

Interview with Elderson Harrison

Interviewer: Melanie Harrison

June 2, 2009

This interview took place in Greenwood, IN. At my grandfather's house. We sat at a table together while he shared his stories with me.

Q: When and where were you born?

A: I was born in Logan County WV, July 17, 1935.

Q: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

A: I had 3 sisters and 6 brothers. 3 of the boys were triplets. 2 of them died when they were babies and the third triplet died when he was 20 in the Korean War. There are currently 3 of us left, me and 2 of my brothers.

Q: Did you remember anything about world war 2 since you were only about 6-10?

A: I remember my father did not have to go to war according to his age and his necessity for the company he worked for. I remember almost all the young men around the neighborhood had to go, quite a few of them didn't make it back. Some of my friends, their fathers got killed in the war.

Q: Do you remember any hard times during World War 2?

A: I remember certain foods were hard to buy at the store, the government issued stamps, not like food stamps you have today, but stamps you had to have in order to purchase. Things like sugar, you couldn't get bubblegum. Being in WV could have been a part of it. Times were really hard, certain types of beef were hard to get. We had a hard time making it during the war, during 1941 and 1945. I remember immediately after the war, when things started picking up my father wanted to buy a new car, because during the war he worked 7 days a week, he was a chief electrician. The wages weren't all that high back then but working all those hours.

Q: You said he wanted to buy a new car after the war?

A: Yes, I went with him to get it, and he had to make a down payment on it and it took him 18 months to get it. You had to go on a waiting list, because everyone wanted a car. Of course, if you had to go on a waiting list now days, people would go crazy.

Q: After school did you remain in West Virginia?

A: No, I joined the army, and after my training I was stationed in Ft. Carson CO with an engineer unit. I was there for 1 year and I was shipped to Frankfort Germany. I Spent 2 years there, and the day that I was supposed to be shipped back to the U.S., I received a telegram that my mother had passed away. It was on a Sunday, and I didn't get home until Friday due to the way the army processed things at that time, and when I got home, my mother had been buried that morning. So, in reality I hadn't seen her in 2 years and didn't get to see her again before she was buried.

Q: How old were you at this time?

A: At that time, I was 22.

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Q: So, what did you do after that did you stay in WV?

A: No, after that I got married to my current wife, and then I went back into the army and was stationed in MI for 3 years with the guided missile unit, and from there I uh transferred to Ft. Hood Texas for 1 year for artillery, and from there I went back to Europe and spent 3 years there in Kitzingen Germany. Then I was transferred to Ft. Sill OK. I was an artillery survey instructor. I stayed there approximately 3 years.

Q: Did you have any kids during this time?

A: Yes 1 daughter in 1958 and a son born in 1960.

Q: So, did your family travel with you everywhere you went?

A: Yes, both children were born in MI and all my transfers from there they accompanied me. With the exception of one, Vietnam.

Q: So, after Ft. Sill OK what did you do?

A: I transferred from there to Vietnam I was there from Jan 1968 to Feb 1969. 1 year, 1 month.

Q: What did you do in Vietnam?

A: During Vietnam, my first few months I was there I was in charge of a platoon, then I did a lot of artillery work, where I would go out with the south Vietnamese army and I would call out the artillery fire missions and adjust the artillery rounds on the enemy.

Q: Did you have the same job during the whole time you were in Vietnam?

A: No, it was similar to it, but I was an air observer, I flew in a small plane. We did 2 missions a day, each mission was 2 to 3 hours long and provided air cover and called in artillery support in air to the enemy targets.

Q: Were you awarded medals for your performance or duties?

A: Yes, I was awarded the bronze star medal, 5 combat air medals, 2 army commendation medals. Vietnamese cross of gallantry, 4 battle stars. And a presidential unit situation, and a meritorious unit citation.

Q: How long were in service?

A: I was in service for 23 ½ years. When I got back from Vietnam, I was stationed in Ft. Mead, Maryland. Then I was shipped to Germany again. And after 2 years in Germany I was sent back to the states and eventually I retired in May 1977 I think it is.

Q: What did you do after you retired from service?

A: I started working for the federal government in Finances. I continued my education, I accumulated quite a few credit hours during my career, so I enrolled and did school during nights and weekends, and I earned my degree.

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Q: What part of the federal service did you work in?

A: I worked in the department of army finance center, then I transferred to the US treasury department. I worked for U.S. Customs. I retired from the civil service, let's see, after um, Jan. 1994 from the civil service. I had a total of 40 years of federal service combined.

Q: What did you do after you retired from federal service?

A: I started be a realtor, attended real estate school and started working with tucker realtor company. I just worked with them briefly, then I retired again I figured I had worked enough I was about 60 years old and have been retired since.

Q: So, what did you do after you finished working?

A: I just traveled, at this time I have 4 grandchildren which are adults now, Traveled around some, just started enjoying life, taking it easy, working around the house, stuff like that. I'm interested in a lot of sports, play bingo, go wherever we want to whenever we want. Growing old gracefully, that's it ha-ha. Still married to the same woman for over 51 years now and happy.