

**Richard Dotti** interviewed October 29, 2007

Staff Sergeant, US Army Reserves, September 1959 – 1963

In 1959, Richard was working for his Father's business in Brooklyn making parts for games such as Monopoly, Parcheesi and Yahtzee. He received his draft notice, but decided to enlist in the Reserves so that he could control which branch he entered and the job he would have. Richard went to the First



Sergeant in charge of the reserves in New York City and enlisted in the 750<sup>th</sup> Heavy Truck II Corp. His initial enlistment was for six years, six months of which would be served on active duty and the balance on active reserve.

Basic training was at Fort Dix, NJ, and he took the bus from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street along with others from NYC. When he got off the bus, it was mass confusion. He was issued a baseball hat and raincoat and told he was in the Army. The rest of the day was spent learning how to “hurry up and wait.” For the next eight weeks, the men learned about weapons, did physical training (PT), and lots of running. The food was not very good, even when the men were hungry.

Volunteering...

One of Richard's friends was also at Fort Dix for basic training, about two weeks ahead of Richard. They were able to talk in the evenings and his friend gave him advice on what to volunteer for and what to avoid. Because of this, Richard broke the unwritten Army rule to “never volunteer for anything” and he volunteered to work with the tear gas grenades. This meant he was able to wear a gas mask and help with the gas masks drills instead of crawl around in the mud under barbed wire.

After eight weeks of basic, Richard was assigned to Fort Eustis, VA where he learned to drive everything from a ¼ ton truck up to a ten ton truck. He was able to drive 90% of the wheeled vehicles in the Army and five different tracked vehicles. The job of the 750<sup>th</sup> was to transport tanks so he had to know how to drive them to get them onto the truck trailer.

One of their jobs was to take tanks to Fort Leonard Wood, MO. This trip would take about four days and there were rules about how far a driver could go in one day. They would stop overnight at an Army base or hotels. They could never leave the tanks unattended, so while the rest of the men slept, there would be a guard to make sure nobody bothered the tanks. There were always extra drivers or mechanics along to handle this overnight guard duty. Sometimes, civilians would approach them and ask to see the tanks and they would always oblige and let the kids climb on the tanks.

On the road, there was always a jeep in the front and in the rear of the convoy. The trucks were designed to haul the M60 Patton tanks so they were able to travel at highway speeds, using the transmission to brake on the long hills. The trailers had wheels that could be extended out the sides for stability.

During his time at Fort Eustis, Richard kept his '59 Chevy convertible off base. The man who owned the parking lot where he kept his car was Greek. Richard's best friend was Greek so Richard knew some of the symbols. He noticed a cross with a rose in the middle so Richard observed that he must be from the island of Rhodes. The man asked how he knew that and Richard explained. After that, Richard's car was kept under a lean-to next to the owner's office.

Eustis was near Williamsburg, VA where the College of William and Mary had a dating policy for the Army. At that time, the men could go over to the sororities and sit in a row on the couches and the young women would come down the stairs and if they saw someone they liked, they would go out on a date with them. They had to be back by 10 at night during the week and 11 on weekends. If someone missed the curfew, that was the end of dating there.

One shock to the men of the 750<sup>th</sup> was the Jim Crow laws of the south. In New York City, these laws did not exist and people made friends regardless of the color of their skin. But in the south, there were some restaurants where blacks couldn't go and some where whites couldn't go. At one black restaurant, Richard had to be served in the kitchen because he wasn't allowed to sit in the front.



Richard Dotti setting up his room at Fort Eustis, March 1960

Recalled to Active Duty...

After four months at Eustis, Richard's active duty time was up and he was released to the Reserves. He had to wait until 12:01 A.M. the next day to start home since his active duty time did not end until midnight! Reserves consisted of one meeting a week and two weeks of training in the summer. This continued until October 1961. The Berlin Wall had recently been erected. Richard was at the movies watching *The Ten Commandments* when he bought a paper during intermission and read that the 750<sup>th</sup> Heavy Truck II Corp had been activated because of the Berlin crisis. The men of the 750<sup>th</sup> reported to Fort Dix, were issued new uniforms and then headed to for Devens, MA. Their job was to replace a Tank Transport unit that had been shipped to Germany.

Fort Devens is the coldest place in Massachusetts according to Richard. They were issued winter coats, "Mickey Mouse" boots (white rubber boots) and other cold weather gear. By now, Richard was a Buck Sergeant and he was told he had to go to NCO Academy. Richard asked what he had to do to get out of going. After some checking, Richard was given the option of being busted down a rank to Specialist which he agreed to do. Now, he was able to go to Mechanics School at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland. The school was both classroom and hands-on for everything having to do with mechanics. It was fourteen weeks long and after about six weeks, he got his Buck Sergeant stripes back.

Once back at Fort Devens, he was promoted to E6 and put in charge of the maintenance section of the motor pool. Now, Richard had a jeep and freedom. He enjoyed this time because he had good men working for him and he was able to do his job.

#### A Brutally Cold Ride...

One time, there was a call for volunteers to drive dump trucks down to Brooklyn so they could be loaded on ships for Vietnam. Richard wanted to see his family living in New York City so he volunteered. Army vehicles didn't have heaters and it was winter and the windshields had already been strapped down to the hood in preparation for shipping. This meant that Richard had to drive 55 mph, in winter, without a windshield. Despite a parka, goggles, mask, gloves with liners and any other piece of clothing he could wear, it was the coldest he had ever been. When he arrived in Brooklyn, all he wanted to do was drink something hot. After visiting with his family, the trip back to Fort Devens was made in the back of a truck, but this was comfortable compared to the trip down.

Part of the duty at Devens was to deliver vehicles, that had been repaired elsewhere, to Fort Drum, NY. On one trip, Richard discovered that the radiators were leaking so he pulled over and dug some beer and whiskey bottles out of the trash to hold water to re-fill the radiators. When he arrived at Fort Drum, in the rear of his column, he was met by the guard holding two of the empty bottles. The guard began to make a comment about the men having whiskey and beer bottles and Richard said "I know, I gave them the bottles so they could keep the radiators filled with water."

In August of 1962, the 750<sup>th</sup> was released from active duty. President Kennedy had signed an order allowing Reservists who had been called to active duty to end their Reserve obligation at this time. But, Richard's commander, a WWII Ranger veteran and Richard's high school history teacher, asked Richard if he would stay until the end of his original enlistment which he agreed to do. One of the conditions of him staying was that his men be allowed to report to their weekly meetings in their work fatigues rather than Class A uniforms. This saved time when the men arrived and didn't have to change and then change back before getting to work on the vehicles. One night, an inspector came in and saw that Richard was not in his Class A uniform at the opening formation. He proceeded to chew Richard out in front of the men. When he was finished, Richard thanked him for his input and resigned from the Reserves.

While Richard could not believe the waste and inefficiency of the Army, he never regretted enlisting. He was proud to serve his country and sees military service as a small sacrifice to the country that has given us so much.