

Dean Millard Boyer interviewed August 29, 2007
PFC , US Army, February 1964 – February 1966

Dean Boyer graduated from High School in 1960 and then went to Penn State college. A friend told him about a job at the Philadelphia Gear Corporation near Philadelphia, so Dean applied and was hired in February of 1962. In late 1963, he got a letter, saying that he had to go get a physical for the draft. Dean



decided to do his Service for two years of active duty instead of eight years of reserves. He wanted to get it over with. He had to take a physical and some written tests. When he got his draft notice, he had felt some anxiety, but it wasn't too scary. When he got off the bus to Wilkes Barre, the sergeant there yelled at him, and Dean thought, "Well, this is it. Just listen and keep quiet." A friend had told him, "Keep your mouth shut, do as you're told, and don't volunteer for anything, and you'll be fine."

Before he left for Basic Training, Dean's Mother gave him a bible (which he carried with him during his time in the service). His basic training was at Fort Jackson, SC. He took the train from Wilkes Barre to Fort Jackson. The routine at basic training was that he woke up at 4 a.m. (2:30 a.m. if you had KP duty, that is, kitchen duty). The food was good there, and he learned to eat quickly. Then he had physical training, like push-ups, then drilling. But each week was different. The last week, he remembers, they had a week-long bivouac (camping trip) – cook your own meals and sleep in a sleeping bag. At night, lights were out at 9:00, but there was a light by your bunk if you wanted to do some reading. They were always tired by that time, so they were able to go to sleep pretty well. They made the men run, and this was a problem for the people in bad shape and smokers. By the end of basic training, everyone was shaped up, and a couple of people had quit smoking. The only way you were taken out of basic training would be if you had a family problem.

Foreign Languages...

In basic training, Dean and his friend Paul were Pennsylvania Dutchmen, and they could speak the language. There were some Puerto Ricans who came to the base, and they started speaking in Spanish to each other. Dean and Paul didn't know what they were saying, so they started speaking Pennsylvania Dutch, and the Puerto Ricans stopped speaking Spanish and started talking English from then on.

After graduation, they got their orders. Dean was to go to Fort Sill, OK, where he would work with missile launching and repair. But before he went to Fort Sill, he got two weeks of leave. Involved in his advanced training at Fort Sill was how to fire missiles, how they worked, etc. his specific job with missiles was repair and launch. If the missile had a mis-fire, they knew that it needed repairing. This was where repair school training came in handy. At repair school, they worked hands-on to fix missiles.



One of the missile types worked on by Dean.

for a month. Dean got to be a flag raiser, something he was proud of. The flag detail would raise the flag at 5:30-6:00 in the morning.

One interesting experience at Fort Sill was that Dean was able to see the Easter Pageant put on by the local town. The production involved three stages and many actors and portrayed the life of Jesus from birth to crucifixion.

Over Seas....

After Fort Sill, Dean had a 30-day leave to make a will and prepare to go overseas to Okinawa, an ammunition depot off of Japan. It's an island, but it's not very big, so if someone were to drop a bomb on Okinawa, it would be gone completely. Because of this, the ammunition was in igloos about 50 feet under the ground. To get over there, he was on a ship from San Francisco for 21 days with 2,800 GI's. He had to stay at his bunk, and if they went up on deck, they'd grab them for KP duty or something. All they could do was play cards as the ship lacked any other means of entertainment.

Dean loved it on Okinawa. He had no KP duty, and there were civilian maids to clean up their rooms. By the time he came to Okinawa, Vietnam was starting to heat up. On Okinawa, they stayed at a Kadena Air Force Base. They had two men to a room like a dorm room. The civilian maids were very honest. If you left money out in your room, they'd clean around it. It was possible to buy a tailored men's suit on Okinawa for about \$10 so Dean bought a number of them. He wore them for many years until they started to wear out.



Dean Boyer, Fort Sill, OK. Flag raising detail uniform.

The American men were treated well by the Okinawans. They could go downtown to eat Japanese food, and it was safe enough that they could go alone. On the base, Dean's main job was to bring the missiles to the ammunition storage underground. The whole base's job was to guard the ammunition on Okinawa.

Dean did a lot of sight-seeing in Okinawa. He thought it was cool to go to the highest point and look at all the water around the island. He could see the whole island but no other islands anywhere. There were some tunnels from the war and he went through a lot of those. They weren't like a museum, but were much like they had been during the war. Miss America came to visit the island as did the Glenn Miller Band. The main source of entertainment was the Airman's Club which had a big stage and sunken dance floor. This is where Dean spent most of his evenings.

Toward the end of Dean's enlistment, his sergeant said that, no, he wasn't going over to Vietnam, because he had too little time left. Dean enjoyed Okinawa so much that he wanted to be discharged in Okinawa and stay there working for the Army as a civilian. His mother was definitely against this. It turned out that the Army made their troops come back to the States to get discharged. He and a few guys happened to catch a ride on a merchant marine ship with a pool table and everything for the return trip. There were only eight service men aboard. On the way back, they stopped for one day in Taiwan, but couldn't leave the ship. There was also a lay-over in Hawaii for two days, and he saw Pearl Harbor which wasn't yet a museum or a big memorial. He was discharged in San Francisco, and then got on a plane to Harrisburg, via Pittsburg. His discharge was supposed to be the 23rd of January, but he got discharged on the 26th because of the three days in Hawaii and Taiwan, so he was paid for those days.

His proudest accomplishment in the military was the fact that he did his duty for his country for two years. He was willing to go to Vietnam if needed, but wasn't called.