

**This interview is being conducted on Thursday, May 3, 2018 at the home of William Marciniak. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Bill Marciniak, who served in the United States Army and is a veteran of the Viet Nam Conflict. Mr. Marciniak 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?**

I was born in Chicago, Illinois, July 25, 1950.

**What were your parents' occupations at the time?**

My mother was a housewife; my father was working in a paper box factory – machine operator.

**How many sisters and brothers did you have?**

I had three brothers, two older than me, one younger.

**No sisters?**

No sisters.

**Did any of your brothers serve in the military?**

No, they did not.

**And what did you do before entering the service?**

I just graduated high school and I was working as an architectural draftsman in downtown Chicago.

**Was there a draft one – how did you enter service?**

I was in the first draft lottery that took place.

**And when was that – what year?**

I believe it was 1969. My number was 69 --

**Okay.**

They said anybody up to 120 or whatever, would be going.

**And how old were you at the time?**

I was 19.

**Where did you go to boot camp?**

I went downtown Chicago and caught a train at the main train station downtown and went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

**How long were you at Fort Campbell?**

Eight weeks.

**And what did your training consist of?**

It was the basic training, Army basic training of all the exercises, marching, making up your bed, how to take care of your clothes, and so forth and so on – all the necessities – learning how to shoot a rifle –

**How about rules and regulations?**

Rules and regulations. There was just a plethora of things that you would need to know should you be in combat.

**Did you have any classroom studies at that time?**

Oh, sure, absolutely.

**What was that –**

There were plenty of things like, in espionage classes –

**Oh, okay**

Almost everything that had a physical and mental aspect to it too. You would sit in a gallery and learn a few things, and then you'd go and do what you just learned.

**I see. Did you have any specialized training at that time?**

No, just regular basic training.

**Did you ever have any specialized training, later on?**

No, I did not.

**Well, what was your job; they did aptitude tests – what did they say about you?**

Well, in basic training you don't have a job.

**Right.**

After I got out of basic training, I was established as a surveyor, and that's when I was – they determined they needed someone at Fort Riley, Kansas.

**Okay.**

And that's why I was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas. Of my basic training class, 90% went to Viet Nam.

**Wow!**

I was one of the lucky 10%.

**Right, you didn't go. Well, they needed your services here, more than they needed them there, I guess. So, how was your adaptation to military life – like the physical regimen, the barracks, the food, the social life, etc. How did you adapt?**

It was tough; very, very tough.

**Was that your first time away from home?**

First time away from home and you're – you have no idea what to expect; then you're tasked with these tremendous physical restrictions, you know, you either do it or you don't -- some people didn't make it; some people, you know, because they got out.

Mentally, even, one person cracked up – just broke down.

**Wow!**

He had to be dismissed –

**Oh, yeah.**

But I, you know, after six weeks or so, I adapted pretty well, because I had gotten through everything pretty well and I was in good physical shape. All of a sudden I felt real good, it was tremendous –

**So everything kicked in.**

Yeah –

**How was the food?**

Food was excellent. I was really impressed with the food. Never had anything that was lousy or overcooked or burnt; it was always very well done.

**So, now you're eight weeks is up and they determined by testing or whatever –**

And your background.

**And your background too, that you were going to Fort Riley.**

Right, part of the Big Red One. First Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Artillery –

**Really – that was the name, huh? Big Red 1.**

There was always a Big Red 1 on your patch. That's the Battalion that General Patton was part of in World War II.

**Oh, I see, so that retained its name –**

Yeah, it's a very famous unit. As a matter of fact I think there was a movie called Big Red 1, but I can't be certain.

**I've seen a lot of wartime movie too but I don't remember.**

So then I get there and I became a surveyor; got to know a couple of people. One of them became a real good friend of mine. And he got – he was the Battalion Commander's driver. And he got orders to leave, because they repositioned in another

Fort, so he recommended that I become the Battalion Commander's driver. And the Colonel who was in charge of the Battalion, did a submit interview with me and looked at me and so forth and decided that I would be okay. So I became the Battalion Commander's driver – spit and polish – as they say, you know. I had to have my fatigues all laundered with heavy starch.

**Wow!**

Keep the jeep shining, you know, the bolts all nice and chromium and so forth. When I had to be on call at any time, when the car will need to go somewhere, and I had to be two minutes later and have the jeep ready for him to go.

**So the Battalion Commander was a Colonel?**

Lieutenant Colonel.

**What was his name?**

Oh, I don't remember.

**Was that your primary job or –**

That was my primary job the rest of the time in the service.

**Oh, wow, for two – were you drafted for two years?**

I was drafted for two years, but I was part of the Richard Nixon Early Out Program. I was allowed to leave the service four months early.

**Wow!**

So I only had to serve twenty months.

**Really –**

During that 18 months of active service after basic training, I went to Germany twice.

**Why was that?**

On what was called Reforger 1 and Reforger 2 – where the entire Battalion was sent over to Germany and deployed as though there was a war. And we had to do reconnaissance, and so forth, set up all our military vehicles – because all the military vehicles that were here in the United States, were also in our German camp in Graffenwier – Germany and it has a U.S. Army base there. And we were stationed there for one month – the first year I was in the service and one month the second year.

**One month each time. What was the purpose of that?**

That was to get us acclimated – had we had to go across the ocean to fight a war. We had to take all our gear and everything and we had to fight war games over there.

**Hmmm!**

Just like as though you were going to be in war.

**But that was amongst your group, right?**

Yes, we had to camp out in the woods in our pup tents, and so forth – dig trenches and fox holes and so forth – we had to do all that stuff as though it was war.

**But you never actually went to Viet Nam?**

Right.

**You just did all that right there.**

Right.

**So when I ask where did you serve, basically you served in this country.**

In the United States –

**Except for these two expeditions to Germany. How did you get to Germany when you went?**

We flew on a C-4 – a big cargo transport plane. We sat in like hammocks for eight hours – that was not fun.

**I'll bet.**

And there's no windows, so you can't see out to at least get some –

**Right, you can't even look out. And you did that both times –**

Both times; same way.

**Okay. So you never went by ship?**

No, just by plane. We landed in an Army Air Force Base in Germany, but then we took a bus – or buses to Graffenvier when we deployed.

**So Graffenvier was a --\**

United States Army Base.

**Did you interact with the Germans there, with the native people or not?**

No, no, we did not. We did on weekends; we went to town or whatever to, you know,

Have some entertainment and have some German food and that.

**Right.**

We tried to; most of them couldn't speak English, so it was very difficult to –

**And you didn't speak German?**

No.

**You sort of pick it up along the way –**

Couple of words here and there, but not much. And you really don't have much time – you're so busy and then when you're done with you day, you're tired. You want to go to sleep.

**What did you do in Germany? Were you still a driver or did you have other duties.**

Yeah, I was the Battalion Commander's driver.

**That was still your primary job.**

We – the Battalion Commander and the First Sergeant had to do reconnaissance ahead of the rest of the Battalion – to scope out areas where we can set up camp.

**I see.**

That's how you would do it if you were at war.

**Right.**

You'd have someone to go out ahead, make sure everything is safe, and then the rest of the battalion would follow.

**So you had to do that.**

I had to do that. And I had long days, from early in the morning, 3, 4, 5 o'clock in the morning, till 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock at night.

**Right! So you weren't sitting on your duff all the time.**

I was not. I was not. When I was in the States it was a pretty easy job. But when we went to Germany that was tough; that was a tough job.

**So then you had to dig fox holes and stuff like that?**

Yeah, we had to pretend like we were doing a war. The only thing we didn't do is shoot each other.

**And you had to set up tents, you said?**

Right, pup tents –

**Like bivouac**

Yeah, and some people had to set up the mess tent, you know –

**Oh, you ate out in the field?**

Oh yeah, Oh yeah.

**Wow!**

And we had C-rations, just like you were in the Army; little cans of -- whatever it was.



**You know, I can see doing that once, but why would you do it a second time?**

For the people, I guess, that didn't do it the first time.

**Oh, I see, for new recruits.**

For new recruits; they probably did it every year after that; I don't know. 'cuz I wasn't in.

**Well, you went back because you were the driver, but the other people were probably newer recruits.**

Probably.

**So you really never were in combat or anything like that?**

No, I was not.

**Or witness casualties or destruction of land.**

I did not see any action.

**So what was the highest rank that you achieved?**

Specialist 4<sup>th</sup> Class – that's the equivalent of a Corporal.

**So you had like two stripes?**

Yeah, Specialist – the emblem looks like this – SP 4, and it's got the bird holding the stuff. I think there's a star down here – not stripes per se.

**Ok. How about friendships formed and camaraderie of service. Did you meet guys in the service that you kept in touch with afterwards?**

I met a couple of folks that I felt friendly with but for the most part only one of them – I stayed in contact with. As a matter of fact he stood up to my wedding.

**Who was that?**

His name is Rick Martin – and to this day, I believe he's still around; we became apart, you know, for a long time. We haven't spoken to each other in twenty years.

**He lives in Illinois?**

He lives way up north in Deerfield or somewhere up there.. We just – as we got older, our interests were different –

**Right –**

You just get apart, so –

**How did you stay in touch with family and friends – what communication –**

Letters.

**Just letters?**

Letters.

**Telephone calls or anything – this was already 1960s.**

It was actually early 70 -- we made a few phone calls here and there – but mostly letters.

**What years were you in?**

I went in March 23, 1970 – yeah, the Viet Nam War was almost done – and then I was discharged on March 1, 1971, which was twenty months later, basically.

**Yeah, because that started a lot earlier –**

It was late 50s, I think or early 60s.

**It was the 60s when our “advisors” went over there; that was in the early 60s.**

**When you were in Fort Riley, what were your off-duty pursuits – recreational or off-duty pursuits. What did the guys do?**

There was a couple of towns that we could go to - one was Manhattan, Kansas; one was Junction City, Kansas, and we'd go there – or try to. Sometimes we'd just stay in the barracks and watch a little TV. I had a little black and white 5” TV that I could get two stations on. But mostly, you know, try to get a few guys together and we'd have a couple of beers in Manhattan or Junction City.

**But other than that, I mean, was there any kind of organized sports among the guys – competitive sports?**

Not to my knowledge.

**No baseball or basketball, just playing for the heck of it.**

Just Everybody was pretty much on their own. – no organized activities.

**No organized sports.**

There was a Rec Room where we could go to play pool.

**But I mean no teams – one unit against another.**

Not like a league or anything.

**How about when you were in Germany – there was no time to do that either.**

No time; no time for anything. We'd sneak out in the middle of the night sometimes and go find a gast haus – they're call gast houses – you know, with the foos ball tables, salami, and so forth. But for the most part we didn't have time for anything.

**When you returned from Germany it was by air also?**

Yes.

**Both times you went back to Fort Riley?**

Yes.

**Did you have any problems when you left the service? You know, like some people coming from Viet Nam with the uniform on?**

I did. I was disrespected very much.

**You were – huh?**

Very much disrespected; felt like I was a criminal.

**Wow!**

By the way I was treated –

**Oh, you mean by strangers –**

Yes.

**How about when you got home?**

No, not my family; they were fine.

**Or your friends even?**

My friends tried to be nice to me but – you could tell that they were, you know, being nice because they thought they should be nice. They didn't believe --

**Yeah –**

During that era the soldiers were disrespected as bad news people.

**I remember that; it's a shame that it happened –**

Nowadays everybody's - thank you, thank you, thank you –

**Right, thank you for your service; you didn't hear that before.**

I didn't hear that; I didn't hear that at all.

**So how was your readjustment to civilian life?**

It came pretty quick because we were planning to get married and I had to –

**So you were single during your service?**

Yes, I was. And then I came back to my job –

**Did you get the same job back?**

The same job, but then my company was moving and they got us – people that didn't want to go to the new city, Pittsburgh – they were moving to Pittsburgh – they got a job at another company in the city and that's what I did.

**You never mentioned the name of the company that you worked for originally.**

Lionel Valence, Architecture.

**So when you first came back you went to work with them.**

Actually, that was the company I worked for when I was drafted. But before I went in the service I left them and went to work for United States Steel.

**U.S. Steel – so who did you go back to then?**

I went back to U.S. Steel.

**So U.S. Steel was going to be moving –**

To Pittsburgh.

**And you didn't go with them.**

I didn't go with them; they set up with another company, Sergeant & Lundy; then anybody they had as an employee Sergeant & Lundy would take, on a temporary basis; and if they worked out they could stay.

**So you worked for Sergeant & Lundy; is that an architecture firm?**

That's an engineering company that engineers power plants.

**What was your job there?**

I started out as a draftsman; I soon became a Designer and then Supervisor. I was there for like 8 or 9 years and then I left and went to other companies.

**So you have not had contact with fellow veterans over the years?**

Not really, for a year or so, but then it kinda fades away. People go on with their lives.

**Are you a member of any Veterans Organizations today?**

No.

**The VFW or American Legion?**

Well, I'm not a member of the VFW because those are foreign wars.

**They didn't count you as being overseas by going to Germany?**

No, not really.

**I guess it has to be in wartime.**

In action.

**How do you think your military experience affected your life?**

In 25 words or less I think it was a good experience. At first I didn't think it was gonna be good at all; I hated it. But afterwards, I feel like it really helped me a lot; I'm a much more independent person and a stronger person and much more physically fit person. Personally, I think everyone should spend some time in the military. I really do.

**I agree. Both men and women.**

Both men and women, yes.

**Other countries like Israel have a two-year enlistment – I think that right after high school it's a great idea; then you go on to college.**

Yes, it's a great learning experience.

**So, life lessons you learned from the military –**

Well, like I said, a great experience; makes you much more independent; you learn to live on your own because that's what they teach you – how to live on your own.

**And discipline.**

Discipline is very, very – you learn discipline; manners, how to be polite; yes, sir, no, sir.

**Did they ever prompt you to go on to be an officer?**

Oh, absolutely; they were after me all the time. Go to Officer's Candidate School.

Please go to OCS; and I said no, I don't want to.

**I'll bet now you're sort of thinking maybe I should have –**

More than once I thought, boy you should have did it.

**They get the kids when they're that age, but years later, when they look back – it was a missed opportunity.**

It's easy to look back and say I should have did it, but what about if you went to war after that –

**Yeah –**

And got killed, so –

**That's true too. Okay, I think that covers it for us; we did okay. I'm glad that you agreed to have this interview – I thank you for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.**

You're Welcome!

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