

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Mark Allshouse
43rd Air Defense Artillery
Integrated Fire Control Area
1973-1974
Interviewed by Mary Rasa, NPS
February 9, 2004
Transcribed by Mary Rasa, 2011



Fort Hancock's Nike Integrated Fire Control (IFC) Area.
Photo courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

(Fort Hancock's Nike site was a dual site. This was because there were four missile launchers. At the IFC Area pictured above there are two sets of radar equipment. Each side of the site controlled the radar for two missile launchers. After converting to the Nike Hercules Missiles c. 1960, the western IFC Area pictured at top of the photograph received an additional and more powerful radar antenna called the HIPAR or Hi-Powered Acquisition Radar. This is the largest white dome to the right of the others.)

MR: Today is February 9, 2004. My name is Mary Rasa. I am the Sandy Hook Museum Curator. I am here with veteran Mark Allhouse, Allshouse and he has come from Ohio today to be interviewed. And I am going to ask him a few questions about his time here. When and where were you born?

MA: I was born in Detroit, Michigan. October 5, 1950.

MR: Okay. Where did you go to school?

MA: I went to school, high school, I went to Jackson High. We lived in Jackson, Michigan then. I went to Jackson High School. I went to Ferris State College. After that, up in Big Rapids, Michigan. I got a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration.

MR: And, so you were drafted right after you got out of school?

MA: As soon as I got out of school.

MR: Did your father or grandfather serve in the military before you?

MA: My dad was in the Air Force in World War II. My mother's father his last commission was he was lieutenant commander of the Boston Navy Yard in World War II. He was in the military. He was in the Navy from 1894 to 1946.

MR: Wow. What year were you born?

MA: I was born in 1950.

MR: What years did you serve?

MA: Yeah. I got drafted on August 28, 1972 and I got released on August 2, 1974.

MR: How did you become involved at Fort Hancock?

MA: Well, upon being drafted after Basic Training I was sent to Air Defense School in Fort Bliss, Texas as a 24 pup 20 which was at that time an acquisition radar technician. So, I repaired the radars.

MR: Okay. I'm sorry, when did you come here? What date?

MA: I came here in September. The best I can remember was September the 16th 1973.

MR: That's pretty good remembering. So, you left here on August 2nd (1974)?

MA: August 2nd.

MR: Did you know anything about this place before you came here?

MA: No.

MR: How did you get here?

MA: My car.

MR: From Fort Bliss?

MA: Yeah.

MR: Long trip. (laughter) So, you were trained to do the job so you knew what you were going to be doing once you got here?

MA: Yes.

MR: What was your title?

MA: I was a Spec(alist) 4 when I ETS'd (Enlisted Termination of Service) and I was radar maintenance on the Acquisition Radars were the scanning radars. We found the target and the tracking (Target Tracking Radar or TTR) ones locked into it and then they transferred communications to the Missile Tracking (Radars or MTR) for launch purposes.

MR: And the unit you think you were a part of was the 43rd (Air Defense Artillery)?

MA: I'm pretty sure. That was what Lieutenant Cavise was in, Captain Cavise at that time, yeah.

MR: Is 43rd ADA. Okay. Did this job aid you in future work?

MA: Yeah, it helped because the military was at that time when I ETS'd in '74 it helped me get jobs, my time in the military. And then people were interested, "Well, what all did you do in that?" You know, because that was at the time, this equipment at that time was state of the art electronic equipment.

MR: What was your next job after you got out?

MA: I went to work for a company manufacturing crank shafts. I fell back on my business degree.

MR: Okay. Did you have, were there any alerts while you were here or did they just like have drills?

MA: We had drills and I don't believe there were any real alerts at the time I was here. We used to have a General in the van. He was over at the Academy in New York. He'd come down occasionally and want to drill us. But he would come up. He wrote a few of the manuals we looked at so, he enjoyed doing that.

MR: Okay.

MA: He was up at West Point.

MR: When you did drills, what was your job? To man the radar?

MA: No. I made sure that everything was functioning properly. We had operators. Which those guys operated it. And then my primary function was to make sure that it would run.

MR: Okay.

MA: If anything malfunctioned during the drill then we quick got in there and fixed it.

MR: Did you work with just military? Were there any civilians working with you?

MA: We had civilian support, support team then but they very rarely (came) unless it was something that the military said we weren't going to do. But they had a little shack down from the HIPAR radar antenna. (located in the IFC area at Fort Hancock)

MR: Did you meet Ron Hyers? He was a civilian employee?

MA: Yep.

MR: He has come out here as well.

MA: I knew Ron. Yep.

MR: What building did you work in at the radar site?

MA: At the radar site I was over the LOPAR (Low-Powered Acquisition Radar) radar and the HIPAR. We had a dual site at the time and I had both LOPAR buildings and the HIPAR.

MR: So you worked on both sides of the...?

MA: Both sides, yeah.

MR: Okay. What building did you live in?

MA: It used to be the barracks. Now it is across from the, just as you come in (to Fort Hancock).

MR: The U shaped building?

MA: The U shaped building. I had the back corner.

MR: Barracks 74.

MA: Barracks 74. I had the back corner as you came in.

MR: And you ate in there as well.

MA: Yep. The mess hall was on the opposite side.

MR: How many people were there at the time you were there? Probably not many?

MA: I think it was about seventy maybe.

MR: Okay. And those seventy worked at both the launch and the radar site?

MA: Right.

MR: Oh, okay.

MA: You were either at the IFC center which was where I was at with the main radars or we had the launching center further down the road there.

MR: Did you take part in any social activities at the Fort?

MA: No. Not really. I was usually on call. The way that we did it at the time, the guy who came from (Fort) Bliss with me there, was just two of us so they couldn't work us 24 (hours) on, you know, 48 (hours) off. So, he lived off base, Ernie did, and that's Giamones (spelling?) is his name. And he lived off base so I covered anything. I was on call 24, on base all night long. And then what we did was we had a warrant officer, Harry Pop. I don't know if you have kept track of him. Captain Cavise would know him. He was a W-2. He was our warrant officer. And all we did was give him a work schedule. He just said, "Just as long as you guys cover it." You know, you take care of me, we'll take care of you so...

MR: Was anything open? Was the PX (Post Exchange) still open out here or was that basically..?

MA: Mmm hmm.

MR: Oh it was. Okay.

MA: And the Gas Station right across from where I talked to you. I remember getting gas on odd and even days. In fact, now I am mad because I just found the letters sent down from Battalion Command which was up there on the hill at the time saying odd and even license plate days. I'll have to make a copy of it.

MR: That would be great. Let's see, was the Theater still open or was that closed?

MA: No. The theater was closed.

MR: It was closed. Okay. So, you had to go off to get any supplies or anything you needed?

MA: Yeah. We had a little NCO (Non-commissioned Officers' Club) Club which was..

MR: Over that way.

MA: Down that way, yeah. And then a couple of your maintenance buildings back there we used to work on our cars (The red brick buildings located in today's north maintenance yard). The Battalion Commander told us we could have an old building where they moved tank turrets back there.

MR: It was the former Motor Pool so that made sense.

MA: Right. He told us we could use that building plus we did have a little repair shop back there.

MR: Okay. Let's see. Was the Service Club still functioning or just the NCO Club?

MA: Just the NCO Club.

MR: Were there religious services held out here?

MA: Yeah there was but I didn't participate in any.

MR: Did you go to the beach while you were here?

MA: Oh yeah.

MR: Do you remember which beach? Was it up in the Fort area or was it down further?

MA: It was over this way.

MR: Okay. It was North Beach.

MA: Yeah. North Beach.

MR: Okay. Did you take any excursions to New York while you were here?

MA: Yep.

MR: Did you go by bus, train?

MA: Car.

MR: Car. Okay.

MA: Went to Club 54 back then. (laughter)

MR: Must have been a happening time.

MA: It was eventful. (laughter) Went to the first Bachman-Turner Overdrive concert at the (Madison Square) Garden. Another guy and I did. And they became popular.

MR: Did you go to any bars in Highlands?

MA: Yeah. In fact, I am going to drive by a couple of them and see if they are still there when we get done here.

MR: Okay. Let's see. Was this a fun or boring place to be working?

MA: I enjoyed it. I had a good time. I was fortunate because it was a dual site. I had a lot of freedom because it was only the two of us. So, I could check in, make sure everything was up and going and then turn around and have my freedom and do whatever I wanted to do as long as I could be there in fifteen minutes.

MR: Did you ever have to sleep in the barracks down there.

MA: Nope.

MR: Okay. That was good.

MA: Because not having the third man I didn't have to do that.

MR: Did anything especially humorous occur while you were here?

MA: We got intoxicated one night and ran over Building 34 steps. (We) Drove a car right over those.

MR: That's why they look the way they do.

MA: Yep. A guy by the name of Mark Wilson. He was with me. He worked. He was in the IFC Center as what we called the “scope dopes.” The guys that were the, you know, the operators. Yeah, we got together one night and got a little overboard and drove a car over those steps.

MR: Okay. Did you ever have any interactions with the Coast Guard people out here?

MA: Once in a while we talked to them at the NCO Club. Yeah. It was a small base and everybody got to where they knew one another. You know, you waved to each other for sure. The one thing that is missing is the MP (Military Police) quarters and that is a parking lot now. That was farther down from the Barracks Building 74.

MR: Oh, okay.

MA: They ate in our building. They used our mess hall, but..

MR: There were a lot of temporary World War II buildings that were torn down over there so, that would make sense. Anything else stand out in your mind about Fort Hancock? Was it really cold in winter? Was it really hot in summer? Anything?

MA: I never really remember that bad except getting off (the Hook) in the summer time and getting back on with the National Park. That was always the traffic. (The southern two miles of Sandy Hook were at this time Sandy Hook State Park.)

MR: Oh, that’s right.

MA: The traffic would be tied up for hours trying to get on there.

MR: Okay. Did you ever go down to those beaches?

MA: Yep.

MR: Oh, you did.

MA: Yep. One thing that we used to do which I could probably get in trouble for which I am sure the Captain, he can remember those days. We used to come through that beach at 130 miles per hour in a corvette, which I still have the same corvette sitting in my garage. But I would come down through there at 130 miles per hour. I remember getting up to the guard shack there were the park rangers are. I used to flip the bright lights on and off and turn from red to green and we would start slowing down there.

MR: Well, we still do that today. (Use the traffic light at the Ranger Station at night.) I am sure there is a lot of dragging going on. Let’s see. Do you keep in touch with anyone?

MA: No. The only person I have really kept in touch with and see once in while was a guy that was in school with me in El Paso. And he lives in Wapakoneta, Ohio and I lived in that area for awhile and I ran across him one day at a festival thing.

MR: What is his name?

MA: Brad Allman (spelling?) was his name.

MR: Okay.

MA: He was the other one. There were three of us. All three of us were college grads that got drafted. Jim Ernst and he ETS'd early from here because he wanted to go back and get his Masters. He had a degree in psychology. He wanted to be a psychologist. She he took an early 90 day early out and then joined the Reserves. At that time they would allow you to do that and with the site closing down it was already announced it was closing down so he left in May of '74. And yeah, Brad Allman, I see him once in a while we run across each other. And outside of that as far as I know Jim he is back in California. He was headed back that way. It is interesting. He kept up with Captain Cavise. 'Cause I can remember him. Ask him the next time you see him about Speedy.

MR: I will.

MA: The guy who had the blue '66 (Corvette) vette.

MR: No problem. Also were you helping them take things down?

MA: Yes.

MR: Did you actually disassemble the radar?

MA: We disassembled everything.

MR: Okay.

MA: We had it packed up in crates and ready to ship out.

MR: Did you notice we started putting them back up?

MA: I saw that coming by. The towers were painted and stuff like that. I said, hmmm.

MR: Yeah. We just started that last year.

MA: Okay. I had the HIPAR radar. That was the one that was in the fiberglass bubble. That was 43' x 43'.

MR: That tower is gone. So, did you see the ceremony when the last missile group left or you left right before that?

MA: I probably would have left right before that.

MR: Oh, okay. I think that was the middle of August.

MA: Yeah. Okay. I would have been out then.

MR: Okay.

MA: I am trying to think of the Major's name was. It's on the tip of my tongue because he wanted to have a farewell party when we shut it down. I can remember we all got together and turned around and set that up. But I can't remember his name. I'm sure the Captain would remember it.

MR: Is there anything else you would like to say?

MA: No. It's kind of fun after thirty years seeing it all as I was flying in this morning from Cleveland. I said, "You know I think I am going to go on out there." I never, in all honesty, I never have been back to a place that I was at. I have moved around over the years, you know, and I said, "Well, I'm here and I know it is close." New Jersey isn't that big so I decided I was going to drive over this afternoon. So, I am glad that I did and we had the opportunity to talk.

MR: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

MA: And bring back some good memories.

MR: And that is the end of the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW