

Jay Russell Meloy interviewed September 6, 2007
Captain, US Army Reserves, June 1970 - 1983

When Jay started at Drexel University as a Chemical Engineer major in September, 1965, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) was mandatory for the first two years for all students. At the end of his freshman year, ROTC became voluntary. Jay decided to continue



with the program. The Vietnam war was in full swing and Jay felt he could make a contribution as an officer. After two years in the program, Jay moved to the advanced program in his Junior year. This carried with it some compensation and a service obligation after graduation.

The ROTC program was designed to train Cadets to become 2nd Lieutenants in the army after graduation. The program consisted of classes, drilling, physical training, rappelling and leadership among other activities. By the time Jay got to the advanced program, there were around 100 students in ROTC. The students were divided into battalions and were set up with a student command structure. Each battalion had a commander and S1, S2, S3 and S4 officers (Personnel, Intelligence, Operations and Logistics respectively).

During the summer between junior and senior year, there was a six week camp at Fort Indiantown Gap. There wasn't much free time for the first three weeks. Everyone was kept busy with training in basic infantry skills, Marksmanship, heavy weapons firing, outdoor training, camouflage and detection of camouflaged personnel, and how to call in artillery fire. Cadets took turns at the leadership positions in the platoon which consisted of 40 men so the rotation took place on a daily basis to give everyone experience.

Prior to attending camp, the Cadets were issued new equipment, including boots. Despite the warnings to break the equipment in before camp, there were lots of hurting feet at the beginning. Each Saturday there was a parade and there were frequent barracks inspections. The Cadets tried to smuggle in things they weren't suppose to have: beer, extra hats, etc.... Creative ways to hide the contraband were concocted, but never worked. Whether the items were hidden in laundry bags or above ceiling tiles, the officers always knew where to look.

Camp was for Cadets from up and down the east coast. Jay recalls that some Cadets had been the class clowns, but at summer camp, they soon figured out this wasn't the way to act. At the end of camp, there was a large parade and a graduation ceremony.

Back at school, Jay continued in the leadership of the ROTC. He also belonged to the American Society of Military Engineers which afforded him the opportunity to go on some interesting field trips. One was to West Point, NY when West Point was being doubled in

size and another to Cape Canaveral, FL. On graduation day, there was a ceremony in the morning for the Cadets to receive their commission as 2nd Lieutenants. Jay was commissioned into the reserves in the Corp of Engineers. Jay went to work for Western Electric and in February of the following year (1971), attended Engineer Officer Basic School at Fort Belvoir, VA. Here, the courses were geared toward the requirements of the Corps of Engineers. Most of the training was in the classroom with subjects like project planning, construction, scheduling, manpower and equipment requirements and the design and destruction of bridges. There was also, some infantry training with weapons.

The class included ROTC and regular army officers and almost all of them had engineering degrees. There were even two pilots from Vietnam who were attending the school as a way to stay active in the army. The school was scheduled for 90 days, but the classes ended with ten days left so there was nothing more to do. The last weekend was a pay weekend and Jay drew officer of the day duty. This consisted of staying up all night and patrolling the barracks with a radio. If any outsiders showed up, Jay was to call for help, but there were only about six people in the barracks because everyone else was out on the town.

After graduation from Advanced Training, Jay returned to his job at Western Electric which had been held for him due to the Soldiers and Sailors relief act. Jay was assigned to Delta Company of the 365th Engineers in Reading as a platoon leader. At this time, the reserves were well staffed with returning enlisted men from Vietnam which made for an experienced Reserve. There was not a problem with blending the returning veterans with the new arrivals.

The Reserves met one weekend a month and for two weeks annually in the summer. During the summer, they worked on things they couldn't do in Reading such as qualification on the rifle range and demolition practice. During the training year, the unit also did projects such as ball fields, grading and land clearing for non-profit civic organizations. Other summers were spent at Fort Drum, NY; Fort AP Hill, VA; Fort Pickett, VA and Indiantown Gap, PA. Usually, the engineers would be the first one to arrive in the summer to prepare the roads and other areas of the camp for the regular reserve units.

On the return trip from Camp Pickett, VA one year, Jay was in charge of the convoy heading north on I-95. He had 15 vehicles and one of the jeeps pulled over so one of the men could answer nature's call. Jay thought the rest of the men needed to do the same so he pulled the convoy over and had the trucks pull up close together along side the highway. A Virginia state trooper saw the first jeep that had pulled over and went up to the head of the convoy to find the commander. As he rounded the front of the convoy, ready to protest about the behavior of the man in the jeep, he saw at least 15 other men doing the same thing. The trooper expressed his outrage at this awful display that would offend the gentle

ladies of Virginia. Jay assured him that it wouldn't happen again and the trooper left, shaking his head.

The most memorable summer project the engineers did was in 1976 while Jay was assigned to the 315th Engineers in Harrisburg. They assisted with re-building the artillery shed at historic Fort Mifflin in Philadelphia. The shed was made with post and beam construction and Jay was fortunate enough to have some non-commissioned officers who were skillful in this area. Jay's responsibility was in general supervision and coordinating between the various groups. Because the project took longer than two weeks, other reserve units followed to keep the work going.

It was in preparation for this project that Jay had his most memorable helicopter ride in the service. A helicopter picked him up in Harrisburg and then headed for the reserve center in Schuylkill Haven. The pilot was a Vietnam vet who came in fast and hard and landed between the high tension wires in the back and route 61 in the front of the reserve center.

After eight years in the reserves, Jay was promoted to Captain. While he was still in the 365th, he now had to go to the Headquarters Company in Schuylkill Haven where he served as the heavy equipment maintenance supervisor. By now, Jay's commitment of seven years in the Reserves was up, but he decided to stay on. After 13 years, he was eligible to be promoted to Major, but this would have meant moving to a different unit that had a position for a Major. There weren't any nearby units with this need and staying a Captain wasn't an option so Jay resigned his commission.

While the weekend commitments sometimes interfered with family plans, Jay remembers the summer camps fondly as a time to get out with the fellows and get a break from the normal routine. One surprising thing Jay found about the military was the exceedingly long periods of boredom. There was a lot of down time and they were almost never prepared for when it came. His proudest accomplishment was when he was Battalion S1 in the early '80's and the commander wanted to have an officer's dinner. Jay was in charge of all aspects from location to entertainment and the dinner ended up being a big success.