

**Karl Scott Gross, Jr.** Interviewed August 15, 2007

E-5, US Army Reserves, February 1962 – February 1968

Karl received his draft notice and then volunteered for the reserves in order to give him a better chance of getting into Artillery. He knew some of the men who were in the local reserve artillery unit here in Pottstown and from talking with them decided that he would like to be in the Fire Direction Center. In February 1962, he entered the reserves for his six year commitment and then was told to report to Fort Knox, KY for basic training.



Karl headed to the Reading airport to fly to Kentucky, but the weather prevented the plane from taking off so he was told to come back the next day. This time, the plane took off, but now Karl was late for basic training. He arrived around 8 pm with some other men and the man in charge asked if they had eaten dinner and then took them to the mess hall. The next day, Karl had to do two days worth of activity in one day: haircut, medical exam, clothing issue, etc... One fortunate part is that he and five others, who had arrived late, had their own floor in the barracks for a few days before they were re-assigned.

Karl gained 20 pounds during basic training from all of the food and physical training. There was lots of shooting which Karl was familiar with because of his background as a hunter. After a few weeks, they were allowed to go to the PX on base and toward the end of basic, were allowed passes to go into Louisville. This was nice because not all platoons got to do this.

One amusing story from basic training is one of the men didn't want to take a shower. The rest of the men talked to the platoon Sergeant who then talked to the Company commander. The company commander said it is in the hands of the men. They all took him in the shower and scrubbed him with brushes. He took showers after that.

After 7 ½ weeks of basic, Karl was allowed to fly home before heading to Fort Sill, OK for advanced training. Once at Fort Sill, Karl was assigned to a barracks where all of the other men were there for Fire Direction Center. In his class of 200, Karl was one of two men who had not finished high school. Almost all of the rest had advanced education. Karl was concerned by this and asked to speak to the Captain who said he could transfer out if he wanted, but suggested he wait a week and see how things go. Karl shouldn't have worried as he ended up finishing in the top ten. (The other guy without a HS diploma ended up going AWOL).

Fire Direction Control calculations were done with slide rules (five different slide rules). Calculations had to be done to tell the guns the elevation, direction, how much powder, etc... The rule was that the target had to hit within three rounds or else the enemy would locate and hit you. Karl worked with the 155 MM howitzer which had a 20 mile range and also was qualified to direct the 8" gun which needs to be set up with cranes.

In November, 1962, Karl was discharged back to the Reserves. In the Reserves, there were two weekly meetings a month, one weekend a month and two weeks a summer. Weekends were often at Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania and the summers were at Camp Pickett, VA. The summer training was intensive. This was the time to take tests in order to be promoted in rank. Out in the field, they would be ordered to pull off the road and set up their guns and then fire at a designated target after making the appropriate calculations.

Cuban Missile Crisis...

In October of 1962 was the Cuban Missile Crisis. Karl was told to pack his bags and be ready to report to active duty. During one of the weekend training sessions, someone brought a little radio out to the field and they listened to President Kennedy announce that the missiles were leaving Cuba.

Eventually, the Pottstown Reserve Center was closed and Karl was assigned to the Reserve Center in Reading which was an armored unit. Karl's first assignment was as a tank gunner which meant he would aim the gun and someone else would fire it. During summer camp, some men were learning to drive tanks and Karl made a comment that one of the men couldn't drive. The Sergeant said "Can you do better?" to which Karl replied "Absolutely." The Sergeant gave him a quick lesson and then asked Karl to drive the tank around. He did well enough that he was then given the real driving test. The next year, Karl became a driving instructor!

Karl's goal was to become a tank commander so learning to drive a tank was a necessary skill since the commander had to know how the whole tank operated which also included a .30 caliber and .50 caliber machine gun. It took about two years, but Karl did achieve his goal. The tank he commanded was an M-48 which weighed 50 tons when loaded for combat. (one can be seen at the VFW on route 113 in Trappe). By reading the manuals, Karl learned enough that he was also able to be an instructor on the tank machine guns back at the Reading barracks.

One day at the Reading Center, the company next to Karl's had to move a tank. The driver got in and hit the gas instead of the brake. The tank went across the street and crushed a Nash Rambler and a pickup truck. This made for a great photo op for the other men.

Karl enjoyed his time in the Reserves and being an instructor, but didn't re-enlist because being in the Reserves made it hard to plan your time. Sometimes, they would get a call on a Friday night to report to Indiantown Gap for the weekend. He is glad he did his military service and believes it should be compulsory today.