

My name is Fran Prokop and I am interviewing Robert J. Kilroy, who served in the U.S. Army during the Viet Nam conflict. He actually served from 1964 to 1978, including the Viet Nam War. Mr. Kilroy learned of the Veterans History Project through me and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans History Project.

Here is his story:

When and where were you born?

Oak Park, Illinois. August 28, 1943.

What about your parents; what did they do? Were they working?

My father was a Postal Worker; mother was a housewife.

What did you do before entering the service?

I worked at the Chicago Sun Times – Daily News.

What was your job there?

Advertising – dispatch.

How old were you when you entered the service?

I was two months shy of being 21.

Were any other family members in the military?

Yes. I had a brother in the Army – drafted. Served in Viet Nam. And a brother went to the Air Force for four years – was not in Viet Nam; was in Europe.

Two brothers – was that the extent of your family?

Yes.

How did you enter the service – did you enlist or were you drafted.

I enlisted.

When was that – do you remember?

15 June 1964.

Was there a war going on at that time?

I think it was August or April of '74 – I forget. I was in Korea when the Viet Nam war ended.

Did you choose that specific branch of service – the Army?

Yes.

Was there any particular reason why?

Well, it's only a two-year enlistment – three-year enlistment. The others are four.

Where were you sent – where did you do your boot camp?

Basic training was at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

How did you get to Fort Knox? By what means?

By train.

How long were you at Fort Knox.

About ten weeks.

Okay, and that was regular basic training.

Right.

And after that were you sent on any specialized training or anything?

Yes. AIT – Advanced Individual Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

And what did that involve?

Clerk-typist.

Your basic training – besides exercise and guns, did that include classroom?

Yes.

What was taught in the classroom?

Hygiene, military courtesy, Uniform Code of Military Justice – basically that's about it – what I remember.

How did you adapt to military life – the physical regimen, living in the barracks and the food – things like that.

It took me awhile –

What do you mean?

Well, being away from home – the military way of life.

But you did adapt to it.

Yes, I did.

You met people your age and got along well socially –

Well, mostly, yeah. I was a little older than most of the guys – I was almost 21 when I went in.

Right, a lot of guys were 18 or 19, I suppose. After your specialized training was over, where did you serve?

In Germany.

And what was your job in Germany.

Clerk-typist – I did all sorts of things, but clerk-typist / driver,

Where was this in Germany?

Finthen – Fi-n-t-h-e-n Air Field in Germany – outside of Mainz.

How long did you stay there – in Germany?

I was there for three years.

And so basically your job was office work – clerk-typist and driver.

Who did you drive around?

Just general – duties.

What else can you tell me about Germany – how did you like it there?

I liked Germany; I didn't want to leave.

That's why you stayed in –

Yeah.

What did happen – I mean your three years were up now and what happened?

I went back to the States – Fort Eustis, Virginia – I was there for about a year – not

Quite, about ten months. Then I went back to Germany.

What was your job at Fort Eustis?

Wheel Vehicle mechanic, parts department, motor pool.

How did it come about – your enlistment was up after three years.

I re-enlisted. I re-enlisted when I was in Germany.

Oh, you didn't mention that. You re-enlisted when you were in Germany.

Um-hmm.

But then they still sent you back to Virginia, but then you got back to Germany again.

Yes, just for a year.

Was it the same place in Germany?

No, it was in Furth – F-u-r-t-h, outside of Nuremberg.

What were your duties there?

I was a wheel vehicle mechanic.

How long did you stay there?

About ten months.

And then what happened?

I went to Viet Nam – the Viet Nam war was ramping up at that time.

How did you get to Viet Nam?

Airplane.

You flew to Viet Nam.

Yes.

And what were your duties in Viet Nam?

I made Staff Sergeant there but I started off – switchboard operator / communications. I made Staff Sergeant; I was Communications Chief.

You were raised in rank because you re-enlisted, right?

Oh, yeah, that's right.

And what else did you say –

Then I worked in Battalion S 4 – property book – that was Battalion Supply.

Continue – what happened after that? Did you stay there –

I spent – I was there for a total of two years – 25 months –

That was in Viet Nam.

Viet Nam – 25 months.

Did you see combat in Viet Nam?

Not really; there was some going on but I wasn't in a fire –

You were not involved in it that much. Did you ever witness any casualties or destruction –

We lost some people

In your unit?

Yes. It was an Aviation Unit – 101st Airborne.

Did you ever witness destruction of villages, or things like that?

No, no.

Did you receive any medals, honor or awards?

I got the Bronze Star Medal, I got the Army Commendation Medal, Viet Nam Service Medal – there was another one; I just can't think of it.

Well, if you do think of it, let me know, okay, and we can include it in the final draft. So you were there for 25 months while this was all going on.

How about friendships formed and camaraderie of service – did you meet any guys that you are still in contact with today?

No.

You didn't keep in touch with any guys afterwards?

No.

How about communications from home. You were not married at that time –

No.

So how did you stay in touch with family and friends?

Letters.

Mostly letters – no phone calls.

I called once through amateur radio – what do you call it –

Ham radio?

Ham radio, yeah – patched through, you know. That's the only time; I did it once.

How about packages – did family members send packages –

For Christmas, yeah.

How did you feel about being there in the service?

Well, when you were in Viet Nam you were there for one year. At that time if you extend it six months you got an extra R & R – and you got 30-day freebies in – In other words it didn't count against your leave time. And I extended six months twice.

Okay.

After that they wouldn't let me, and the war was winding down anyway, you know.

Okay, so you extended your service six months twice.

Yes, in Viet Nam.

What were your recreational or off-duty pursuits?

There was nothing there that we could do.

There were no organized sports activities, teams or anything?

No, not that I remember. It was Viet Nam; we were near the DMZ, so there was nothing

You were near the DMZ –

Some people played basketball – I just – I read, you know.

Okay, so if there were any sports, you weren't involved.

No.

You were a reader.

Yes.

Did you have a regular 9 to 5 job there or –

No.

What were your hours.

It was 24/7 basically.

Really?

We had sleep time, but anything could go, you know.

Were you ever bombed or anything like that? At the place you were at –

In your area?

No, but – down the road somewhere, I forget – some Cobras – some Viet Cong set off some rockets – We had a couple of attack helicopters blew up and it blew all the ammunition and it went to a barracks that was empty. That was close; it was a few Meters down from us, and I was on switchboard duty at that time, and it was scary

What years are we talking about that this happened?

I was in Viet Nam from November of '69 to first of December of '71.

So two full years.

Right.

So this took place while you were there.

Um-hmm.

And what part of Viet Nam were you in – was there a specific name for it?

Du Bai.

Do you know how to spell that?

I think it's Phu Bai – I was in Camp Eagle near the DMZ.

So in December of '71 your enlistment again came up –

No, the enlistment – I was still enlisted. I re-enlisted the first time it was six years. And after Viet Nam I was assigned to Fort Lee, Virginia and my job was I drove for a one star general – Brigadier General – chauffeur – they call it. I did that for about 13

months and he was sent someplace else. And I drove the Major General of the post – Commander – Post General for a few months and then I went to Army Recruiting Center – I went to Army Recruiting School.

Where was that at?

That was in Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. Near Indianapolis.

And that's a recruiting school –

At that time; I don't know what it is now, but at that time, yes, eight weeks.

And were you a recruiter?

Yes.

And then what happened after that?

I was a recruiter for about – from about October – I was there for about six months.

Then I didn't get enough people in, you know –I told the truth –

You were too truthful.

I was truthful.

So you didn't recruit enough people, right?

I recruited some but I don't remember how many. And then I was sent to Korea.

When were you there?

I went there from June '74 to July of '75.

One year, just about.

Yeah.

And what was your job in Korea?

I ran the bus terminal.

The bus terminal. Who rode these buses?

It was the military – service personnel. We had buses going to yag san (phonetic)

Seoul, Korea – going to Camp K C – DMZ – different – other places.

So the buses were for military personnel.

Right. And some civilians, you know, and their dependents. Some people had dependents over there.

Military and dependents. And that was for one year, just about.

One year.

Okay, that's July '75, and what happened after that?

I went to Hawaii.

And what was your job in Hawaii? Gotta stop and think --

I was a squad leader in the 25th Supply & Transport Battalion – 25th Infantry Division -- Tropic Lightning.

What were your duties there?

Well, squad leader, in charge of so many men. I worked in the motor pool – it's a truck battalion – supply – tractor trailers and straight trucks – military type vehicles. I did that for three years.

So you were in Hawaii for three years.

Um-hmm.

What did you do off-duty there in Hawaii?

Well, we went to different – we went to Honolulu, toured around the islands, stuff like that, you know.

What base were you at in Hawaii.

Schofield Barracks.

Oh, you were – the old Army barracks.

Yeah.

That's on Oahu.

Right.

Wow – did you feel military history there – you know

Well, it was nice to have nice weather all year round. But you can only do so much there. It gets a little damp after awhile. And it's so expensive back in those days.

Housing was in the six figures at that time, without air conditioning and here it was still in the five figures.

Wow.

Probably by now it's in the seven figures; I wouldn't put it past, you know.

Yeah, very expensive. So how long did that last – three years –

So we're talking 1978 then?

Yes. Time to get out.

So you had enough of the Army by that time.

Um-hmm.

So you just said that you were through. Where did you go to muster out?

It was there in Oakland Army Base.

Where?

Oakland, near San Francisco.

Are you a member of any veterans' organizations?

No.

So you don't have any contact with fellow veterans?

No.

How did your military experience affect your life, do you think?

Well, I had a chance to travel; I probably wouldn't have otherwise. Well, it was good for the most part but some parts I'd rather forget.

But for the most part –

It was okay, you know; a lot of issues with officers, you know, otherwise it wasn't bad, I mean, I'd do it again, but I don't think today I would encourage anybody to join the military.

So what life lessons do you think you learned from the military?

Well, being at work on time; you mature more if you're in there for awhile.

Right , responsibility –

Responsibility, yeah.

Anything thing else that you'd like to add to this story?

Not really.

How did you feel coming back home again – how did you readjust –

Well, it took awhile – the use of, just getting up at a certain time – to get used to civilian life, that took me awhile having been militarized for so many years.

What did you do here when you returned?

I retired as a courier – messenger for a few years; drove a cargo van and I worked in the office too.

So basically the same type of job you were doing in the service.

Yeah; small packages, and I retired after 30 years there.

I'm driving for UBER cab now.

Oh, you are! How do you like that?

Yeah, so far, I've been driving for about three months. I retired, I don't have to work but I just want to.

Do they just contact you –

Through your Smart phone.

How often do you drive – do you have a set day –

If I want to. I can work today. I went down there – I can work the whole day.

But tomorrow if I don't feel like going down, I don't go down, so I don't have

Any set hours.

Where do you go, if they call you?

I start off from here; I get something on my way to the city, I could just pick up the fare and drop them off – and also, like I say, it's just work when I want to –

Right.

I don't have to call in to anybody, yeah. Just call anybody that I'm not coming in or anything like that.

That's wonderful; you're the first person I've ever talked to who actually works for UBER –

I'm only doing it for 3 or 4 months

Well, it's only about a year old –

No, it's older than that –

Not in Chicago – in our city

Yeah, it's a couple years older now. I think they started in the U.S. in San Francisco.

So you work whenever you want to. How often do you work – once or twice a week, would you say?

I work about 4 or 5 days a week; some time – last week I worked seven, but one day I just had one call, I got tired I just came home.

Well, that's good that you can do it at your leisure or whenever you want to and that's all.

I'll do it for about 4 or 5 years and then probably have to give it up; it's not like it used to be so much.

Do you have to stay within a certain geographic area?

We can go – actually Illinois, Indiana, Iowa – just once. I just stay in the local area.

Okay, I think that we're done. Thank you very much for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.

Okay, thank you.

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