

**Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS  
Oral History Interview with Jerry Boisseau  
51<sup>st</sup> Air Defense Artillery, 1963-67  
April 25, 2003**

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Transcribed by Melissa Kozlowski 2003**



This oral history interview of Jerry Boisseau is taking place on Friday, April 25, 2003 at Amherst Financial in Toms River, NJ. Mr. Boisseau served at Fort Hancock for three and a half years from December of 1963 through March of 1967.

Question: When and where were you born?

Answer: Plattsburg, NY, June 5, 1939.

Q: Where did you graduate from?

A: St. John's Academy in Plattsburg, in 1957.

Q: Was your father or your grandfather in the military?

A: No. I had one uncle who was in the Army during WWII and I had another uncle who was in the Navy during WWII. My father was never in the service, or grandfather was never in the service.

Q: How do you become involved at Fort Hancock?

A: It was my first duty assignment. I'll bore you. After I graduated from high school, I went to St. Michael's College in Vermont, I was taking the Air Force R.O.T.C., I was there for three years, I left in, after the year 1960, worked at various jobs. My wife and I were married in August of 1961. I enlisted in the Army as a private in October of 1961. At that particular point in time, we were living in Rutland, Vermont, and I went through basic training at Fort Dix from October of '61. And I don't remember, I think, I finished somewhere around March because we had basic training and then advanced individual training. My first duty assignment was at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. I was accepted into the Officers Candidate Program out of Fort Leonard Wood. So I went to the Field Artillery Officers' Candidate School at Fort Sill. I was there from, I attended the O.C.S. at Fort Sill from late '62 in about the October/November time frame. I graduated from O.C.S. in June or July of '63. I remained at Fort Sill on the O.C.S. staff, and my first duty assignment was at Fort Hancock. I was assigned at Fort Hancock; my first assignment was assignment adjutant, at the 52nd Artillery Brigade. The brigade commander was Brigadier General was Clarence W. Clapsaddle Jr. I remained there for about a year or so. I don't remember the exact dates. When I left there I went to jump school, paratrooper training, and I came back and I was assigned as a launcher platoon leader with Charlie Battery 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 51<sup>st</sup>. I remained in that position for several months. Moved from there to the IFC (Integrated Fire Control). As an IFC platoon leader in Charlie Battery, it was a dual battery; they had two IFC's, two launcher platoons. I remained as one of the IFC platoon leaders for several months. I got promoted to First Lieutenant while I was with Charlie Battery, then I went from there to Headquarters Battery as a Battery Commander of the 3d Battalion, 51<sup>st</sup> Artillery. While at the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 51<sup>st</sup>, they were short officers at this particular time because

Vietnam was starting to pick up, and for a period of time I had concurrent duty as a First Lieutenant I was Headquarters Battery Commander and I was also the Battalion S-3. Later on, I took on the additional duty of Battalion S-4, so some of the people I was working for as a mentioned, Lieutenant Colonel Powell was the Battalion Commander, Major Henry Butts was the XO (Executive Officer). I got promoted to Captain while there with the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 51<sup>st</sup>. I left Fort Hancock in March or April of 1967. Had orders to go to Vietnam. That was what I did at Fort Hancock.

Q: Can you tell me about an average day at Fort Hancock?

A: Usually, I reported to work at about 6 o'clock in the morning. Depending on what unit I was with we'd either have some PT (Physical Training), or we'd go straight to our duty assignment. The hours were normally pretty long. You may get back to the house about 7 or 8 at night. When I was first assigned there, we had our son, Linda and I, my wife, we had our son at that point, Gregory. I think at some point in time someone asked me what was the highlight of my career at Fort Hancock. I'd have to say the birth of my daughter, Lisa. She was born during a blizzard, in January of 1965. The hours were long, but that's typical of any military assignment, quite honestly. Many times you'd be working weekends, other times, depending upon what activity was going on and what activity was taking place.

Q: Did your work in the military aid you in your future work?

A: My time in the service, I always consider to anyone I ever talk to, as good. It gave me a very, very good foundation. It gave me the discipline I needed. Like I said, when I went in to the service, I was a private. I didn't have a college degree. While in the service, I got an undergrad degree in business. I got a master's in education and a master's in business administration. All taking night courses. While I was there at Fort Hancock, I was taking course at what was at that time called Newark State College. I'm not really sure what college that is now (Kean). They had educational programs on campus which I was taking to get my undergraduate degree.

Q: Were there ever any alerts of potential enemy attacks?

A: Oh, yes. Because it was the Air Defense Artillery primarily and we were dealing with, when I was an IFC platoon leader I can recall one situation, or one instance where a commercial airline for some reason was not identifying itself, either its electronics were not working or whatever, and we went through our whole process and we were all the way on the countdown. As a matter of fact, I was sitting in Fire Control Station and I had my thumb on the switch, and we were on the ten second countdown. And thank God, at somewhere in that last ten seconds they were able to identify the aircraft and determine that it was commercial, and we breathed some very heavy sighs of relief.

Q: What building did you primarily work in?

A: First year or so I was with the 52<sup>nd</sup> Brigade at Brigade Headquarters. Then from there I went to Charlie Battery and my duty station was down in the Launching Area for awhile and then in the IFC area. Obviously, when I was platoon leaders for both of those units, it was all right there in the main center of the post compound, but quite honestly I don't remember the building numbers.

Q: Do you recall the building that you lived in?

A: I think it was 145, 145B.

Q: Did you work with any civilians at the Fort?

A: We had, in the Air Defense Artillery, we always had a lot of civilians there because they're the ones that gave us our technical support, I can't recall any of their names, but I know that yes, on a regular basis we always had civilians in the launcher platoon area or in the IFC. Those initials stand for Integrated Fire Control. In those locations, in the IFC, you had an acquisition radar, a target tracking radar, a missile tracking radar, and a target ranging and all these radars required civilian support. And I think they all came from Picatinny Arsenal, or in that area. But, yes, to answer your question.

Q: What can you tell me about social activities at the Fort?

A: Oh, they were great. The quarters we lived in were almost right across the street from the Officers Club. So, there were various events that we would have. There were some long hours, but we had some good times as well. We would have Battery functions, where we'd get to have a Battery party, and then there'd be, because there were several other units on Post, there were several officers, and we would always have something going on at the Officers' Club. In the Brigade Headquarters, there were many officers at that particular location.

Q: Did you attend any religious services at the Fort?

A: Yes, there was a little chapel. The last time I was out at the post I think the chapel was still there as a matter of fact.

Q: Did you go to the beach while at Fort Hancock?

A: My wife loved the beach. From our quarters, while standing in the kitchen you could look out and watch the ocean liners coming in and out of the New York Harbor, and the beach was just almost a stones throw from our quarters.

Q: Did you have the opportunity to make any excursions to NYC?

A: I'm sure we did but quite honestly I can't recall them, but I'd have to say we did. Yes.

Q: Did you know of any servants, minorities or women working at the Fort, either in civilian or military jobs?

A: None come to mind.

Q: Overall, would you say it was a fun or boring place to have been stationed?

A: Not boring. The Post itself, because of its location, was outstanding. As a matter of fact, I was told as a young Lieutenant with the quarters we moved into, I would probably not have another set of quarters of that, as nice as that, while in the service. And they were pretty close to being right. The quarters on the post were very, very nice. Even though I was not on Officers' Row, and in the larger set of quarters, they were perfectly adequate. It was a good experience. The assignment was not what I would call my best assignment, by that I mean because of our reliance upon electronics, and electronics was in its very early stages, that I saw some very good officers who were on the fast track to rapid promotions lose their entire career because a capacitor resistor blew during an evaluation or during an inspection. I was fortunate enough that never happened to me, but there were so many strong people who left their career right there at Fort Hancock.

Q: Do you recall any particularly humorous occasion?

A: Oh. I forget. I'm sure there were plenty of them but I can't think of any right now.

Q: What stands out in your mind about Fort Hancock?

A: For one, its location. Not often do you, I think, the location is truly outstanding. Some of the things I did there that I have done since is, there's an old civilian gentleman, I can't even recall his name, we used to call him "Pops," he taught me how to surf fish. This guy was truly outstanding. One of the other things I recall, as I mentioned, General Clapsaddle, here's a guy that, he loved to fish. He loved to dig his own worms, and that was all a part of his recreation and enjoyment. I never heard from him again, but he was very supportive of me and my career and helped me get a good foundation.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to cover that we have not gone over already in the interview?

A: No, other than the fact that it was a great learning experience. And it was a good Post; it was a good place to be.

**END of Interview**