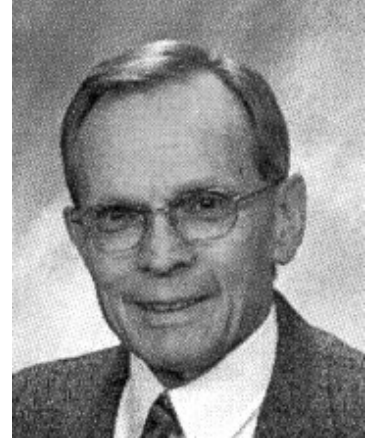


**Ernie Baum** interviewed August 14, 2007

First Lieutenant, US Army, January 1964 – October 1966

Ernie was drafted right out of college in 1964. The letter said to report to Pittsburgh for testing after which he was sent home and told to wait for orders to report to basic training. Ernie had scored well on the tests and a recruiter came to Ernie's house and talked to him about Officers Candidate School (OCS). Ernie made a deal that he would attend OCS if he could be inducted after his college graduation on January 23<sup>rd</sup> as opposed to his originally scheduled induction date of the 11<sup>th</sup>. The deal was accepted and Ernie was inducted on the 27<sup>th</sup>.



First Plane Ride...

Ernie's first plane ride was on the way to basic training at Fort Knox, KY. The flight was during a snowstorm and was so rough, the stewardess couldn't stand. Next it was a bus which dropped them off at a stop with a phone around 3 am. They were picked up and issued a pad and linen for their cot and left with the words "see you at 5:30." The next day was spent getting buzz haircuts, uniforms, physicals and shots. The shots were given via air gun and the men walked the gauntlet and received all the shots they needed as they went down the line.

One amusing incident was when a kid from Chicago was asked to fire an M-14 rifle to show him that it wasn't that bad. The kid took the gun and when he fired it went off on automatic which caused it to rise while continuing to fire. Everyone in the stands behind him dove away as the gun kept going higher until a Sergeant grabbed the gun. The kid never did qualify on the rifle.

Ernie's baseball skills became evident during grenade training. He hit the target three times in a row and from then on, they had him teach the other men how to throw.

The men went through seven weeks of trainings, just like the enlisted men. Ernie was then discharged as an enlisted man and inducted as an officer. He missed basic training graduation because he had already been sent to OCS at Fort Sill, OK. At OCS, there were only two choices: Infantry or artillery. Artillery rode in trucks instead of walking to Ernie selected artillery.

Mini West Point...

Again, Ernie arrived for OCS basic at 3 am at Fort Sill. OCS was like a mini West Point. The first week was Hell Week when everyone was screaming at you for something in order to tear down and then remold the candidates into what the army wanted. They had to run everywhere, in formation, on schedule and right now. If not, 20 push-ups. Everything had to be yelled in order to develop the voice so that it could be heard by all six guns in the battery which were spread out over about 150 yards. During the day were classes where they had to learn how to fire the cannon and hit the target. The men took turns in the various roles necessary to fire the gun so they could learn each part of the operation.

OCS lasted for Seven months. During this time, Ernie's battalion had an attrition rate of 40%, the second battalion had a rate of 60%. Ernie's commanding officer was more lenient than the commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion.

#### A Disaster and a Near Disaster...

Each battery had a safety officer whose job it was to make sure the cannon was properly loaded and aimed before it could fire. There were lots of foreign students at Fort Sill. In one incident, a German crew fired a 9" round (measured across the base) that hit near the front gate, killing some men. One incident involving Ernie was when he was serving as a forward observer (between the guns and the target). One round went off too early and exploded over their heads. Fortunately, the round was high enough that the shrapnel did not cause any injury.

After OCS, about 20 men went into US Army Air Defense at Fort Bliss, TX. This was better than riding in a truck hauling a cannon. At the time, most cities had SAM missile sites. Batteries were also in Germany and Korea. Ernie was first in HAM (High Altitude Missiles), these were Nike Hercules missiles. Ernie learned electronics and then did some teaching, test monitoring and counseling. Part of counseling was to encourage the soldiers to bear down on their studies. For many, it was their first time away from home and they had trouble taking their studies seriously. The attitude was "What are they going to do to me? I'm already in the arm." This changed as American involvement in Vietnam increased and being sent overseas as a rifleman became less appealing.

Ernie taught many foreign students such as Japanese, Israelis, Germans and Greeks. Almost any member of NATO and SEATO had students there. Some classes were taught through an interpreter. Each nationality had its own characteristics: the Japanese were the best students while other nationalities tended to cheat or have lower personal hygiene standards, etc... Having the foreign students there also gave opportunities to the Americans because they would sometimes teach courses in martial arts, etc... These students were there learning how to use the American weapons systems that had been supplied to their military. In the case of the Germans, they also needed room to practice firing which they would do at the White Sands range in New Mexico.

Ernie did get to fire Ajax missiles at drones at the White Sands range and also participated in Time On Target (TOT) drills which would involve artillery and missiles fired from great distances all hitting the same target. The TOT drill took place at Fort Sill, OK and included a missile that had been fired from Colorado.

At this time in 1965/66, the main "enemy" for those in Air Defense was the Soviets. Even though America was at war in Vietnam, the big build up hadn't yet occurred American troops there were mostly Special Forces. In addition, the North Vietnamese did not use their air force offensively so air defense was not needed in Vietnam.

One of the interesting things about Fort Bliss is that it was also where Biggs Air Force Base was located. The base was home to B-52's which would rotate air crews for duty on Guam for six months at a time. Occasionally, they would have B-52 scrambles in which a plane would take off every 30-35 seconds. Ernie said this was an impressive (and loud) sight.

Ernie took the opportunity to play lots of baseball and softball while at Fort Bliss. He played on teams on and off base. Being close to Mexico also gave him the opportunity to go to dog races and bull fights. Ernie was there when Texas Western won NCAA championship in 1966. This is the team made famous in the recent movie *Glory Road*. Ernie listened to the championship game on the radio and then went downtown for the celebration.

Proudest Accomplishment...

Ernie's proudest accomplishment was graduating from OCS. He entered the service as a small town country boy and learned a lot about people in the service. Human nature came out and you started out naïve, then become skeptical and then you got smart. What he learned at OCS still affects him today in the way to weigh facts and make decisions. In the military, you had to make decisions quickly or you didn't cut it.

Ernie enjoyed the military and could have made it a career. He applied to pilot training and was accepted, but then the rules changed and pilots couldn't learn fixed wing flying until they had learned to fly a helicopter. Helicopter pilots were needed for Vietnam as part of the Air Calvary concept that was being used. By this time, Ernie was married and had a child. The rotation for pilots was 12 months in Vietnam, three months back in the states and then back to Vietnam for another 12 month tour. The commitment for a pilot was five years so he decided it was time to get out.

Ernie was discharged in October of 1966 as First Lieutenant. He still had to serve two more years in the reserves and then two more years of inactive reserves.