

This interview is being conducted on Wednesday, June 3, 2015 at my home in Carillon, 21006 W. Aspen Lane, Plainfield, IL. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Kennard O. Whitfield, who served in the Army and is a veteran of the Korean conflict. Ken Whitfield 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?

St. Louis, Missouri on May 28, 1933.

What were your parents' occupations?

My father was a custodian for Liggitt & Meyers Tobacco Company; my mother was a homemaker.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I had one brother, Harold L. Whitfield, born September 16, 1938.

Was he in the service?

Yes; he was in the Army. He was drafted.

Was he in the same time you were in – just about?

No, no. I think he was in around 1965.

Is he still living, your brother?

Yes.

Is he in Illinois?

No, he's in Kirkwood, Missouri.

Would he be interested in doing an interview if he ever came to visit you here in Illinois?

I think he would be – he's a retired lawyer.

I certainly would be interested in interviewing him.

Okay, we'll talk to him - yeah.

Good. What did you do before entering the service?

I was in college, but I got drafted.

You were drafted – when was that – what's the date?

October 19, 1953. Yeah, it was, traumatic to me.

Oh, really, why is that?

I was in college on a scholarship.

What year were you in college?

Sophomore year.

I'm surprised that they drafted you –

Yeah, but they did.

So you didn't choose that specific branch; they chose you.

Right.

How about your departure for training camp; how did you get to the training camp?

I was in New Orleans, Xavier University, going to college, so I returned -- I had an appointment for my physical in St. Louis. So I returned to St. Louis and took a physical prior to induction. And then I was inducted, like I said, on the 19th of October, 1953. I left St. Louis and went to Fort Leonard Wood.

How did you get to Fort Leonard Wood?

Bus – troop bus. I stayed over night there and then we took the train from Fort Leonard Wood to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas.

Is that where you had your basic training?

It was Camp Chaffee then; now it's Fort Chaffee.

What about your early days of training; how did it go?

I had eight weeks of basic – first eight weeks was basic – just normal basic training. Then the next eight weeks was artillery – where you learn the Cannoneer's Hop – which is the routine that you do when firing the 105 Howitzer.

Was that normal training or was that specialized training?

Well, it was – I guess it was advanced training from basic.

So that's considered sort of specialized training.

Right. I spent another eight weeks there – 16 weeks total.

And that was also at Fort Chaffee?

Yes. And then I was transferred out to Camp Stoneman, which was in Pittsburg, California.

How did you adapt to military life – the physical regimen, the barracks, the food?

I'll just tell you if you were raised by my father, you would be ready. Plus, I was in good physical shape because I had been working out for basketball. I had a sports scholarship to Xavier University.

How were you psychologically – you said it was devastating –

Well, I wouldn't say it was devastating. I just had so much going for me. I was majoring in Physics and minor in Math, and I was also teaching a Lab Class.

You were a Teaching Assistant?

Right, a teaching assistant; so things were all in place, you know. My father couldn't afford to send me to college and I had a scholarship.

Well, wouldn't it carry over? You wouldn't have lost the scholarship –

Well, I had to go play basketball; it was an athletic scholarship; it wasn't academic; even though I was fairly good academically. It was an athletic scholarship and I don't know whether, after you're out for two years, whether you're physically – able to get back into the shape you need to be.

How old were you, by the way?

I was 20 years old.

So you got over the psychological barrier and adapted to military life.

Right. Because my father told me they can make it a lot harder on you than you can on them. You know, one of the things, if you know me for long, you hear me talk about my father, because he was my idol and I'd do what he said to do. You know, he had the experience. One of his favorite expressions was, is that, "Second-hand experience is better because you don't get hurt as much." I sort of live by that.

Okay, like, how was living in the barracks – how did you like that?

Well, we almost already lived in a barracks because we live – in Track, the athletes in Xavier University lived in the R.O.T.C. barracks. Because they had taken the R.O.T.C. off campus; there wasn't any more when I arrived there.

You said you went to Camp Stoneman – after the 16 weeks of basic. What were your duties there?

Well, that's a Repo Depot – what I mean by that, it's a Replacement Depot. Nobody stays there; you just go there and you get reassigned.

And where were you –

So I was there four days – the biggest thing you try to keep from doing is K.P. – kitchen patrol. The way they do it, the way they did it then, is they'd wait till like two or three o'clock in the morning and they'd tie towels on your bunk for those people to be awakened to go off to K.P.

Oh, okay.

So you get smart to that and those towels got moved around quite a bit. Because nobody wanted to be on K.P. at a Replacement Depot.

Don't want to peel potatoes and stuff –

A lot of people there. And after that four days I was transferred to Presidio, in San Francisco, which was the Headquarters for the 6th Army.

How did you get there?

By train.

And what were your duties there.

I worked in Personnel.

What did that involve?

I was the – you know, they have allotments – so I was the head of the – it wasn't but a one-person job – so I would say I was the head of the Allotment Department. Those were allotments that went to dependents – Mr. Mullen came to me and said “Man, Our allotment section is all messed up; you think you can straighten it out?” I said, “I'll try.” I did a pretty good job of straightening it out.

Did he assign you to that job because you already had some college?

Probably –

Was it like an office-type job?

Right. One of the real reasons was that I had two years of typing.

Ah, that's the key.

That is the key. So I spent 20 months in that job. And I worked during season – what I mean by “season” - when I played baseball, when I played basketball – I'd work half a day and then I'd go to train.

So these sports activities were with your Division?

Well, it was for the Presidio.

Right, I mean you had an actual team – organized sports.

Right. We played throughout the 6th Army. WE would go all the way up through Fort Lewis, Washington –

You traveled?

Yes.

Describe that – how did that work? Basketball and baseball you played –

Right. Well, we had a schedule and when I was going to travel, the Allotment thing would just sit there till I got back.

Okay, it waited for you.

We played in Fort Lewis, Washington; we played in Provo, Utah.

When you were traveling did you go by bus?

Yeah, we went by bus most of the time. We didn't fly. Sometimes we'd go by train. But it was ground transportation.

So that went on the entire 20 months you were there?

Yes.

And did your team win any awards or anything?

Well, we won the baseball conference – we won the championship for Presidio. We also played the Naval Base – Alameda –

So it was like Army against Navy?

Yeah, well, it was really military. So we played the Navy. We played at Dugway Proving Grounds which was in Provo, Utah and at Fort Lewis Army Base in Washington. We traveled quite a bit; and then we played locally in the San Francisco Area.

Just against each other?

It might be any team; we picked up sandlot teams. We picked up –

So you played against non-military?

That's right.

So you had a good time then.

Yes, I did. My father didn't think I was coming back home. San Francisco is a nice town; it's my favorite city.

Yeah, San Francisco is nice. So you never actually went overseas?

No.

You remained in this country. How about friendships formed and camaraderie of service.

Well, just one person I remember that I was friends with – and I can't remember his name; he was from Hempstead, New York - oh, his name was Lee Duglinsky D-U-G-L-I-N S-K-Y.

Polish?

Yes; he and I palled around together quite a bit. For some reason we just never stayed in touch. As far as my relationships after I got out of the service, it's almost like a blank wall between the two – yeah.

Your communications from home consisted of letters and phone calls?

Right, right.

You weren't married at that time?

No.

What did you do besides sports – were those the only sports you played?

Yeah, those were the only two. I shot a lot of pool – that's because you don't have much money so you go to the service club and shoot pool – but other than that.

What was the highest rank you achieved?

PFC – private first class.

You served two years, right?

Um-hmm.

So when were you discharged?

October 19, 1955.

How did you get back home?

I took a 48-hour ride – from San Francisco to St. Louis. It was a couple of days.

By car?

By train. I wanted to ride the train on my own – because when I rode the train out there, it was a troop train, so –

Oh, yeah, outgoing - so you took a private train –

In other words, I paid for it.

Yeah, right. How was your reception by family and friends?

Well, I hadn't been home since I was in – the whole time. I stayed there two years.

So whenever you had leave or anything, you just took it over there. You never came home.

They paid me for it when I got out.

How was your readjustment to civilian life?

I didn't have any problem. I was more like a civilian in San Francisco –

You had like a 9 to 5 office job.

Yeah, right, right.

You didn't work the weekends or anything?

No, no.

So yeah, you had it soft.

What the difference was – it was a Headquarters and we had Retirement Parades every Friday. So you had to march for those people when they retired.

Really – and were there quite a few people – every Friday?

Yeah, yeah, because there were more brass out there than there were people.

Really?

Oh, yeah. The generals and colonels would walk on the other side of the street to keep from saluting somebody out there. And then they had a Bagpipe Band that was really outstanding – and they marched and played every Friday.

So you had parades every Friday.

Um-hmm, right. When I left post I was in civilian clothes. I never wore military clothes off post. It was a good job.

I'll tell you, the guys that I went to school with, they ended up taking typing and they had the same kinds of office jobs – in Hawaii and elsewhere.

Yeah, that typing did it for them.

It sure did; it sure did; the guys were happy. So you have not had any contact with fellow veterans over the years.

Not at all.

Are you a member of any veterans' organizations?

American Legion.

Is that the only one?

That's the only one.

So you are pretty active with that – you go to meetings all the time.

Yeah, you'll see me Tuesday.

I'll be there. What time does it start?

Seven o'clock.

How did your military experience affect your life?

I think it just put a blip in it – in other words I didn't have any problem – because I stayed at home with my parents – I didn't have to come out and look for an apartment and all that kind of thing. It was all there when I got there. I got out in October and I went to St. Louis University in January.

You did finish school – that is a questions – what did you do after you got out of service? You got your Bachelor’s Degree?

Yeah, and then I went and got a Master’s Degree because the G.I. Bill took care of everything, yeah.

Then you didn’t have to worry about a sports scholarship –

Right, right. And my father bought me a car.

He probably saved that military allotment you sent him –

Well, he told me that if I come home – ‘cuz I was planning on going back to Xavier; I really like it in New Orleans. And he said if you stay home I’ll buy you a car.

So what school did you attend?

When I came back I went to St. Louis University.

There’s another big university there –

Washington University. They got the University of Missouri there which is affiliated with the campus in Columbia.

What life lessons did you learn from the military?

Again, my father had his boys ready – I didn’t – in other words, as far as punctuality, and cleanliness and getting up and doing things – we were already there. So as far as life lessons are concerned – it was pretty easy. You know, after I got in there and got rid of basic, which I enjoyed also – usually you hear guys – let me say this: one thing I learned is that the draftees were pretty good soldiers. It was those who joined on their own – turned out to be something else.

Really? The enlisted men?

Yeah, right. How you could tell the difference, their military number was RA – Regular Army. And ours was US.

Oh, I didn’t know that. There’s a distinction.

Right, yes. As a Draftee my number was US 55429134. An RA would say – well this guy joined on his own. A lot of them ended up in – the reason I know it is I'd go to the stockade – because when people went A.W.O.L. they'd cut their allotment off. So whenever they caught one and brought him back, they put him in the stockade and I'd have to go to the stockade and do his papers and everything all over again.

So once their allotment was cut off, while they were A.W.O.L.- but when they returned – did it matter if they came back of their own accord or if they had to go and get them?

I don't know because, see, the Army, when I was in there, was different. You had to serve enough time to get your required service time in. So if you went A.W.O.L. – then that means that you extended your time in; you had to take care of that time. It's different now. If you do something bad now, they put you out.

Oh, really?

I had a grandson just got put out.

Oh, that's too bad.

I don't think he did anything real bad. I think he just – his mother hadn't trained him like my father trained me, okay? But anyway, when I went to the stockade to restart their allotment, because their dependents – in many cases their wives and children weren't getting any money from Uncle Sam.

Oh, I see.

When they go A.W.O.L. – they cut it off – at least in those days. And then when they caught somebody, the guy who was in charge of the stockade would call up Personnel and say Joe blow is back now and he's crying about his wife not getting any money. Come up and set up his allotment again. So I'd go there – I was there quite often, at least once a week.

Wow – and most of those guys were R.A.

Yeah, right, most of them were R.A.

They went in of their own accord –

Yeah, right, right. A lot of us who were drafted – who were college kids – who had been in college – a number of us, when I got drafted, they were drafted right out of college.

And the war was already over, wasn't it?

Yeah, it was over July 26 –

But the draft just kept continuing on – when did they cut off the draft?

I don't know; I don't remember. So, to answer your questions, it wasn't very difficult for me to get back into my life. I was almost like a civilian out in San Francisco. Like I said when I left the post I was always in civilian clothes.

But generally speaking then, the Army was a good experience for you.

Yes, yes, Oh, yes.

You had these characteristics prior to your service –

Right, right –

Responsibility and things like that. A lot of men don't have that and when they get in as young kids of 19 or so, they learn. They learn to obey orders and things like that.

My brother is writing a book about my father - he's trying to do that. But one of the things, I need to let you know why – my mother died when I was 11, so my father kept my brother and I -- by himself. He had to be at his job at 7 a.m. where we didn't have to be at school till 8. So that meant we had to get up, get our food

Take care of yourself.

--and the real thing was – we couldn't leave our beds unmade. We had to have our shoes under the bed.

And your brother was younger than you.

Yeah, I think he's five years younger –

Wow, so he was really little – so you had to get him off to school –

Yeah, right, right, 'cuz he was in first grade at the time.

No wonder you had all that responsibility – that covers your military service. Anything else you wish to add to the story. You said you would tell me about Mullens –

Oh, he was just the Chief Warrant Officer –

Was he in San Francisco?

Yeah, he was CWO – Personnel Officer. He was in charge of Personnel – one story I would tell you about him, when all the brass around there – they were always calling Personnel and trying to get certain things done for people and not go through the proper channels.

Right, right.

So I had this one experience where there was a bird colonel who called and asked me to do something for a guy. I said well, sir, that's against regulations. I can't do that. So he called Mullens – I don't know if you know about Chief Warrant Officers – Generals hop to it when they say so because they have a specialty. In other words, that's why they're Chief Warrant Officers – it's a different – they march to a different drummer, okay. So when the colonel called him and said, hey, I called your Allotment Clerk back there and tried – and Mr. Mullens said "Well, What did Private Whitfield tell you?" He told him – and he said well, that's what it is.

It is what it is, huh?

So he backed his employees; that really impressed me. Samuel L. Mullens, CWO –Chief Warrant Officer.

What is the job of a Chief Warrant Officer – because I don't know.

He could be a number of different things –

Sort of like a police thing –

No, no; they have specialties that the Army doesn't have. So they put them in this different category called Warrant Officers. For instance, if a guy was a meteorologist, he probably wouldn't be in the normal – he would be a Chief Warrant Officer because he had a special skill. Warrant Officers had special skills. Mullens being a Personnel Specialist – he's like a Human Resource Chief.

Someone would have to have a degree in a subject –

Yeah, right. I don't even know if they went to basic training. I think they took them through some kind of special training and then they were made Warrant

Officers because the Army, or the service, needed that particular skill – and they didn't draft them.

They probably had a higher –well, if he was a Chief what rank was he?

He didn't have a rank. You have Warrant Officers, Junior Warrant Officers and Chief Warrant Officers – that is their rank – CWO.

Interesting – I didn't know that.

Yeah, that's a specialty within the service. I don't know about the rest of the services but in the Army I do know.

Okay, anything else you can think of?

Just the Army - no, I was in there two years and it was – I didn't like it being drafted, but after I was in there for about the first 2 or 3 weeks, I began to really enjoy it.

You accepted it – psychologically.

Yeah, right, right.

I'm sure some guys –

And it worked out a lot better for me. Most of the people who had some college – they accepted it a lot better. Usually when the Regular Army comes in they're having some problems in life or they're not getting along with their parents or your daddy says you're going in the Army or you get a job – you know, that type of thing.

Yeah, right. That's pretty interesting. If there's nothing else that you want to include, I'd like to thank you very much for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.

I think everything here is good.

Thank you, Kennard.

You're welcome

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