

Root Cellar

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My group finished the training; I came home on leave for a week and then I was off to Fort Sill Oklahoma, Home of The Field Artillery, for AIT.

I spent another 10 weeks at Fort Sill training in an MOS of 13E20, Fire Direction Control for artillery. We were the guys that calculated the elevation and deflection (*windage*) to be set on the artillery guns in order to hit the target that was as far away as fifteen miles. I might add that this was in the days before computers or calculators, and all calculations were made by hand using a slide rule. The only computers that the Army had to do this type of job were being used in Viet Nam and it (*the computer*) took up the entire back of a ¾ ton truck, or APC (*armored personnel carrier*). There were so few of these new computers, that there was no training facility for them at Fort Sill. The training was done OJT in Viet Nam.

Almost all the guys that graduated before me, with me, and after me, went to Viet Nam. There were a few out of every class that did not. My orders were cut for Bamberg Germany. Why this happened I don't know, and I didn't ask. I graduated AIT and after spending a few days at Fort Dix NJ, (*mostly on KP duty*) I "shipped" out for Germany aboard a troop carrier called the Rose. There were two ships that made the trip to and from Germany on a regular basis, and that's all they did. One was the Rose and the other was the Garry.

It was a seven day trip with bad weather all the way. A squall came up our first day out and it didn't let up for seven days. The Rose was tossed about the Atlantic Ocean like a cork in a bathtub. Most everybody was sick the entire way and spent most of those seven days in the head (rest room) on their knees over a commode. My diet consisted of cracker and water for the entire seven day, and not much water.

We arrived in Bramhaven Germany and took a train to Bamberg. By the way, there was no one to greet you and say, "Ok guys, here's your train to Bamberg, get aboard". You had to figure it out on your own. It's amazing how well you can adapt when you have to.

Although Bamberg was not where I stayed for my entire time in Germany, it is where I was stationed. My unit was the 1st Battalion, 75th Artillery Group, of the 7th Army, *The Seven Steps To Hell* group as they have always been called. I think one reason the 75th Artillery Group was still in Germany at that time and probably still is today is because they (the 7th Army) played such a large roll in defeating the Nazis in WWII.

My unit spent about three months out of the year in the field...on maneuvers. That would be six months out of the approximate 1 ½ years I spent in Germany; or about 1/3 of the total time. I might add that almost all six months were in the winter. Germany is about the same latitude as Detroit and Chicago and the climate is also about the same. Living in a tent for three months at a time, with the temperature near or below zero is an experience you will not soon forget. I remember it snowing

for twenty-one day straight during one of those three trips. We were very innovative however in our methods of staying warm, not the least of which was a bottle of wine while walking guard duty on the ammo dump at 2 O'clock in the morning, in the middle of nowhere. It almost makes you wish you had been sent to a warmer climate... Viet Nam.

I reached the rank of E5 very early in my short career as did many of the young soldiers. It was because of the high turnover of troops and the shortage of qualified people and leaders. My best friend and cousin Andy Burnett reached the rank of E6 (*Staff Sergeant*) while in Viet Nam and he was a 2 draftee like me. However, he was in the infantry and not the artillery. The turnover in soldiers was higher in the infantry than for any discipline of the Army...for obvious reasons.

I was discharged a few days early...an "early out" it was called and flew back to the US on a commercial air liner in January of 1968. The trip back only took 8 hours with not air sickness. I spent a few days at Fort Dix and tried to get a planeout of NY City. Both JFK and LaGuardia airports were closed because of bad weather; something I certainly had seen my share of over the past two years. I was not staying in New York another minute. I was longing for warmer weather and smiling faces. I finally found a bus station that was letting busses leave and I got the first one available. It stopped at every pig-path between New York and Knoxville. The trip took sixteen hours. Every time the bus would stop, I would get off and visit with the people in the station. It was very easy to see how gradually, as we made our way south, the people become friendlier and more respectful of my uniform. The hate and animosity that I experienced in NY didn't exist south of the Mason Dixon line. I learned a lot from the few day in NJ/NY and the subsequent bus ride home. After working in New York City, Chicago and Detroit over the past four years, I can say that little has changed in the way of an individual disposition. People are no friendlier now than they were then; however, the attitude toward our military men and women has improved greatly since Viet Nam.

I was separated from the Army in January of 1968. I spent the next four years in the Army Reserves and was released with an Honorable Discharge.

That's it. Petty much an uneventful and short military career...just the way I wanted it. Although there are many, many stories packed into those short two years, most of which I have not discussed in this thirty seven years, and most likely never will. However, I have the memories of some special times and some special people...some good guys and some not so good. It's all just part of life's experience. Just about all the guys that Uncle Sam beckoned to service in those days have similar memories...at least the ones that lived.