

James Daniel Jones interviewed July 30, 2007

Specialist 4th Class, US Army, February 1957 – February 1959

After graduating from North Coventry High School and attending Penn State for two years, Jim was married in September of 1956. Waiting for him upon his return from the honeymoon was a draft notice. The letter said he should report to Coatesville for a physical and if he could prove his wife was pregnant,



which he couldn't do, he would be excused from service. He passed the physical and told them to put his name high on the list so he could enter the service as soon as possible. As a result, he was drafted on February 28, 1957.

In March, Jim and 20 others from the area took the train to Fort Jackson, SC. Jim had been designated as the one to carry the records for the group. Fort Jackson turned out to be a good place for basic training due to the mild winter weather, although some of the men from Mississippi and Louisiana thought it was cold. Treatment was rough at the beginning of basic and Jim remembers one guy being thrown down the stairs with his duffel bag for making a mistake. Another interesting thing was that there were three James Jones in Jim's battery.

While in basic training, the men were given tests and evaluated. Jim was assigned to guided missiles. Something he had no choice in.

After basic training, Jim was given a weeks leave which was the first chance he had to see his wife in nine weeks. Then it was off to Fort Bliss, TX for specialized training in Guided Missiles. This was a relatively new weapon for the military. Jim worked with the Nike Ajax, a surface-to-air missile, which had a range of around 20 miles which was the maximum range for missiles at that time. These missiles were deployed around large cities and other potential Soviet targets around the country.

Jim's job became Section Panel Operator which meant he raised the missile into firing position. He was also the backup for firing the missile if needed. Once the missile was airborne, radar would guide the missile to the target. Some of the training took place in the classroom with the last week being firing missiles at Red Canyon, NM. When a missile was fired, Jim would be about 20 feet away in a protected enclosure with three other men. He said the 20 foot high missile was not particularly noisy when fired. While they only fired a few practice missiles, they were successful in hitting their targets.

Because Fort Bliss was not far from Mexico, the men could get passes and cross over the Rio Grande River on a bridge. It cost around two or three pennies to get into Mexico and one or two to get back. Once in Mexico, one of the interesting sights was watching bull fights. Even though the men were warned to be careful about crossing the bridge, one guy in the outfit from Connecticut said "Russian Spy" when they asked what nationality he was. The border guards got mad and almost locked him up.

Voyage to Europe...

After training at Fort Bliss, Jim had ten days leave before reporting to Fort Dix, NJ. From there, his unit

went to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and boarded a troop ship for Germany. This was Jim's first time on a large ship and his berth was at the front of the ship, down low. This turned out to be the worst place to be in the ship. Part way across the Atlantic, one engine of the ship went out and a storm hit. For 24 hours, they rode out the storm holding onto the edge of their bunks. Many men were sick. Jim remembers that in the mess hall during the storm, he had to hold onto his tray to keep it from sliding off the table. Jim didn't eat too much during that time as he can't remember ever being sicker than he was on that ship.

Once the storm passed, things improved. There was a chart on the ship that the men could look at each day that would show where the ship was. The ship arrived in the English Channel after five days and docked at Dover, England. The dependents could get off, but the soldiers had to stay on board. The next day, the ship headed to Bremerhaven, Germany and from there, the men took a train to Frankfurt. The barracks were near the town of Mainz.



Nike Ajax missiles at White Sand Proving Ground in New Mexico

When driving on the autobahn, you could still see bridges that had been bombed during the war and not replaced. Jim said the Germans were very efficient and made use of every inch of ground to grow vegetables and food. Another note of interest is that they would get liver every Monday, sometimes disguised as steak. Jim, unfortunately, does not care for liver.

Even though Jim's battery was the third one to arrive in Germany, they were the first to become operational due to the ingenuity of one of their Warrant Officers. The holdup in setting up the missile battery was that the cables left behind by the 90mm gun battery they were replacing were not compatible with the Nike Ajax missiles. This Warrant Officer was able to figure out how to rig the 90mm cable to work with the missiles.

While in Germany, Jim bought a nice set of China and had it shipped home. Three pieces arrived broken and the maker replaced them. This set of China stayed in Jim's garage until just a few years ago when they were pulled out and used for Thanksgiving dinner. After which they were *hand* washed.

Who Goes There?!?!

Everyone had to take their turn at guard duty. Jim remembers one especially dark night when he was on guard duty and heard a rustling sound coming toward him. He slipped his carbine off his shoulder and the noise stopped. It turned out to be a dog. Another interesting guard duty story was about a 2nd Lieutenant would sneak up on the guards to test them. He did this until someone fired a shot at him.

A Close Call...

Each battery took one week to be on active duty, then one week for stand by duty. One incident Jim recalls is when an unidentified airplane flew into their area. All airplanes send out a signal identifying themselves. This plane was not sending out such a signal. Jim's battery had their missiles raised and were ready to fire because they had permission to fire if there was an unidentified plane within range. At the last minute, the plane was identified and turned out to be a passenger plane. Jim's Captain took a few days leave after that to calm his nerves.

Back to the States for Missile Practice...

Because there wasn't enough room in Europe to practice fire missiles, they went back to Red Canyon, NM. After practicing, the men got leave before flying back to Germany.

As Jim's enlistment came to an end he was sent home on a ship. One interesting part of the trip is when the ship stopped one day out from Brooklyn so the sailors could go over the side and paint the ship. Because of this delay, Jim served an extra two days beyond his original enlistment (for which he was paid). Once on shore, there was a bus ride to Fort Dix where Jim was discharged.