

Interview with Edward Jenison

Interviewer: Andrew Jenison

November 5, 2009

Interviewer Notes: Edward Jenison is my Grandfather

Q: This is November 5, 2009 in Evansville, Indiana. I'm Andrew Jenison, and I am going to be interviewing my grandfather, Edward Jenison. Before we get started what we are doing here is an interview for the Veterans History Project. We are collecting oral histories from veterans who served in World War II, and the Korean War, and the Vietnam War and just a getting their oral histories of what they went through and their experiences. My first question is how did you become involved in the military?

A: Well, in 1950 I had just graduated from the University of Illinois. At that time the draft, the universal draft in the United States, was still in effect, but college students were automatically deferred from the draft because they were actively enrolled in school. Once you were out of school you were as vulnerable as everyone else. And you had two choices. You could take the chance of your draft number being picked by the selective service and being inducted into whichever branch that they were calling people into. Or, there were some advantages if you wanted to "volunteer" for the draft. If you volunteered for the draft, you have the choice of what military unit that you would be drafted into if they were accepting people. And in a reasonable amount of time you were able to select the date in which you would report to basic training. So, a number of us after graduation decided that it would be better to volunteer for the draft because then we had a choice of within 5 to 6 months window of when we want to report, and we definitely had more certainty of when we would go and where we would go. So that's what I did, along with several of my college classmates and the date I selected was in September. It gave me the balance of the summer, and I had just gotten married, actually the day before graduation. So that gave us the summer to settle in a little bit, and everything before I reported for duty. So, in September, I reported, and I was transported to Saint Louis, Missouri, where we were inducted. Then we were sent on to what then was called Camp Chaffee down in Arkansas for basic training.

Q: If you could go into a little bit, specifically what branch of the military did you serve in, and why did you decide to pick that branch?

A: Well, I served in the army, and at the time it seemed to be the easiest choice because in college I spent four years in the Naval ROTC program for several reasons though I like boating and the water as a hobby. My father was a naval officer during World War II. So, I took the naval ROTC program at the University and a completed it successfully, but during the commissioning physical examination, my eyesight did not pass the requirements. At the time for the navy, you had to be 20-20 as the requirement, and my eyes had fallen below that. So, as a result having passed everything else, I could not be commissioned. So, I figured that the army would take me if I had bad eyesight or not.

Q: Ok my next question would be how did you mentally and physically prepare for the war?

A: Well, at the time of basic training and everything, you did not really know what your future assignment would be because a relatively small number of men were being sent overseas to Korea. We didn't have a huge military force over there at the time in comparison to later engagements. But there was always that option but there were a number of other assignments so, as I recall at the time, we didn't even really worry too much about what we might be doing we were going to complete, in our minds, our two years of required service and then get on with our private lives.

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Q: Were you ever stationed with your friends or family members?

A: Not after basic training. Several of us from my hometown went through basic training together, but after that everyone spit up.

Q: What were your first days of service like?

A: Well, actually they were not too bad. As I recall they, you know, in basic training was pretty demanding physically a lot of running and they gave you a number of tests, of aptitude tests and everything like that, but by taking basic during the fall months for September, October, and November down in the Ozark Hills, we were there at the best time of the year because it was after the summer heat, which I guess had been pretty bad in everything. And it was before winter cold weather living in those wooden barracks in the fall kept them just warm enough at night which during winter was no fun either. But during the mild fall weather it was pretty nice.

Q: What were some of your instructors like?

A: Actually, they were all pretty reasonable, on the contrary to some of the movie programs and films in everything that you have seen. They generally were knowledgeable on what they were training and as far as I can remember, all had a good sense of humor. There definitely was strict discipline, but nothing that would make you terribly upset or unhappy or anything like that. Most of them tried to make it entertaining and instructive and sometimes a little bit fun.

Q: Where exactly in the United States did you serve?

A: After basic training at Camp Chaffee, they assigned you to various advanced trainings and for some unbelievable reason of the Army choosing maybe the right person for the right type of duty. Since I had worked in a newspaper and had been trained in journalism, which a lot of it is interviewing such as we are doing now. And since I had lived in Washington D.C. for about four years during World War II, the army sent me to Fort Holabird in Baltimore, Maryland, for advanced training for a unit called CIC which stood for "counterintelligence corp." That was basically the army's background and investigative unit to primarily do security clearance for either military or civilians who were contracted by the military to perform classified or sensitive work. So, I went through the CIC training at Fort Holabird and then was assigned to the unit in Washington, D.C., and then I spent the rest of my military time doing background interviews on individuals who were being screened for security clearances to work in the government or work for the army.

Q: Was your war experience what you expected, or did you have any expectations going in?

A: Well, I really had no expectations going in. I figured that I could do anything, you know, from carrying the gun in an infantry unit to doing clerical work or who knows what. Like I said, for whatever reason this time the military classification system worked, and they found something that I had the background and in a location that I was experienced in, and so they put two and two together and that's where I ended up.

Q: Were you or others you know treated differently because of gender, race, ethnicity or any other factors?

A: At that time, we had mixed personnel during basic training, in fact, since many of the inductees were from the Saint Louis and East Saint Louis area, they were sent down to Camp Chaffee. From this area came a large number of young black inductees as well as white, and they were scattered all throughout basic training. But from that point on from my particular specialty, I don't remember that we had, you know, any black members of our unit. I know that we had several oriental members who were either Japanese or Chinese that were in our unit. That was the only diversity that I can remember, and there wasn't any segregation or any different training while we were all in the basic training.

Q: Ok. Can you tell me about some of your most memorable experiences during the war? Or was there anything interesting that happened?

A: Well none of them were terribly memorable. Occasionally we had to take our turn at some of the most advanced investigational work such as surveillance, but to me it never really seemed to be real serious or anything like that. It was some exercises that they went through, and they weren't even sure if they were for real exercises or for periodic training exercises. But you would be stationed in a car or something like that while you tell them to patrol a certain area or part of the city and everything like that. It was more like playing cops and robbers, and it seemed to be fairly serious. The bulk of the time was spent doing basic interviews of associates, and we would talk to the people who they put down as references if they were trying to get high security clearance. The job was to get as much information that you could to account for, that person's background. This was also during the McCarthy era where we were told to keep a look out for people who may have ties to the Communist Party, and if so, do very thorough background checks of that person. But rarely did anything turn up about that because most of the people trying to get clearance were good people, and we had no problem.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about some of the other members of your unit, maybe a story or something?

A: Some of the senior officers had been -In the particular unit for about four or five years and did not really have any major war stories to tell or anything. If you stayed in the service, there would be a chance that you would be moved overseas. If you were moved over there, you would do much of the same thing that you are doing here but over there you would most likely be working with a Korean who knows the people and the area. The two of you would try to figure out who the good guys were and who the bad people were, who was trying to sneak into your area. Which that would be a little more exciting that what goes on here.

Q: How did you see people more through the ranks?

A: As far as this particular branch, you were promoted on longevity rather than where you served. As long as you did your job and you did not have any problems or anything depending on how many years or months that you served would generally move up in rank. We had a different type of ranking from the normal military ranking system or private, general, and so on. Because so many civilians worked in our unit, we were given ranks of E-1, E-2, E-3, E-4, E-5 and so on. The only real difference between the ranks in our unit was the amount of money that you were paid.

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Q: How were you able to stay in touch with your family? Was it hard or pretty easy?

A: For me it was very easy. While I was finishing up training in Baltimore, my wife at that time just had a baby son, they both moved to D.C. with me where we lived in an apartment. Since my unit just worked out of office buildings, I did not have a permanent base that I had to stay at or anything. So, I was able to live in private housing with my family.

Q: Did you have to wear a specific type of uniform during the service and what was that like?

A: Well, a matter of fact since we were doing all of the interviewing throughout the city and everything like that, we were able to wear just normal American civilian clothes. The only time I wore the standard army-issued uniform was when it was my turn for guard or watch duty at the office. So, during the weekends, there was always someone there at the office keeping an eye on the place just in case something was to happen. But for the most part, we wore normal clothes and drove our own cars to the office.

Q: What did you and the guys in your unit do to keep your mind off the war?

A: Well, where we were that was not a problem because we were far enough removed it did not affect us that much. It was a little different for some of the senior officers because they had some friends overseas. With our unit being in Washington, it felt like a safe distance from Korea.

Q: What did you do when you were on leave?

A: If we had leave, any extended leave; we would drive back to our home in Paris, Illinois and spend time there. For the weekend leave, most of the time, we all had to work five days a week but there was a period of about four months where we would have to work six days a week. Normally, it was like an eight to five, week job unless you were on duty on the weekend. Other than that, on the weekends we could do whatever we wanted to.

Q: What did you think of the other officers in your unit and what was the relationship like with those members?

A: Well, the senior officers were basically like managers; they actually issued the assignments for the field teams, and we generally had teams of two people, although sometimes you would be by yourself doing the interviews, and then go back and write up the reports. The senior officers would review the reports that you would turn in and would assign follow up question if needed. But in this unit, it felt like just working in a civilian office.

Q: Did you ever grow close to any members in your unit and what were those relationships like?

A: I never grew terribly close to any of them. There were a few of them that occasionally we would meet for dinner but other than that it was much like an office professional relationship.

Q: Ok. Describe the day when your service had ended.

A: Well, at the end of your two-year enlistment, they encouraged you to reenlist which made sense because by then they had invested all of that training into you and everything like that. It made since for them to try to persuade you to come back for another two, three, or four years. But many of us at that

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time just wanted to serve our two years and then tell them "thank you very much" and head for home. After you went through your tour, you went through a discharge procedure which was a lot of paperwork and everything like that. When you were cleared even if you did not reenlist, they gave you a small bonus for your service. I don't remember the amount, but it was not much, but it was enough to get home on. We rented a trailer and packed up all of our things and put the kids in the car. We left around supper time one evening and got the kids to bed in the back and drove all night and half of the next day and then we were back in Paris.

Q: Describe the feeling you had when you had come home for good?

A: It definitely was enjoyable we were eager to get back out into the real world. All of the guys that I went in with from my hometown were getting out around the same time and it was nice to get to talk to them about where we had been and everything like that. We all left for the military in September of 1950 and all came back in September of 1952.

Q: Ok, well that's nice.

A: I'm sorry; we all left in 1954 and came back in 1956.

Q: What did you do in the days and weeks afterwards? Did you go back to work or what?

A: I worked that summer for the family newspaper, and then I got a job as a newspaper reporter in Champaign-Urbana where I worked for the next two years to gain experience before coming back to work for the family newspaper.

Q: Did you ever stay in contact with any of the members of your unit or any other members of the war?

A: Just the friends that I left with from Paris. I never did have any further contact with any of the men that I worked with in Washington.

Q: In what ways did the service affect your life?

A: Actually, for my newspaper work, it was good training because in was basically two years of interviewing and that certainly fit right in. Beyond that, I don't think that it influenced me one way or the other.

Q: How did your military experience influence your thinking about the war or military in general?

A: With my father being in World War II I have always had a positive light on the military. And nothing happened while I was in the army that changed that. My perspective may be a little bit different from someone who served overseas. Especially for someone who has served in combat. I still think good things about the military, and that I think that it is a good career and a worthwhile one.

Q: What differences do you see in terms of how people thought about war then in comparison to the war now?

A: Probably people who have served in active combat in any of the military campaigns, I think, that they would have an opinion but for people in support positions such as myself who served in other lines of

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duty, I really have not had a basis of experience to relate to something like that. I think that it would be interesting, and I don't view one way or another just because I don't have any experience.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to talk about that we have not covered so far?

A: No, the only other thing that I was thinking of, really, was getting to become good friends with a very high-ranking officer, a brigadier general or a major general, a surgeon out at Walter Reed Hospital. And the first child that we had, our son Kevin which is your dads' older brother, when he was born, he had an orthopedic problem. His feet turned inward, and we had access to military hospitals and the base hospital referred us to Walter Reed. He was the surgeon who took the case and treated and fixed Kevin's problem with his feet. And so, we had a number of visits with him for about a year. And being a good doctor, he got kind of attached to Kevin and always wanted to know how he was doing. And instead of looking at him as a high-ranking officer, we saw him as a doctor and a friend. That was the only high-ranking officer that I got to know during my time in the service.

Q: So, is there anything else that you want to talk about?

A: I don't think so; I think that is my story about my two years of service in the army.

Q: Well I thank you very much for doing this interview with me.

A: Well, you are very welcome.