

Today is Thursday, July 17, 2014. My name is Fran Prokop and I am at the home of George Osborn who served in the Army during peacetime – from 1956 to 1959. George 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:

**George is an old friend of mine and I urged him to participate.
George, when and where were you born?**

I was born in Evanston, Illinois on November 25, 1935.

What were your parents' occupations?

My mother was a housewife and my dad was a sheet metal worker. He worked for the electric utility company – making cabinets.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I am the youngest of nine – I had three sisters and five brothers.

Were any of your brothers in the service?

Yes. My father was in World War I in the Navy. My brother Leo was in the Army Air Corps, which became the Army Air Force in 1943. My brother Victor went in the Navy in 1944. My brother Jim was in the service twice. He went in about 1946 and then when he got out the Korean War had started and because he was in the Reserves he got called up immediately. So then he went to Korea. And then my brother Pete was in the Army like from 1946 and he was only supposed to be in for two years but they made him stay another year because of the Korean War. He was an instructor in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

So you really have a military family history –

Yes.

What did you do before entering the service?

I didn't go to college right out of high school – I went to work for Public Service Company, which was the electric utility company and I became a customer representative but to be perfectly honest with you, I was extremely bored – and being the youngest I decided that I would have to make a break. And so I decided to go into the service. But having my brothers with all the years of experience, when I talked to them they said, "Don't go in the service unless you're going to go to school and learn something that's going to benefit you." So I went to all the different recruiters and then the Army said if I went in by this particular date in February 1956, I would be guaranteed to go to the Adjutant General's School at Fort Benjamin Harrison and become a

stenographer. And that was a four-month course and it was really an excellent course because it was school for eight hours a day five days a week – shorthand, typing, English, military terminology. It was really good. And then when I left there, I went to Fort Ord, California where I was the secretary to a bird colonel who commanded an engineer battalion – and I was there for six months. And there were two so-called qualified general stenographers on the base at Fort Ord – and we were classmates from the steno school -- and he wanted to get married, and of course, I didn't -- so he called me and asked me – he would have to go because his name came before mine alphabetically. And I said no, I'd be delighted to go. I didn't want to spend all my military time at Fort Ord. So in February of 1956 I took off for Izmir, Turkey and I didn't even know where Turkey was.

Okay –

Couldn't find it on a globe, you know –

We sort of bypassed all your early days of service - how did you enter the service. First of all, you did enlist in the service.

Right, right, like I said, I wanted to make a break –

When you enlisted, where were you sent – what was your first –

I went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for basic training – that was two months.

Okay, and – two months – and you had actual, regular basic training like anybody else.

Basic training, yeah.

And can you describe like a typical day of your basic training?

Well, you know, they always get you up really early in the morning –

How early?

Like, Five o'clock, you know, and you go out, get dressed and you go out for revellie and roll call, and then you train – you know – you go on marches and you do the obstacle course and you learn to fire the rifle, you know – anything. Just regular basic training; they teach you like – they teach you like you're some kind of garbage, you know, they scream and yell at you all the time – call you dumb and stupid, you know, but this one stenographer friend of mine from Fort Ord said to me, last time I saw him, he said, "You know, the thing that always got me about you is not even the Army could make you angry."

Ha, ha.

I said because I always knew this was not going to be my entire life.

Right, right.

This was going to come to an end.

Right. So your specialized training came after boot camp was –

Stenographer –

Where?

That was in Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis.

And how long of a course was that?

That was four months – five days a week for four months.

And then after –

After that I went to Fort Ord, California.

Okay, and your duties at Fort Ord?

I was the secretary to the bird colonel who was in charge of the 34th Engineer Battalion. That was kind of fun – I thought that was fun because we did bivouac – and after I left there that's the last time I ever went camping in my entire life.

Ha, ha, Okay – and how did you adapt to military life – like the physical regimen, the barracks, the food –

I had no problems whatsoever - none.

How about food and everything?

No, no problem.

Did you gain weight, lose weight?

I didn't think I lost weight but I turned what was a little bit of blubber into some muscle.

The barracks life and all –

I enjoyed it very much – the camaraderie of it. As you can see from those pictures I showed you we had a lot of fun together in our off time.

So, although George was not in any war, he did go abroad. After Fort Ord you went to Izmir, Turkey. How did you get to Turkey?

Well, they were looking for a stenographer to work on general staff who had at least 24 months of active duty left to serve – because they weren't going to send you all that way for like six months or 18 months. They wanted to get their money's worth out of it. And it was a thoroughly enjoyable job. And I met the most wonderful Greeks and Turks and Italians. We had – we had a Turkish general and his staff; we had a Greek general and their staff and they were coordinators with my general who was the Supreme Commander. I worked with bird colonels, lieutenant colonels, majors – I was the only enlisted man on the entire floor. The only people that I outranked were the Turkish soldiers who guarded the Situation Room. I used to kid with them and always pretend I was shooting them as I walked by. They'd see me on the bus and they'd yell "Sergeant."

Was that your highest rank achieved?

No, Specialist 3rd Class – but in the AG you'd never become an NCO. You always are specialist.

So you were a Specialist.

Right. Specialist – and I was 3rd Class. If I had stayed in, I would have gone up from there, but –

How about details of your trip abroad. How did you physically get to Turkey?

I flew Military Air Transport – MATS – from New Jersey, Fort Dix. And we went – you know in those days there were no jets. So when you're traveling that far all you do is go up and come down and get gas. Go up and come down and get gas.

Oh, really?

So we hopped – I went from here to Bermuda. Then we went from Bermuda to Tripoli, Libya as I recall. And then we went to Paris and then we went to Istanbul, and then I took a Turkish airlines flight from Istanbul to Izmir. That was the only trauma because I was supposed to be met by a person who was going to be my sponsor, and he wasn't there, and I didn't know what to do. So I just followed the line and we got on this bus and I didn't know where this bus was going and I got on it because nobody spoke English.

A Turkish bus –

Yeah, and it went to WagonLee Travel in downtown Izmir. So I went in there and I said, you know, I had a uniform on and I said, "I'm a GI" – and they said, oh, just go down the street – they're on the waterfront. It's a big building with lots of flags, you can't miss it.

(George has provided a black and white photo of the NATO Headquarters.)

So I'm lugging this duffel bag and all this junk and I'm walking and I get there and I go up to this door and this guy jumps up in front of me and puts a rifle to my face and shakes his head NO. So every time I went to a door – I had to walk all the way around the building – it seems the entrance was on the other end. And of course I didn't have a badge to get in –

Right.

So I had to wait until an Airman came out and I explained to him - so he took me in to Security and then they photographed me and gave me a badge. And then I had to get on another bus and go way out in the country to these barracks where the Americans, the French, the Greeks – the Turkish government had built these barracks for us to live in, and I don't mean to be rude to the Turkish government but they were sub-standard. Like they didn't have traps in the commodes and the rats could come up from the sewers, so you had to put cement blocks on the tops of the toilets at night. So I did not have to live there. I could rent an apartment and so that's what I did. I lived in this – but I had to maintain a footlocker, a bunk and a bed, and a wall locker there and I had to keep it clean.

In the barracks.

In the barracks, but I didn't have to stay there.

What was the name of that barracks – do you remember?

It was called Shrinier – S-H-I-R-I-N-I-E-R and I'll tell you what we used to call it – Kazuchulopoulos (phonetic) –

Ha, ha. Are we going to attempt to spell that?

Just do it phonetically. But you know, it was interesting, because Turkish soldiers are always so friendly and they only had one uniform.

Did they speak English at all?

No, but we could communicate – you could communicate. We weren't having great conversations, but I would go out sometimes on Sunday to be sure that my area was clean – bed was nice and tight – whatever. And they would do their laundry – the ones that weren't working on Sunday - so they'd all be sitting around naked in the yard playing cards while their laundry was draped all over the bushes drying out.

Ha, ha. Okay, The large building that you couldn't get into – was that the NATO Headquarters?

That was the NATO Headquarters, yeah.

George had provided a photograph of the NATO Headquarters – a large four-story building –

It was a hotel –

It was a hotel and they turned it into NATO Headquarters.

It was one of the newest buildings there and it was right on the waterfront. And interesting thing was that in the mornings sometimes, the Sixth Fleet, which was based in the Mediterranean – they would come by and – one of the things they do in the Navy is they stand at attention on the decks of the ships and they would pass by the Headquarters in honor of the General – because he had three stars. And sometimes in the morning the bay was like glass and they would just be standing there in their little white uniforms as tight as could be and they would just pass right by NATO in a line – submarines, destroyers –

Interesting. So, although George did not see any combat duty, he was mostly in an office in the NATO building. What about friendships formed and the camaraderie of service?

There really weren't a lot of Americans there. I think at the time that I was there -- there were probably -- the total number of Americans – eighty would probably -- that were military. Now that would be Army. The Air Force was the logistics – and I don't know how many of them there were. Their job was to bring in supplies and to fly the General and all that kind of stuff. But I made a lot of really, really good friends, but you know, that's a long time ago. I was very young; I was 21. Most of the people that I met were career military – master sergeants and their wives. And several of them took me under their wing and I would have dinner with this family on Sundays, you know – very nice—

Very nice – yeah.

It was really very nice and I had an absolutely wonderful time. And you try to keep those friendships, but, you know, some of those couples got divorced –

Right.

You know, what do you do – you've got to pick a partner – and I chose not to do that. Then I moved around so much since then that I lose people. You know, you just get lost – the mail sometimes doesn't follow you, you know.

This NATO is a very large building – do you know what was on those other floors – was it all strictly –

They were all divided up; all different things, like G-3, G-2, you know, all these different sections of the military. They pretty much – we had the entire floor because – the reason we had the entire floor is because we had to have the War Room, you know, on this floor because that was where the General was.

What was your section called?

Just Secretary to the General Staff.

That was your title.

That was my title, right. I didn't take just dictation from the General. If some of his aides like Plans & Operations or whatever – they needed me, then I would take – they would call me and I would take their dictation from them.

So how did you stay in touch with friend and family back home? How was your communication home?

Well, I wrote – I wrote letters and I did come home in 1957 as a surprise – it was my parents' 40th wedding anniversary – and I came home for that. My parents didn't know I was coming.

A surprise visit.

But I didn't want to miss it because I would have been the only one in the family that wasn't there.

Right. What were your recreational or off-duty pursuits while in Turkey?

I really – I traveled a lot - I really wanted to see the country. So I traveled all over. In fact, once the General was gone to Paris or something and I didn't have to go with him, so I had a friend, a young man that I met there – his name was Ergun Uytun -- And he worked for WagonLee Cook. And so I took ten days and he mapped out this trip for us – he went with me. And it was really interesting –

He spoke the language?

Oh, he spoke English, and French and Turkish – that was his job; he was a guide –

Oh, he was a guide –

He was about 20 – we were almost the same age. At any rate, we left Izmir on a bus, and in Turkey at that point in time they were really – the country was really bankrupt. And so the buses, if you sat in the back you had just as good a view as the guy driving the bus because they were moving sideways down the road.

Ha, ha.

And you could bring chickens, and geese, and whatever – you could bring all that on the bus. And so we went to, uh, down near Bursa – and we went to the Marmora Sea and we took a really lovely luxury ship up to Istanbul. And I remember we stayed at the Istanbul Hilton – it was brand new – brand new. And we stayed there a few days; and then we went by the Orient Express to Ankara, which is the new capital in the center of the country – very wide, open streets and avenues – it was very beautiful. And then we went by bus to two cities – one was Kisiri where they make the famous Turkish rugs. And then we went to Konia – where they grow a lot of grapes – and they have the famous Blue Mosque there – it's wonderful; it's made out of blue tile and it was a tomb for the Sultan's wife. Sort of reminded me of India, you know, the Taj Mahal. Then we stopped at another place, it was called the Palmukalei (phonetic) – which was a mineral springs, and it was a beautiful, beautiful place. The minerals have so much calcium in the water, but they're warm, but they make like these walls – it would fill – like these walls – and as the water was running it would be making this wall that just kept going higher and higher and higher.

Wow!

That was amazing; it was absolutely – as soon as it would get in the air it would calcify

Wow – rolling wall

Yeah, then they'd have an earthquake and it would crack and fall over; it was lovely.

So you really got to see the entire country of Turkey.

Right, I used to spend a lot of time in Ephesus and Pergamum – they were not too far from Izmir – and I'd go out with my Turkish friends. We'd take lunch; we'd go out there and spend the afternoon - and Ergun also knew all about these places because these were the places that he took the tourists. He was always very informative.

So you had like a private tour with him –

I did, really. We spent a lot of time together; we really did.

Wonderful. And how long did you spend at the NATO building in Turkey?

I was there two years.

And then your time was up

My time was up – I don't know if you're interested in this but the General, Harkins, asked me if I would be willing to go with him on his next assignment, which was Viet Nam. And I knew nothing about Viet Nam. So I sought counsel from a friend of mine

who was a Major there, on the staff, and I asked him about it and he gave me some pretty good advice. He said, "You have three years in the military on active duty and if you re-enlist – you have to re-enlist for six years to get the maximum amount of bonus. He said you will then be nine years in the Army when your term is up. But you are working for a general officer and he is going to retire. You can stay in, but I'm going to tell you, anybody who knows that you worked X number of years for a general officer is gonna see that you get the lousiest assignments in the Army."

So I went to the General and I said, "Sir, after consideration I decided that I'm not going to re-enlist; I'm going to go home." So we parted friends. He just liked it because he was used to me.

Right. So how did you get home – how did you physically get home?

Then I came home – I actually came home on MATS – and it was the reverse order.

Oh, the same thing happened – you had to hop

Just hopped back, because they had just –

I didn't realize that –

They had just inaugurated jets at that time. Now, when I came home in 1957, I went through Gander, Newfoundland on a prop plane because I wanted to stay outside of the United States – because I wouldn't have to pay that terrible air tax. And I went to visit some friends in California – and so I flew commercial then from California here – had my parents' wedding anniversary, then I went back. But at the end, it was just the reverse procedure in MATS – came back the same way.

How was your readjustment to civilian life – can't say it was much different than your service experience.

There really wasn't much difference and I - when I came back I went back to work at Public Service Company –

In your old job?

Well, they didn't have that position for me. They gave me the salary plus all the raises, but they – so they gave me a job as a secretary. And I worked at that until there was an opening for me to go to customer rep. But again, I found myself extremely bored – it really was. I worked with a lot of married men who had little children. There's a place west of here, you might know, Carol Stream, all right – that was being developed at that time, so everybody was buying these tract homes with automatic garage door openers. The big discussion was diaper rash and crab grass and so – my mother was a widow at the time and I said, "I'm really not happy Mom and I want to make a change."

So I left here and I moved to San Francisco – and while I lived there from 1964 to 1968 I took courses at the University of California at Berkeley and I worked as a Sacristan assistant with the Franciscan Friars – and they convinced me – like I said, I’m easily convinced – that I should go into the seminary and become a priest.

Oh, wow.

So I left there and went to Boston to a school for late vocations. They said they were looking for late vocations but they really didn’t know what to do with a late vocation because they tried to treat us like we were teenagers – and I had all this experience – you know –

Yeah, exactly.

So that didn’t work out. The Rector was intimidated by me – I was doing some work for Cardinal Cushing and he loved that. Then when I got in the newspapers and he didn’t like that, so he kicked me out. So I came home, was kind of lost for awhile – so I took a job at the shopping center, selling men’s suits – I worked with a lot of fun people. I kept trying to get back into the seminary but it was fruitless. So ultimately having been trained as a stenographer, I decided to go into court reporting. My brother Vic had a buddy who was a pen writer and worked for the federal court in Chicago – his name was Joe Cateloni – and Joe had a court reporting agency in addition to working for the feds. I went to talk to him about it and he said, “If you are going to go into this field, don’t go into this field as a pen writer. Go to the school over there and learn machine shorthand.” So I had the GI bill so that’s what I did.

Is that when you went to Chicago College of Commerce?

Right.

That’s where I met George – by the way – I also was a court reporter and George and I met at the school there. We were both teachers.

So I went there and then the government cancelled my GI bill half way through – so I had a friend who was a banker –

Did it just expire? Why

No, they cancelled it.

Why did they cancel it?

Because they had all these guys coming out of Viet Nam –

Oh, wow –

So they cancelled it and I had this friend I'd known for several years; he worked at Continental Bank. I had one whole year in court reporting school and I'm out of money. He said give me twenty bucks; we went over to the bank and he opened up a savings account for me for \$20 and I borrowed one whole year's tuition.

Oh, really.

And I paid the tuition for a year and I got a cheaper rate. And then what happened – while I was going to college, the lady who ran the college, Mae Glassbrenner, she really liked me. I gotta tell you, she really liked me. Her lady friend, Lucille, wasn't too fond of me but Mae got me a job working with Stenograph Corporation. They were developing computer transcription, and I worked with them; I did that for a couple of years – I should say maybe nine months actually – and then I was also part-time student-teaching as a reader, you know, Q & A. I was also a Registrar – afternoons at the college and Mae got sick – she suffered vertigo. Merrill Morris, the college administrator, called me and said Mae has recommended you to take her courses. They were all high-speed dictation, really the ultimate – you had to make your own teaching materials – as you know – you had to make your own. And you couldn't give the same tests over and over again; they had to be different every time.

Yes.

So, I passed my 200 (words per minute), which was all you had to do and I was going to sit for the next CSR when it came, but I hadn't touched the machine in five months – so I thought I'd take it later. So she came out and called me into her office. She told me that teacher evaluations had just come out and the high-speed students really liked me. They think you're fair, you're honest, I'm getting tired of this, I'll give you \$35,000 a year – that's a long time ago -- and an office, and I'll give you the Chair of the Division. And I thought about it and you know, it's a lot of work to get back to it and pass that CSR –

Yes.

And so, I'll take this position. And I did, I worked there until 1989.

You really retired from there.

I did. Because my sister that lived here –

We need to get back to the military -- You finished here in 1989 – have you ever had contact with your fellow veterans over the years.

I do, there's a guy I met the very first day I was in the Army – Bob McCarty – he still lives in Kalamazoo. He winters in Phoenix and we still communicate by phone calls or letters, whatever. And I was traveling a few years ago and I visited him and his wife in Phoenix. I just spoke with him I think last November and was sorry to hear that he has

dementia and his wife has a bad back – so – they fly out there and stay out there all winter now. They used to come back at Christmas.

Do you have a membership in any veterans' organizations?

No, 'cuz I'm not a joiner.

You were overseas but not during wartime –

I could join the American Legion, but I know that the guys – I don't have a wife – they have wives. It's a way to get out of the house from the 'ol girl, you know – get a few beers and play some cards.

Okay. All right. George has given me a couple of photos of himself when he first enlisted with his Army uniform on. And then a photo while in the service in 1956 at Fort Leonard Wood. And also a photo of the NATO Headquarters in Turkey. I will include those three photos.

How did your military experience affect you life?

Actually that's how I got my career as a court reporting teacher; that played out for me. And the military – I bought a three-flat in 1980 on the GI bill with no money down – no, my military experience was wonderful. I have no complaints, none.

Right. And your life lessons learned from the military?

Yeah, be patient and keep your mouth shut.

That's true. Most guys say – discipline, like with basic training.

Well, when you come from a big family there's discipline here. You can't be throwing snit fits; it doesn't work. We had a big chicken house and my dad would say if you can't get along in here, you can go sit out there.

Ha, ha. Okay. George has gotten a letter of appreciation – Certificate of Appreciation for his service – I'll read it aloud --

Headquarters Allied Land Forces Southeastern Europe, Izmir, Turkey – Certificate of Appreciation to Specialist Four George P. Osborn, United States Army, in recognition of meritorious service while assigned to this headquarters during the period 2 April 1957 through 4 February 1959. The quality of his service reflects great credit on him and on the national military organization he represents. Signed by Paul G. Hollister, Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Chief of Staff. Very good – I hope you noted this in your questionnaire.

Is there anything else you'd like to add, George, to this interview. It's been very interesting and very different from all the other interviews that I've had --

That's because I'm a different kind of guy.

With other servicemen. Anything else you wish to add?

No, I think this covers it. It's hard to go back and remember a lot of stuff.

Well, if there is anything else, you'll have a chance to review this transcript for accuracy and make any necessary changes.

I wish to thank you, George, first of all for this interview and in getting in touch with you after all these years --

It's been a long time.

And thank you very much for your service to our country.

You're welcome.

**George P. Osborn
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