

This interview is being conducted on Wednesday, March 4, 2026 at the home of Eugene R. Link. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Gene who served in the United States Army and is a veteran of the Vietnam War. Gene 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:

Gene, when and where were you born?

I was born in Brooklyn, New York on January 15, 1943.

What were your parents' occupations?

My Mother was a housewife and my Dad was a finance executive.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I have a brother, Richard and I had a sister who passed away on her eighth birthday, Mary.

What did she die of?

A brain tumor – yeah, 1962.

Wow – heartbreaking when they're that young.

Did you have any family members serving in the military?

My Dad served during World War II – and he was in the Navy Seabees. He was in Iceland then was in D-Day Normandy Beach, and then went to Okinawa. My uncle, who was my Mother's brother, his name was Buddy Clare and he served in the Coast Guard.

During World War II?

Yes.

How old were you when you entered the service?

After college, so I was 21.

What college was that?

St. Anselm's, Manchester, New Hampshire.

How did you enter the service – were you drafted or did you enlist?

No, I enlisted in the Reserves.

Is that the Army Reserves you're talking about?

Yes, Army Reserves?

Any why did you choose that path?

Well, previous to this I was accepted in the Army – I guess you would call it their – their Officer Training Program.

Like ROTC?

Yeah, but it wasn't ROTC – want to hear the story?

Yes, I do – go ahead.

My Father, who was in World War II, I said to him – after I said -- “I'm going down and I have to sign on the dotted line, and if so I'll be going to , you know, the Officers' Training Program. And one of the reasons is because I want to follow you and I want you to be proud of me.” And he had told me, at that time, he said, “We're probably going to be fighting in Vietnam and I think this is a bad war – this is gonna be a bad war. And you can do what you want, but that's how I feel about it.” So I listened to him and did not go down and accept the Officer Training Program – and then I passed the Army Security Agency –

Army Security Agency – is that a special branch?

Yes, it's a special branch and basically you – uh –

That's not like the Military Police, is it?

No, no. It's, it's – right now it's part of Army Intelligence – and what we did is we eavesdropped on Russian communications, but also, you know, it was Chinese communications – there was a whole bunch of people involved – but I was in the branch that eavesdropped on Russian communications.

Okay, so you enlisted – how did that happen? You enlisted on your own?

Yep.

Into this group?

Yep.

You enlisted directly into the Army Security Agency?

Yes.

Did you have to go downtown – New York?

No, no, I had to go to Fort Monmouth.

New Jersey?

Yeah, and you know, you had to pass a lot of tests.

So you had testing done?

Yeah, lot of tests.

But you enlisted and once you enlisted this is where you went to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey?

Yeah, well, that's where I enlisted, at Fort Monmouth.

Did they test you before or after they accepted you into the service?

Before.

Oh, before?

Yes.

Testing before they took you in.

Before I was able to go into Security – because you had to -- supposedly –

At a higher level –

Who knows, but the Army Security Agency is the top one per cent of the Army.

That's what I read!

Okay – you have to test out for that.

So they did accept you – you passed the tests and now where did you go for basic training or – what happened after that?

For basic training I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey, I think it was for ten weeks.

So you were close to home. Could you drive there?

I could drive there, yeah. But I didn't, you know, I had to take the bus – I don't know, it was maybe 30 miles away.

So you were very close to home.

Yeah. I was.

So, ten weeks – you didn't have to go cross country or anything; you were right there.

Right.

Could you explain a little bit about training camp? How was it – how was basic training for you? What did it consist of?

Yes. It consisted of basically, you know, everything you had to do in basic which was, you know, physical and mental – and you had to, you know, learn the Army way. And what was interesting in this particular way – I was involved with –the Army decided to combine a lot of the black people with the southern white people because they knew that it would be an experience going forward. So a great deal of my company was that – and it was great. It was – black and white –

Well, that's okay.

But the bottom line was that you learned a lot about – you lived very close with these people.

Yeah, right.

And it was a great experience.

So that is the question – how did you adapt to military life – the physical regimen, the barracks, the food – social life ?

Pretty good. In the physical training I came in third out of 220 people.

Okay, that's good.

Physically – you know, we didn't have any mental things, but –

Did you find it rigid or tough?

It was challenging.

It was not easy.

Yeah, it was challenging. And the food was fine; the food was great.

And you spent ten weeks there.

Yeah.

And did you have – did that include classroom training along with rifles –

Oh, yeah. We did the whole thing. It was physical training, rifle range –

Rules and Regulations –

Yeah.

So after completion of the ten weeks, where did you go?

Then I went to Fort Devens, Massachusetts for specific training.

Now is that considered specialized training?

Yeah.

And how long did that last?

That was about six months maybe – and that was not physical but it was very mental. That was The Army Security Agency training.

Did you receive a certificate or something after you completed that training?

Yes.

What was your ranking after completion?

Spec 4. Should I tell you about the training?

Yes, yes, go ahead.

So it was Morse Code. And then you had to learn the machines; and then you had to learn conversational Russian.

Mm– hmm.

And that was it. So basically our job, I was a teletype operator – so I used the teletype and the Morse Code to eavesdrop on – we knew the frequencies – the Russian frequencies, which was a key thing. And if it looked like it was interesting, I would then report it and then it would be turned over to the linguists, who were the people who could -- that were very proficient in Russian. And out of it came the highest ranking – it was a top secret crypto clearance that they had then. It's funny because they actually – in part of this I found out – they went back to the candy store that I used to go to when I was six years old –

Ha, ha, ha

To find out if I ever stole anything, ha, ha, ha.

Ha, ha; they went that far – oh, my God.

Well, you know, they also had a thing where they told us supposedly these were the Russian frequencies, and they really weren't. But they let us out and some of us, you know, went out drinking –

Oh, right. Wanted to see if you had “loose lips.”

And they specifically had girls there who tried to get the information.

Wow! They really put you to the test.

Oh, yeah; Oh, yeah.

Wow!

If you let go the frequencies, I mean, that's real –

That's the main thing.

Yeah, because the Russians didn't know that we knew the frequencies.

So was that mostly Russian at this time or did you do the Chinese too?

No. Just Russian.

Strictly Russian.

So how long were you at Fort Devens?

About six months. So it was like 9 or 10 months total – Active Duty.

Oh, that was Active Duty.

Yeah.

And what happened after that?

Then we went back – and we had – we went every other Sunday and two weeks in the Summer.

Oh, so you were like strictly every other Sunday and two weeks in the summer. Well, tell me about that. How did you –

It was good; I mean – what am I gonna say – it is what it is. For six years, that's what we did.

So this is how you spent your entire service mostly -- you had nine months of Active Duty and the other five years were Army Reserve duty doing this type of work.

Yeah, yeah.

Wow – that is different than the regular Army – and you stayed there at Fort Dix for the entire six years?

No, Fort Monmouth. So when I returned back after Fort Devens, it was Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, which was very close to the house.

Okay, so during those six years where did you go on your two-week summer campout?

Okay. We went to different forts –

In the U.S. or out of country?

No, in the U.S.

You stayed in the U.S.?

Yes. God, I can't even think of it – went to a Fort in Virginia, Fort Bragg –

Fort Bragg, North Carolina and you'd stay there for the two weeks and live in the barracks – or what?

Yeah.

What was your regular job while you were in the Army Reserve?

At that point I worked for Bambergers, which was a division of Macy's. And I started out as a – basically in the finance department.

Finance Department –

So I was an internal auditor.

And did you continue with that job during your entire military career?

Towards the end I went into Human Resources.

With the same company?

Yes, yes.

So what else can you tell me about your service – how about some things that happened while you were there on alternate Sundays or for the two weeks?

You spent the whole day on Sundays – what did you do?

We worked with the teletype machines –

Did you ever have to learn like new topics or new things?

Yes, there were new technical things that we had to learn.

This was really pre- computers, right?

It was. Yes. So it was fairly sophisticated. One of my – this is interesting – one of my professors at Fort Devens was one of the people who discovered the Russians in Cuba –

Oh, okay.

Were you monitoring them?

No, no, but he did it. So he was, as they would say, an ASA was, from what we understand, was instrumental in finding out the information that the Russians were in Cuba.

What does ASA stand for?

Army Security Agency. Which is what I was –

Oh, okay; that was your title – said it at the beginning.

So, as the years went by, were you happy that you chose that part –

Sure, yeah.

Were you satisfied – where did you go the other years – do you remember?

Fort Bragg, you said, and somewhere in Virginia.

There was a fort in Virginia –

You went to all the Army bases, more or less?

Right.

And you never went overseas?

No, never.

And what was the highest rank you achieved?

E-4.

How about friendships formed and the camaraderie of service – Did you meet guys there that you are still in contact with today?

Oh, yeah; oh, yeah. That I'm in touch with today – no, but I did for – you know, I met new people and became friendly with them for many years.

Right. This is difficult because many questions here relate to wars – witnessing casualties and things like that. Even how did you stay in touch with family and friends – you were right there.

Right; right.

I'm not even going to ask about recreational or off-duty pursuits –

Yeah, exactly.

That was strictly your job and you did that for the entire six years that you were in the service.

Yeah. When I left we signed a document that we couldn't talk about our experiences for thirty years.

Well, this is past 30 years.

Oh, yeah.

So what do they call that today – a non-disclosure agreement?

I don't know. But it was – I mean I couldn't say anything to anybody; not even my wife, you know. I think that the key thing for the top secret crypto clearance was our knowledge of Russian frequencies.

Did you ever have – in your years there did you ever find, other than the Cuban missile stuff, did you ever hear of anything now, 30 years later, that you can talk about?

Other than the fact that ASA is all over the world with listening posts in a lot of different countries –

Good to know.

And what we knew then, I can't imagine what we know now.

Oh, yeah. Right.

We knew a lot. We knew a lot.

Well, that's good. I'm glad that they do.

Unless you have some other stories to tell about what happened on your two weeks summer camp in different place – did anything ever occur – any injuries or anything happen/

No, nothing, but you know, it was pretty intensive during those two weeks.

How so – what do you mean?

Well, I mean, you know; you had to work at night sometimes –

What were your shifts – were they 12-hour shifts?

They were – I think they were 10 hours. I think they were 10-hour shifts.

Were you looking for anything specific?

No, if I can remember, they used – they set up different, you know, I don't know what you would call them – different scenarios of -- and I don't think they were real, I mean, they were made up.

Were they – did they tell you to look for certain things or listen to certain things?

Yeah; they said you have to, you know, here are the frequency numbers and, you know, tell us what you hear.

Oh, what they're saying out of those frequencies?

Yeah.

Were there several frequencies?

Yeah, there were.

And of course it was all in Russian so you did have to have a pretty good knowledge of it.

Well, the way they set it up – it was Russian. I don't think it was true Russian; I think they set it up so that they – somebody spoke Russian but we didn't – we weren't there during that two weeks observing the real thing.

Oh, you weren't? That was just – how about on Sunday? When you went on alternate Sundays, what did you do on that day?

We used to practice, you know, different things. And if I can remember correctly – I think it was originally – it was real life things and then they changed it to you know, different programs that they had. I'm really not sure on that.

Well, what was the purpose of this if these people weren't real – if you weren't monitoring real-life lessons?

Yeah, but it was the process of using the machines and knowing the language.

In preparing you in the event if you would have to?

Yes. Yeah, if they – if we were activated, we would have to –

Oh, I see, I forgot you were in the Reserves –

Right.

But if you were doing this job when you were activated, you would not be having simulations –

No, no –

You would have the real thing so what you were doing was simulations.

Right.

So to keep you in a state of readiness –

Right, right.

I see. And for the two weeks you were there – you had 10-hour shifts – so what did you guys do afterwards? Did you ever have any kind of organized sports or anything like that? Baseball teams or basketball –

No, we'd go out drinking and carousing basically, ha, ha, that's what we did.

Ha, ha, okay. Well then it wasn't difficult for you to return to civilian life – your six years are up – how was your readjustment to civilian life?

It was great because I didn't have to go to meetings every other week – every other Sunday.

How did you feel? Did that weigh on you the whole time? Were you concerned that perhaps the war would start and you would be activated?

Oh, yeah; we were almost activated once. We were very close – from my understanding –

What was going on in the outer world at that time?

It was during the Vietnam War, and we were, from what I understand, I mean, who knows if this is true, but we were very close to getting activated because of the Vietnam War. We were 90% ready to go.

So you weren't happy about that and you didn't know for how long you'd be gone.

No, and we only knew this later on. We didn't know it at the time.

And your company has nothing to say about it; I mean if you're activated you're gone. They had to take you back.

That's it; that's it.

After leaving the military did you ever use the G.I. Bill?

No.

You did not. Now that you are an older gentleman, do you use the VA benefits at all?

No.

I'm sure that your medical care is taken care of through your employment?

Right, right; you know, afterwards I was on my own.

Have you had contact with fellow veterans over the years? People that you served with –

Uh, no, I really haven't.

You don't go to any reunions or things like that?

No. But I belong to the group here.

Are you a member of any Veterans' organizations today?

Yes, the Carillon family –

It's not really the same –

Yeah, it's veterans and spouses and anybody who wants to join; I think mostly it's veterans and spouses.

But you didn't belong to the American Legion or anything –

I did in the past but I don't now.

Looking back on your military service, how do you think that your military experience affected your life?

In a number of ways: Number One, I think it – I didn't like it when I was in it – but I learned teamwork; I learned working with all different types of people; I learned living with all different types of people. I learned to be competitive in a competitive atmosphere. I learned about pressure because if I failed, of course, I learned how to deal with that. Part of my job was executive coaching, so I used to do, up until this past year, executive coaching with senior people.

Coaching for --

Coaching for senior people – a six-month program Senior Leadership coaching – and a lot of the things I'm teaching, I think I learned in the military, you know, which is teamwork and leadership and how to get along with people and getting to know who you are, etc. I've done a lot of work too with veterans looking for jobs and trying to convert what they learned in the military to adapt to reality – and you know, that's teamwork, discipline, doing a good job consistently, being responsible.

Responsibility.

And so what I try to do is convert that into a resume so that, you know, people would have to learn how to articulate what they can offer of themselves – you have to educate the people who hire these people, in terms of what a veteran can bring to the table. So, it was a reciprocal type of thing. I did a lot of that, you know, on the side at the job site. You know – gotta have VP of HR, National Sales Manager. I've been in Human Resources –

Those are jobs that you had?

Yeah, and executive coaching – Human Resource Consultant.

What life lessons have you learned from the military?

I would say those things that I talked about – responsibility, teamwork and just general leadership, and you know, being consistent, being on time and everything else; more of an understanding of other people and the importance of doing a good job.

So your overall experience with the military was positive?

It was really good, yeah, more so realizing, not when I was there because I didn't recognize it, but afterwards, in the workplace, knowing that the military experience helped me do a good job.

It helped in civilian life.

It really did; it really did.

Well, I think that we covered everything and in conclusion I want to thank you for taking the time to share your recollections about your military service. If there is anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered in this interview?

I don't think so. I think that the process is really a good one because it takes you back mentally on your experiences and you're able to connect your past experiences to today's reality and I think that's really constructive and an intelligent way to live life.

Good, okay. Well, thank you very much for your service to our country and thank you for this interview. I appreciate it.

Thank you very much for your help.

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