese Islands and stuff like that. Because they, you know, they didn't know what Russia was gonna do. And so they had to keep constant over flying over the Kuriles and stuff like that.

But, now on Watkins' crew, there was an article - he was the last one to fly up missions in the Aleutians, and photographing the islands and [to] see what was going up there. And at the time, the Russians came up in their fighters and they wanted him to land. But they, they just turned around and went back. And they followed them for quite a while, and then they left them alone. But he was the last one to make a trip over the Kurile Islands.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you remember about when that was? Was that before VJ Day?

Jim Schroeder: No, it was afterwards – just before we left to come back to the states.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, I see. OK.

Jim Schroeder: So, it had to be in around September when, just before we left to come back to the states.

Janis Kozlowski: OK.

Jim Schroeder: He and another crew - I don't know what they, who the other crew ... there was two, two planes that went up over there.

Janis Kozlowski: And were you on either of those flights?

Jim Schroeder: Oh no, I wasn't. That's when I was still on Howlands crew, see. I left the Watkins' crew and then went to Howlands crew.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:27:45] Did you get a lot of mail when you were out there at Shemya? And did you keep in touch with your family, or your wife, or girlfriend?

Jim Schroeder: Yeah. We were ... I wasn't married at the time - no girlfriend. So, it was just ... send mail back and forth. But, of course, it was all looked at before what we sent back and, you know, back and forth. But, it'd come in every, you know, maybe every week, or something like that - when the planes came in ... flew from Anchorage, or wherever it was sent from, you know. But, no we always had good mail coming back and forth, so it was no problem with that.

Janis Kozlowski: Did your family know where you were?

Jim Schroeder: No, we couldn't tell them. Shemya was unknown at that time. See, it didn't come out until after the war where Shemya was. Nobody knew about Shemya. So if you'd have to write, [or] if you'd said something, they'd just blank it out for you.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, yeah. And did you get news on Shemya about what was happening in other theaters of the war – the South Pacific, or Europe, or anywhere?

Jim Schroeder: Oh, we a radio. And we had ... they would, you know, you'd get news from the states and everything. So we knew what was happening all the time, anyway. No, we weren't without contact, 'cause, we knew what was going on. I often thought about[Chuckle] the difference, if I had been ... had been shipped over to Europe, compared to the number of planes that went down over there ... compared to what we had up in the Aleutians. You'd think, "Maybe I made a good choice going up to the Aleutians instead of going over there - because they [there] was a lot of B-24's over in Europe at the time."

Janis Kozlowski: [0:29:27] What do you remember, what are your best memories of the war? Is there anything that really stuck with you, that carried you through life?

Jim Schroeder: Oh ... not really. Like I said, it's just, knowing the guys that I flew with and keeping in contact with them, you know, and talking to them. And it's ... they have a lot of nice memories. Like I said, when you're in there, you'd like to get out, but, you know, you look back and you really didn't have too bad a time while you were in the service.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hum. Now, when you got out of the service, did you go back to Iron River, was that your home?

Jim Schroeder: No, when I got out of the service, I had ... like, I had drafting, you know, in high school. And my [wife], we got married in '47 - and my wife's brother-in-law worked for Sargent & Lundy, which is an engineering firm. So, he got me in there in '47. And they did power plant work, you know - nuclear and fossil fuel. So I worked, I stayed there for about eight - ten years. And then, I went to ... you know, they'd run out work sometimes. And you ... naturally, in Chicago, they had a lot of firms, which - not only in nuclear power, but plumbing and heating, ventilating ... which, I went to about four, or five different places during that ... my 35 years of drafting, like that.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hum.

Jim Schroeder: [0:31:01] After that, then ... after I retired in '84, we had built a cabin up on Porter Lake in Iron River, Michigan. So, we decided to go up there. And we had the cabin up there, so we used to go up there. And once we moved up there, we would stay from May until October. And then, the first couple of years, we came back to my daughter's place and went on trips down to Florida - things like that.

And after the first year or so, we found out that one of the fellows, one of the elderly fellows -Konwinski- he was the Santa Cause for up there. And he used to go down to Florida after Christmas time. He used to get gifts for them from people around there, you know - money. And he'd buy Christmas gifts and take them to the children's hospital, or different elderly people. And after that was done, then he would go down to Florida for about four or five months. So, we would house sit for him.

And after two or three years, he passed away. And the daughter lived in Lower Michigan, and she got in contact with us and asked us if we would like to house sit for them. Because they used to go ... they had a place in Arizona, and would go down there for, from October until May. So, we were glad to get a hold of that. So we stayed there from, oh, well, 1990 I believe ... until 2003 I guess it was ... then we came back down here to Menomonee Falls [Wisconsin].

Jim Schroeder: [0:32:39] Well, you know, I shop for all the people around here - because, there's only 50 cars, about, for 300 people. So, you know, if ... they have a bus service, you know - twice a week to go to different places shopping. But, on like a Saturday or Sunday, there's nobody here. Then I take them over to the dentists and the doctors, and I ask them if they want some different things - certain people on, during the week, they ask me to get this and that for them. So, I go to Wal-mart - and Wal-Mart knows me [Chuckle] by heart.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle]

Jim Schroeder: I almost [Chuckle] go there everyday. So they know me pretty well over there. But I get to know a lot of people over there, you know - even some of the upper people. So, they always say, "Hello" and talk to me and things like that. And it's nice. I keep on going like that.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, and then you have a little bit of a social life anyway.

Jim Schroeder: Yeah. And then I'm working on my cabin here - from up north. So, I'm trying to get that finished. I had pictures, but, I thought, "Well, this is the last cabin here...." Well, did you ...you didn't get the pictures from ... that I sent you - the color pictures?

Janis Kozlowski: Not yet. No.

Jim Schroeder: The Terry Redland Pictures. Well, you'll see those ... and I've been working on those ... two pair there. And I don't have any homes to work on. So I thought, "Well, I'd give it try." But, it's a lot different working from a picture, than it is taking pictures and measuring out the home, you know. Because they, they gave - get the different size. But, it came out pretty good. But, you should get the pictures - I don't know how long it takes. But, I sent them up there, I know, the other day.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:34:13] Well, from one remote area to another. So, it's probably just a little bit of a slow ride [Chuckle].

Jim Schroeder: [Laugh] Yeah. Well basically, on the one, where, up on Porter Lake - there was only three of us that were up there all summer long. The rest were two, three days - a week, or two weeks. So, you didn't have that much company up there all the time. But it ... you know, you have to like being in the woods like that. Otherwise, we had people come up there and say, "Gee, it's nice up here, but I couldn't take it for more than two days." Yeah, it's nice. We started going up there in 1963. We went camp ... ah, the guide that we had, took us up to Porter Lake ... I think it was in '63. And we use to camp on the Island. We used to drive from Chicago and pick up my cousin in Wausau and drive up there, and get up there about two, three in the morning.

And then ... well, we'd stay for a little bit. Once it got light, I take the canoe - we had a canoe from 19.... That's all we ever had, was a canoe - a metal or aluminum canoe that we used to fish in. And I'd go down and put the flies in the ... into the canoe. And then my wife and I'd get in there, paddle across to the Island, which is about a half a mile, dump the stuff off, [and] I'd come back, get more supplies. Then we'd go back ... This is on a weekend; a Saturday morning. And sometimes we'd be sitting up there - I'm trying to build a fire to make a ... you know, something to eat. And Vi was, ah, from Wausau - would say, "Jim wouldn't you like to go back to Wausau and sleep in a nice warm bed?" And I'd say, "Vi, there's no other place I'd rather be than right here."

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle] Sound's pretty nice there.

Jim Schroeder: Yeah, well it was nice. And then they - one of the fellows from across from the island offered some land. And we got 392 feet on the lake and 1,000 feet back. So, we got a little bit of land up there. But, once you go past, you know, 200 feet, [Chuckle] you don't go back in the woods much anymore - you don't see hardly anything like that.

But, then in 19.., ah, '70 - what was it? '79. Well, in '79, when we bought the land, my daughter, well, my daughter wanted it. And my son-in-law, they said, "Well we're going to ... and, you know, everybody, pay half of it." So, we got a ... a cabin in pieces from Rhinelander. And we put that together in two weeks. So, we had a cabin [there], too. And we kept bringing stuff up, you know, from Chicago, all the time. And finally got it pretty well fixed the way ... indoor plumbing and ... a well that we got - got big tanks. It's just like a home when you go up there. So, we have heat and everything. We used to go up there until maybe mid-November before it started snowing a lot. But, then, you know, after we got, we got sick, we just didn't go up there that much. The kids go up maybe every two weeks, and then I'd go up right after they did, or before they did, and then come back again. So, we kind of take care of the cabin all of the time. So it's nice to have something to go to.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, it sounds like a great place. I bet I'd like it there.

Jim Schroeder: [0:37:34]. It's too bad that, you know.... It's funny that they had a ... the government is funny, with sending troops to one place and not equipping them with the right stuff, you know - to go in there. They had all the African stuff to live on until they finally got the right equipment for them. But, that's what happened. [Chuckle]

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Yeah, you'd think they would be better prepared. But, those are the stories we've been, heard about, you know, you guys not being well prepared.

Jim Schroeder: Yeah. Yeah. You go up there and... I know a lot of them came back with frozen feet. And with the equipment that's just for keeping them covered up, you know - dress covering and that. It must have been pretty bad up there. And then having the Japs up there too, [Chuckle] is another thing.