

**This interview is being conducted on Tuesday, January 20, 2026 at the home of Gary R. Taylor. My name is Fran Prokop and I'm speaking with Gary Taylor, who served in the United States Army and is a veteran of the Vietnam War. Mr. Taylor learned of the Veterans' History Project through me and through a mutual friend, and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans' History Project. Here is his story: Gary, when and where were you born?**

I was born in Steubenville, Ohio –

**Isn't that where Dean Martin was born?**

Ha, you're right.

**And what's the date you were born?**

April 3, 1948.

**What were your parents' occupations?**

Well, my Dad was a crane operator in the steel mill; my Mom was a homemaker.

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

I had a half sister.

**What did you do before entering the service?**

I used to work at the Joliet Ammunition Plant.

**Oh! The Arsenal?**

Yeah.

**What was your job there?**

Putting the shells together.

**Wow! And how old were you?**

Just -- I would say 19.

**Do you have any other family members serving in the military?**

No. My Dad did it when he was –

**Oh, well what was your Dad?**

He was a cook in World War II.

**What branch?**

Army.

**Is that why you chose that branch of service?**

No, I just felt that that's where I'd rather be. I get seasick.

**How did you enter service – Were you drafted or did you enlist?**

Well, that's a loooong story –

**Well, make it brief -**

I was in for three years but I actually got my draft papers.

**What do you mean you were in for three years?**

Well, I went and saw the – I knew I was going to be called in the next draft – and so I went down the draft board in downtown Joliet – and was talking about, you know, could get your own thing -- what you want to do when you get in. and the guy talked to me and said we got a deal right now if you sign up for three years you pick your MOS – and you won't go in for 90 days – but it'll count.

**Oh! I see – but you won't be in, right?**

Right.

**Did they call that something?**

Pre – something

**Pre-enlistment?**

Yeah, really it is 'cuz you're really enlisted but you just don't go in for three months.

**Right. I've heard of that before.**

Yeah. But they said if you get your draft notice, because they're gonna be sending the draft notices out, if you get your draft notice, you have to go in the draft.

**So what happened to you?**

I was in for three years.

**So you never got your draft notice?**

I did. I went home and got it. So –

**How did your draft notice affect your 90-days?**

I had to stay in for three years.

**Okay; otherwise it would have been two years?**

Yes.

**So you had a three-year enlistment.**

I got to come home a couple of times.

**So you were born in Steubenville – did you grow up in Joliet? Did you live here as a child? How did you get here?**

No, I moved here when I was 12.

**Your family moved here?**

Yes. I grew up in Romeoville – Hampton Farms – back in those days.

**Okay, so you were in the area here?**

Oh yeah!

**How was your departure for training camp? Where did you go and how did you get there?**

Okay – took a train from Joliet to downtown Chicago. Went to the Induction Center downtown and had our physical. Unfortunately I passed, ha, ha. And then we got on a plane and flew down to fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where I started my basic training.

**How was your basic training? –**

You really want to ask that?

**Yes, I do – how was it? I want a description of it. What time did you get up in the morning, what did you eat and what did you do?**

Soon as the sun come up, you heard the bell – the whistle blowing – you had to get out of bed –

**And that was what time?**

Oh, I would say, 5:30; had to make your bed and everything before you fell out for chow – and then we – every day we did something a little different – you know --

**Physical?**

Oh, yes; everything was physical.

**Did you do classroom work too?**

Very little.

**But like training – you had marching and rifle –**

Yes. See – the other part – after basic training – that’s when we did our mental work.

After that I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia.

**How long was your basic training?**

Eight weeks.

**And everybody did the same thing?**

Yeah, basically everybody did the same thing.

**Shooting – rifle range?**

Oh, yeah. I shot Expert on the rifle.

**Expert – that’s important. Now you’re finished with basic training and you’re transferred to Fort Gordon, Georgia.**

My MOS was 72 BRAVO – and that’s teletype communications.

So I had ten weeks of teletype.

**Ten weeks of schooling – specialized training?**

**How was your life in the Army? How did you adapt to military life?**

You know what – it was – at the beginning it was rough for me, ‘cuz like I said I was the only kid in the family, basically, you know, and Mommy took care of me. I wasn’t like the real go-getter where I’d go out – I did play football in high school – but, you know, I was never actually in a – Mom and Dad never really had me doing a lot of things; so it was a little hard. But then –

**You made friends?**

I’m glad I went.

**Made friends there?**

Oh, yeah, yeah.

**So it was getting used to it – the first eight weeks of basic training; everything new.**

You know, you learn not to let anything bother you.

**There you go.**

They belittle you and stuff like that – just forget about it.

**That’s right; that’s all part of your training. The ten weeks in Fort Gordon – you were in the barracks, right?**

Right. We didn’t really – we did a few exercises, you know, in the morning, but basically our thing was the school.

**And how did you like living in the barracks? The physical regimen, the barracks, the food, the social life - in general?**

Oh, I had – to me I thought the food was good. Yeah, we did – we’d go to downtown Augusta – that’s where Fort Gordon is – outside of Augusta. They’d give us 12 hours liberty on the weekend to go downtown. And you could actually walk there – yearh.

**Okay, so it was fairly normal – the school was like 9 to 5 every day?**

Yeah.

**And then you had your time off after that.**

Correct.

**So your ten weeks of schooling are over. What happens now?**

Well, we got our letters and my letter says I'll be going to Long Binh, Vietnam.

**And you were in communications there?**

Oh, I didn't know what I was going to be doing. You don't know. You don't even know what unit you're gonna be in; all they're telling you is you're going to Long Binh Vietnam and when you get over there, you'll get your orders –

**Okay.**

No, I was – I had to go; I had to leave on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December.

**Oh, Wow!**

They wouldn't even let me stay home for two more days.

**Oh my goodness! So you had Christmas in Vietnam.**

Yes, I did. Charlie knew I was coming too.

**Oh, so how was your trip there – you flew there, obviously.**

Yes. Long – long flight – over 24 hours.

**Two different planes probably.**

Well, same plane but just the way we went. We left out of Oakland, CA and went to Anchorage, Alaska ; and then Yakota, Japan (phonetic) -- and then we flew into Vietnam, landed about midnight.

**Midnight on Christmas?**

Christmas Eve.

**How many men did you go with – what was your unit – number**

Well, it's just a bunch of different guys; these were just guys going all over the place –

**Different areas in Vietnam.**

I was on a plane with 220 people

**Servicemen, and of course the crew. So when you get to Vietnam, what happened?**

Well, we got off the plane and we ended up sleeping outside all night.

**Oh my God. Was it warm ?**

Oh, yeah, it was warm.

**You slept outside – why is that?**

Cuz we had no place to stay; we weren't going to stay there. What they were gonna do – said it's too late now, sleep outside with your bunk and we'll assign you a place to stay.

**Assign you in the morning.**

Right. And then they – they started calling –

**Yeah, but that was Christmas Day.**

Oh, we had a nice dinner.

**Okay.**

And they threw a few little grenades in just to make us feel at home. We were on a bus after the plane landed – they boarded us on buses and we're going down through town. So I had said to one of the guys, I said – “What's the chain doing on the bus?” All the windows were wired with barbed wire –

**Oh, barbed wire on the windows –**

Yeah; they said that was if they threw a grenade it would bounce off, so – oh, good.!

**So where did you go – what did they assign you to?**

I was there for about three days. I went to Nha Trang. Once we got there, they assigned us to different units I mean that was a major headquarters there. And I was in the Artillery Unit – just called First Field Artillery.

**And what was your job there?**

Well, that's what I was. I was a courier –

**Explain being a courier.**

Okay, like you get up in the morning; if they were assigning flights – three days a week we would fly up to the batteries – that's out in the field –

**Three days a week – fly to the units – in the battlefield**

Yeah.

**And where did you land?**

On the runway; they had runways.

**Were these towns that you were going to?**

No. These were way out; we were out in the boonies really, you know. It was our post –

**So you just had runways out there and you landed on the runway.**

Yeah.

**And what were you delivering?**

Well, we had Top Secret Mail, regular mail, all kind of mail.

**So mostly it was mail.**

Yeah, it was mail; that's how they got it.

**I mean, you weren't doing any deliveries of munitions of anything like that?**

No, no, no, no.

**Just all mail.**

Yeah. That's how they got their mail.

**Wow! And did you have any experiences with all these trips back and forth, something must have happened along the way?**

Something must have.

**What happened? Would you mind – telling about that?**

Well, we were in Plei Ku, name of a town, and we were dropping off the mail and as we were there Charlie started shooting mortars, while we were there. So the Lieutenant of the plane said, "C'mon we're getting out of here." I'm still unloading my mail. He said lets get the heck out of here. So he's taking off on the taxiway and I'm running after the plane. They got the back end down and the guy grabbed my hand and pulled me on the plane. I said thanks for waiting!

**Yeah, right! That was a close call!**

Yeah, that's the closest call I had.

**So did you continue doing this for the whole three years you were there or did your job change?**

Really, what happened was – we had the headquarters there; we would work in the headquarters 12 hour shifts; 12 hours on, 12 hours off. That's where everything come in, you know. So what we did – I would – we would switch. One week I worked 12 hours at night, then work 12 hours at day.

**Shift weekly.**

Yeah.

**And the other men you were working with they had the same schedule as you?**

Well, I was in charge; eventually I became an E-5, Sergeant, E-5.

**What was your highest rank achieved?**

E-5, Sergeant E-5. I would be in charge of – well, I was in charge of all the guys but I was on one shift, you know, so

**How large was the unit?**

Basically, it was a big base –

**What's the name of the base?**

Well, it was Nha Trang.

**Oh, you said that, yeah. So that was the main base and your headquarters?**

Right.

**And from there you flew out to the field?**

Right.

**So how many men were you in charge of?**

12.

**Is that like a platoon?**

Yeah, you could call it that. And we were together; we had a place where we slept and that was out – all we had to do was do our 12 hours on and 12 hours off and actually when you were off you could do what you wanted to do.

**So on your 12 hours on you were getting incoming mail by delivery? Or by electronic?**

All we'd do is go over to the post office and pick up the mail; it would be all there for us, sorted for us; and all we did was pick it up and take it on the plane.

**Wow! So you were lucky. Did any incidents happen while you were doing this? Ever – while you were there?**

No. A guy that was there was getting ready to come home; he was a little bit ornery and he took me downtown, which was a bad thing to do, and I said I want to come back – I want to get back on base, he said Hold on -- Well, he waited too late and there was nothing to bring us back.

**No conveyance?**

So we had to walk back; we had to walk across the Vietnamese Airport –

**Holy cow!**

And as we got to the border line all of a sudden we hear a click click – Halt! Who goes there!

And here comes a Jeep out with a machinegun on it and everything –

**Who was it?**

It was our guys –

**Oh, Americans! You were lucky.**

Well, yeah, till we got back to the base. Then we got put on pieces – the Major told me “I told you not to hang around with this guy.” I said, you know, he’s just –

**What did they do to you?**

Oh, they just put us on a suspended – you know, no time off, stuff like that.

**So you were suspended?**

Just a ten-day – ten days when you couldn’t go downtown or anything. Yeah. No big deal.

**Right.**

What were they gonna do to me – send me home? Ha, ha

**So how did you stay in touch with family and friends: how were communications from home, since you were in communications?**

Well, I -- besides writing and everything, we could call them on a land line.

**Oh! That was nice – Did you do that -- to your Mom and Dad?**

Yeah. I talked to them about 3 or 4 times a year. I was over there my whole tour.

**So you never came back – once you were there you never came back.**

After my year of service, I come home for 30 days and I had to go back for another six months. That was the hardest thing to do.

**Yeah, well you were just gone for a whole year in Vietnam, you came home for 30 days, then went back for six months.**

Yeah.

**I bet that was a long six months.**

Oh,

**So did you write letters or was the phone your only communication?**

Oh, yeah.

**Received packages and things like that?**

Oh, yeah.

**What were your recreational or off-duty pursuits, other than going to town? I mean were there any sports involved? Like were there teams –**

No. We only had – we had the beach right there. We were located right on the beach.

**Oh. Okay.**

So I'd go down there, hang out at the beach. And there was a little restaurant – a little momma-poppa-san restaurant and we'd go there.

**So there was no danger there?**

Well, you never knew where there was gonna be danger, but if they wanted to do anything – they were probably walking around the town; we didn't know they were walking.

**Oh.**

They all dress the same.

**You don't know; they all look alike and you don't know – they didn't have uniforms –**

No. , no way.. On my day off I'd go to town, sit at the beach; and if other guys were off we'd all be down there; if you walk off the beach there's the restaurant, and we'd go there; sit there at the bar, outside at a table and we'd play euchre –

**Oh, okay, card games.**

Yeah.

**So that was your off-time pursuits.**

That was it.

**How about emotions relating to combat or witnessing any casualties, or destruction of property – did you see any of that/**

Very, very few, but enough.

**Well, can you describe at least one incident?**

Well, I had met a guy in basic training; he wasn't in my unit but he was over there in the same – he did get – we got mortared and he got a shell – he got fragments from a shell – he got them into his neck.

**Wow – did they send him home?**

Yeah, but he was okay.

**But he was injured, one of your friends that you knew personally.**

Yeah.

**How about destruction of villages or things like that? Did you ever witness that?**

No.

**In doing your mail run did you see villages burning or things like that?**

Oh, I've never seen anything burning, no. We were on the beach and about two miles in they had rice paddies; I think there was a hill and a big mountain and that's where Charlie was

shooting his guns off; about a thousand of them. Yeah, you just sit there at night and watch – we had a ship or a plane called Spooky and he could shoot a thousand rounds a minute on the plane – and he could be up there shooting tracers down there. But then we had a – we had -- Green Beret had a club right next to us; they'd bring in groups of Philippines that would sing and dance and stuff. So we had that maybe once every two weeks or so, you know.

**So entertainment.**

Yeah, that was the entertainment.

**Doesn't sound too bad being out there.**

Well, no, no, no, no, but what was really funny was to watch – listen to these Philippines trying to sing Proud Mary, ha, ha!

**Are you still in touch with any friends that you made in the service?**

You know what – I come back with one – his name was Gregory Newman; he was from North Carolina, and we got together one time. I went down to his place, down to his house and he come up to here. You know, after you're married and all –

**Right, right. So you didn't have any kinds of reunions of your buddies?**

No, not like the Navy; the Navy always did. It's so hard with the Army because you –

**Right on ship those guys are together.**

Right. My friend, he's dead now, but he had – they did celebrate every year all over the country.

**They do. Yeah, they go to different places like a convention.**

It's all day long.

**Yeah, I've heard that.**

He's passed away now.

**So other than the few incidents you described, you never really saw much of wars?**

No.

**So what happened after the six months were up? Did you come back home for that last year?**

No, I had to go back again

**After the six months?**

Because I had to finish my tour, but – sop if I extended – I extended six months – by doing that I got to come home – so I actually come home twice – for 30 days – but I had to finish another six months.

**So when did you actually get out?**

March – 5<sup>th</sup> of March '71.

**And when did you go in – enter?**

That was – it's right here – 25 June – no 26<sup>th</sup> day of June '68.

**You went in in June came out in March – so like three months shy of three years.**

Right.

**How did you return home – by what method?**

Plane.

**You just flew to O'Hare, or somewhere?**

Well, I flew to Seattle and then they had me set up from Seattle to O'Hare.

**And where did you get discharged from – actually?**

Fort Lewis, Washington.

**So you got discharged in Seattle?**

Yes. I went on R & R – when I was in high school -- Romeoville – Lockport West – there was a girl that came over as a foreign exchange student and she went to school there for a year. She was staying with a well-known family here in the area, but she told them if anybody takes R & R to Australia, write me a letter – here's my address – you can stay out at my parents' place. So I decided heck, why not do it. since I was going there. I sent her a letter, told her when I was coming in. I'm in this hotel with all these guys; and they're down on the road behind, there's this orange convertible pulls up with this really beautiful girl, black hair and they said, Man look at that girl down there – and I said “Bye, boys” – oh, that was --

**And where was that?**

That was outside of Sydney.

**When did you go to Australia?**

That was for my R & R.

**So you spent your R & R there?**

Yeah, I went golfing with her Dad. We went to an outdoor zoo, animals running around – she took me downtown – this was like two years later or three years later – '72 -- so they had it set up for me to go golfing with him. She told me don't you get drunk – so we went out that night, went to downtown Sydney and she took me to a fancy restaurant – so I'm sitting there - I'm like from the hicks – She said want to try some oysters? Oh, sure – they were raw. The only kind I ever had were cooked –

**Oysters Rockefeller – cooked?**

So anyhow, I ate about two of ‘em. And we went – we went to the movies and saw “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.”

**Oh, wow! You remember that.**

I never forgot that. First time – movie just came out for the first time –

**That’s nice; you had a nice time then.**

**So how was your reception by family and friends when you got home? In 1971 – happy to see you – you were not married then. When did you meet your wife.**

Afterwards.

**So you were still single.**

Yeah. Mom and Dad came up to O’Hare.

**They picked you up at O’Hare.**

My neighbors around about 3 or 4 houses came – the people treated me good.

**How was your adjustment to civilian life?**

Pretty good.

**Did you have a job waiting for you – what happened?**

They put me back in the Arsenal; they have to let you come back.

**So did you have your same job?**

No, no; they put me in a TNT cooling area; that’s where they pour the TNT into the shells – I has to push these racks into the cooling station and it was hotter than -- -- you know how long I stayed in that job.

**No, how long?**

Not very long – I could hardly -- maybe two months.

**What happened after that?**

I was out – you know, it’s funny –

**Where did you work after that?**

Oh, I worked at O’Hare 34 years.

**What did you do at O’Hare?**

Little bit of everything; I worked at the counter.

**For any particular airline?**

Yeah, US Airways – customer service rep. Then I worked the gated area where you board the people; I worked the ramp outside –

**Luggage, you mean?**

Yeah, and then I got a job in Operations, which was bringing the planes in, pull up all the weather, things like that.

**Communications.**

Yeah, that's good. And then as time went on I was – I got to be a Manager –

**All this was for US Airways?**

Yes.

**Did they close down eventually?**

No, they got bought out – they're American Airlines now.

**I know they're not around now; they were bought out by American.**

**So do you have benefits from them – like you get free transportation or anything?**

It's hard because you're on the list with people all over – you put in the order – but they put all their people first, and then, forget it. If I go someplace I go in the car.

**Are you a member of any veterans' organizations today?**

I belong to the American Legion, Plainfield –

**How about the VFW?**

Well, we had a VFW over here (in Carillon) and they closed down. We took over – we started a new one up, so I was in that.

**With Debbie Leinweber?**

Yeah. Well, I ran for President couple of times – let's see – what else did I do? Well, I was Commander at the Post in Plainfield, couple of years of the American Legion.

**Anything else about the war that – during your service that you want to talk about?**

In the service, you know, I think I spent a pretty good time there –

**You never were injured or anything like that? Or any close calls or bombings –**

No.

**Your headquarters never got attacked or anything?**

No, no but now, since then, you know they never – they never would admit to Agent Orange.

**Right. But they do now.**

I know, and I did get –

**Were you affected by it?**

They didn't find anything but I -- but what they had was symptoms – I had all the symptoms.

**Did you go to the hospital to get tested or anything?**

Yeah, oh, I went all over the area to get tested.

**And what did they find?**

Oh, I had sleep apnea; I had a heart problem, hearing problem –

**Are you on disability now – partial -- what percentage?**

90.

**Ninety per cent disability – from all these problems. So you really were affected.**

According to them. I didn't argue with them. I was really – I guess you could say I was fortunate because two years ago I had a heart attack and I've been dealing with it ever since. I have – I get dizzy a lot so when they – when they had this all added up and had me go to these different places to have me physically tested – that's what they came up with.

**So you – this is through the VA, is that correct?**

Yeah.

**So you do get VA benefits?**

Yes, I do ; I get lots. Yeah, I was very fortunate.

**Well, I'm glad that you're getting the benefits that you deserve. All veterans deserve their benefits.**

It was so funny, you'd hear about, through the years, you'd hear about – inaudible -- why don't you check so and so – you gotta be in the service during war time and guys were saying well, I've got this and I never saw Vietnam. I got this – but I don't know enough about it – I said you just have to – things work out, if you want to call it worked out -- suffered with the heart, had a stroke and I've been going ever since to the doctors.

**But all at the VA? You go to the VA Doctors?**

I never go to the VA doctors.

**Did you ever go to the VA Doctors originally?**

One time.

**So you don't have VA benefits?**

I got all VA benefits.

**So you have benefits but you don't use the hospitalization?**

Correct, private doctors.

**How would you say your military experience affected your life?**

I needed it for me. I needed to grow up. Boy it made you grow up fast.

**Oh, yeah!**

Seriously. I say that the kids today – they should go in for two years –

**They should – male and female alike.**

Yeah, just go in for two years and do everything that we had to do; not go to fight –

**Do basic training, yes; other countries have mandatory military service – two years; I see nothing wrong with that.**

Yes. How many high school kids kill themselves because their girlfriend broke up with them. We would never think of doing that if you had to go through that; you would think that would be the worst thing you ever had to put up with.

**I know. So what about life lessons that you learned from the military?**

Basically, you know, my parents always were pretty strict with me, so I wasn't a bad kid or anything like that, but I just think there's times in your life you do things you might not like to do but yet you do them.

**So you do what you need to do.**

That's it; that's it.

**Well the service makes you grow up, definitely.**

So I came home. I met Marge in '75, we were together for a year, and I worked at the airport. I used to have to put in for my vacation a year in advance. So I had put my vacation for Christmas – the week of Christmas -- so we got married the day after Christmas.

**How nice!**

Didn't we, honey?

**Marge: Yes, we just had 50 years.**

**Congratulations!! 50 years – Wow! Not everybody makes it that far - (other discussion not transcribed herein).**

**Anything else you want to add? I think we covered everything, really.**

Like I said, I belonged to the American Legion. For a long time I didn't go to any Post. I just paid my dues. The State would send me the notice. So my kids were getting older, not playing baseball no more, so I wasn't doing any of that, so I might start to get something to do -- go to a

meeting, so I sent out to Illinois that I would like to be signed up to the closest American Legion Post and I got a phone call from a guy in charge from Plainfield. So I went to a meeting and

(end of tape)

**I want to thank you for your service to our country and thank you for doing this interview today.**

You're welcome.

**Gary R. Taylor**

**13165 South Carlisle Court**

**Plainfield, Illinois 60544**

**815-524-4946**

**Taylor13165@att.net**