

DON LINES

Our Neighbors, Our Heroes: Forest Park Veteran's Oral History Project

NC: Today is August 23rd and I am Nancy Cavaretta for the Forest Park Historical Society Oral History Project interviewing Don Lines. Hi Don, how are you today?

DL: I am quite well today.

NC: Great, could you please provide your date of birth?

DL: 7-14-31.

NC: Great, and do you currently live in Forest Park?

DL: I live in Forest Park.

NC: And how long have you lived in Forest Park?

DL: I've lived here since 1967.

NC: That's a long time! Where are you originally from Don?

DL: I'm originally from Fulton, Illinois, that's my hometown.

NC: Home town on the Mississippi.

DL: On the Mississippi River.

NC: Right, and in which branch of the military did you serve?

DL: I served in the US Army.

NC: And, during what time?

DL: 1952-1954.

NC: That sounds like Korea to me, did you serve in the Korean War?

DL: I did. I was in during the Korean War situation.

NC: Do you have any other family members who have served in the military?

DL: Not really.

NC: Here's my first question about early military training. Were you drafted or did you enlist?

DL: I was drafted.

NC: How old were you at the time when you were drafted?

DL: I was 20.

NC: Twenty years old, how'd you feel about that?

DL: Well, I guess I thought I was going to have to do my duty because all my other buddies in town, they were being drafted or enlisting in some form of the military, so when I got my notice I thought, well OK, I guess it's my turn-my turn to serve.

NC: Yes, and how did your family feel about it at that time?

DL: Well, I don't think they were too thrilled about it all, but we could look at other young fellas in town who were being drafted or whatever, and they were going in and doing their duty. So I thought, well, I'll just have to join them.

NC: Join with them, yes, so where did they send you for your boot camp training?

DL: I started my service at Fort Riley, Kansas and I was doing a 16-week infantry basic training. That is what I started with.

NC: What did you guys do to entertain yourselves during the 16-week basic?

DL: Well I'm trying to remember just what might have been going on in those 16 weeks. It was a bit monotonous what we had to do every day. There was one location where they'd have a little dance band place, music of course, and the military people along with some other visitors that would come in to join the crowd so to speak.

NC: So, the party went on!

DL: Yes, I guess you could call it that, yeah.

NC: What did you think of the officers or the people who trained you during that time?

DL: Well, I had a lot of respect for them. And, I felt they were doing their duty, and I was there to do my duty, so we were going to get along with each other-'cause we had to! -that's about what it amounted to.

NC: I'm going to ask you that again when we get over to the topics about combat. So, you served in Korea.

DL: I didn't serve in Korea, no. I didn't really serve in Korea, no.

NC: Oh, so you were US side during the war?

DL: No, as the story goes, as you inquire about things. I'll have to tell you what else I did in the military and where I was.

NC: Why don't you go ahead and do that, yes. Tell us!

DL: OK, do you want me to start with that now?

NC: Sure.

DL: OK, well I did my basic training in Fort Riley, Kansas and I was in an infantry course which was going to be for 16 weeks. Well during that time at Fort Riley, I found out that there was a band school at Fort Riley and I thought to myself, why don't I inquire about that and see if when I get through with my basic training, maybe I can get involved with the band school. So, I talked to the sergeant on duty that one day and I says, "I hear there's a band school about a mile away from us here and I'd like to go over there and see if I can talk to somebody about getting involved with going into that band school course."

NC: Did you ever play an instrument before?

DL: Huh?

NC: Did you ever play a musical instrument before?

DL: Yeah, I played the coronet in high school.

NC: Oh, nice.

DL: Well he said, "Well, why don't you just go there tomorrow." So I went over there and I talked to the man at the band school and I says, "I will be having a few more weeks

of basic training and I'd be interested in getting involved with your band school." Well he says, "We have an 8 week cycle, and the new cycle we'll be starting the 1st of September." And I said, "I'll be finishing my basic training about the 1st of August." Well first of all he said, "What do you play?" I said, "I play a coronet, I did in high school and that's the experience I have." He said, "Well, I tell you what, we need some more coronet players in our new class so I will get the information I need from you and I will see to it that when orders come down after your basic training that you will be assigned to our band school." And, that's what happened there.

NC: That's very interesting. So, what happened then after that.

DL: OK, to continue on with my good story.....after I finished this band school, I was sent to Fort Sam Houston, 4th Army area to be assigned somewhere in that area with the military band. Well, it turned out that I was sent to Camp Polk, Louisiana and I was going to be, I thought, there for probably quite a while. But would you believe after I was there for about 6 weeks, orders came down that they wanted more musicians in Europe. So, I was chosen and a couple of other guys playing different instruments besides mine. So after about that short of time and getting acquainted with things at Camp Polk ,well. we were off to I guess it's Camp Kilmer in New York to get lined up to get on a boat to go over to Europe. Well, after that happened, after we were on the boat for quite some time and sick most of the time of course, we finally landed in I think it was Hamburg, Germany. The group that I was with, being in special services as we were called playing in a band, we had to be transferred to Munich, Germany where we would be probably be assigned to some band in Europe some place. Well, it turns out that when I got in to Munich, in that area was another band school. And the people I talked to said, "Well you know you play a coronet and that's your experience, this place has a duration of 3 months. And, you're here about a month ahead of time, so you're going to spend about 4 months at this band school in Munich, Germany." Well, I did that all right and after I got through with that, I was assigned to a band in Orleans, France. There was a 76th Army Band and I got there, I guess it was in June, and from June of '53 that would have been to March of '54 I spent in the 76th Army Band in Orleans, France. And then of course after

that time was up, then I was sent back to the states to be discharged. So, that's my career with the Army!

NC: Really! So that spanned the 2 years that you served.

DL: Yeah.

NC: Wow, what was the purpose of that if they just sent you to school and then dismissed you at the end of the service? Because you really never played for any functions, correct?

DL: Well. Yes, we did!

NC: You did, so let's hear about that!

DL: You see there were Army bands in Germany, England, France and I think maybe a couple in Italy during that time of the Korean War. We would play for different situations there in Orleans. Sometimes they would have some high officials and generals come to Orleans for whatever reason and we'd have to play our music, of course.

NC: OK. So you did play for official dignitaries and ceremonies-very good, very good.

DL: Oh yeah. We were busy doing something almost every day there in Orleans giving concerts in the morning and playing for different situations that might be going on in Orleans you see.

NC: Were any of these situations related to or addressing the Korean War?

DL: No, I don't think you could say that. It was just-well, there was different things going on in Paris that was at Shape Headquarters in Paris France. And there was things going on that involved all of Europe as far as the Korean War was concerned. We got

involved with playing a few different times in Paris. So, it was what I called pretty good duty!

NC: Yes, it certainly was-it certainly was!

DL: I always like to think of my 2 years in the Army. It was almost like a vacation for me.

NC: Did you learn any French while you were there?

DL: Did I what?

NC: Did you learn to speak any French while you were there?

DL: Oh, just a little bit. Ah ha, yeah-and then also, I was going to be sent back to the states like in March I guess it was of '54. I had some furlough time coming so I made arrangements one way or the another so that I could see as much of Europe as I could. I flew to London and spent a few days there, and I crossed over to the Netherlands and visited some Dutch relatives of mine in Amsterdam and spent a few days around there. Then I took a train to Frankfort, Germany and spent a little time there, and then I caught a military hop from Frankfort, Germany to Paris, and from Paris, I got a ride back into Orleans. Orleans, France was about 60 miles south of Paris so it was, let's say it was close enough that myself and my buddies could get into Paris quite often which we did and had some good times there too. My military service was, I thought, a good time for me and I did my duty and was happy to do it.

NC: That's right. And, as far as the music, when civilians hear the military bands playing for these events, it's so inspiring and I think it really helps people to focus on what is actually happening in terms of the service that the military are giving at the time. That's a big contribution.

DL: Right.

NC: You mentioned your buddies. Do you see anyone from those days? Do you stay in touch with anybody?

DL: I really haven't. No, I probably should have but I didn't.

NC: Have you been involved like in American Legion or any other kinds of veteran's organizations?

DL: I belong to the American Legion in Fulton, Illinois, my hometown. I belong to the American Legion there and I belong to the VFW in Savannah, Illinois.

NC: Oh!

DL: See, I was able to join the VFW because I served a short period of time in Germany going to band school, so I believe you had to have at least 3 months service to be eligible to say that you could join the VFW.

NC: Yes, because you served overseas in an area of foreign conflict.

DL: Yes, being that I was in Germany for that period of time if I wanted to I could join the VFW, which I did. I belong to both the American Legion, and the VFW.

NC: That's great! Do you go to the meetings?

DL: Very seldom.

NC: Well that's great. So, my next set of questions will, take a look at what you did when you came back from your European tour after your military tour was up. So, after Europe, then what?

DL: Well when I came back home to Fulton, Illinois, I thought, well, I guess I might as well check in where I had worked before I went into the service and get back to work again.

NC: Did they hire you back?

DL: Oh yeah. Oh sure! Well, I walked in there, where I was working was at Clinton, Iowa at a place called Curtis. Curtis Company is where we made windows and doors. When I was drafted, I was working in the office in the scheduling department at Curtis. So when I got out of the service and come back to work there, I was doing about the same type of work as when I had left to go to the service. So, everything just rolled along.

NC: Everything just fell into place. That's very fortunate. Did you ever play your coronet after you got back?

DL: Well, once in a while in Fulton we'd have a little weekly concerts like on a Wednesday night and that went on during the summer time where we could have these weekly concerts. So, I got involved with that of course. That just went on for that one summer. So, that's about what it was all about.

NC: That's really interesting. So, when you came back, how were you received by the community or family for giving service? Did there seem to be an appreciation, or not much said? What was the response?

DL: Well, you know, I believe everybody, just about every other family in town had somebody that had been in the service, or was still in, or were just coming back from their tour of duty, so we all got a good greeting and they were glad to see us that we were back home again. (Laughter)

NC: It's certainly good to feel appreciated when people respond to you in that way. The other thing I wanted to ask you is, do you have any life lessons, or reflections on military service in general? What did you think about the conflict in Korea at that time?

DL: Well, I just thought it was a situation that I didn't think the United States should get involved with. I thought if North Korea wants to be aggressive and do some bad things to South Korea well, they're going to have to fight their own war over there. And, I don't think the United States should get involved. That was my opinion and most of us in Fulton had the same opinion. But that was our opinion. It didn't affect what was really going on because we were still being drafted and serving. Some of my friends had to go to Korea and some of them didn't survive very well, that's for sure. It wasn't a popular war, but the United States got involved and we had to make the best of it.

NC: Right. I wanted to ask you, because your experience was before the draft was removed, how do you feel about an all volunteer military as opposed to the draft?

DL: Well, I believe the draft situation is OK as long as our government is getting involved with some other conflict around the world. I guess some way or other we here in the United States feel we should get involved because maybe we can do some good with our efforts. That's the way I looked at it.

NC: So would you recommend that the draft be reinstated or that people just volunteer?

DL: Well, I believe if you are talking about the present time, I think if somebody wants to get into the military they ought to just volunteer. And, maybe they see it as a career opportunity to get into the military. And for some, that might be just what they need. That's the way I looked at that.

NC: It's an interesting question because like in the present time only 1% of the population volunteer. So, the same people get deployed over, and over, and over again

which, you know, does present some problems for them psychologically and a lot of other things too. But, it is very interesting.

DL:

NC: So, my last question is, what was the best thing or what lesson came out of your military service? What would you tell a young person today if they were thinking about joining the military?

DL: Well, I believe I would just suggest to somebody that was thinking about the military, that if this is something you want to do to maybe enhance your education, maybe you didn't finish high school or something like that, maybe you should get into the military, you know, and try to build up your education a little bit. And if you thought it was a good deal why don't you just make a career out of it? Because maybe it would be the best thing you would ever do, who knows?

NC: Right. Yes, it does offer a lot of opportunities for people. It really does but it all depends what's going on in the world at that time too.

DL: Well it does, yeah. That's for sure.

NC: Absolutely. The other thing I wanted to ask you, Don, is do you have any pictures that I could scan and return back to you?

DL: Any what, any pictures?

NC: Yes, any pictures of yourself, like in your uniform or playing in the military bands?

DL: Oh yeah, I have one picture where I'm dressed up in my uniform, of course, and holding my coronet in the backyard of our camp there in Orleans. I can give you that picture.

NC: That would be great? Anything else?

DL: No, I believe that's the only one I have with my uniform on.

NC: Well, if you wouldn't mind looking around for more pictures because now I showed you the website and how people have given pictures to help tell their stories. So if you have any more that would be really, really fantastic.

DL: Well, I have that one for sure. So, I can let you make a copy of that or I can give you that, and then you'd give it back to me?

NC: Oh yes, I'd just scan it and I'd give it right back to you. I can actually do that with my phone.

DL: I can let you have that for that purpose.

NC: Great, but any others that you have of yourself, or of people you served with, or pictures of your whole band, if you have anything like that it would be really fantastic.

DL: OK, all right.

NC: OK, well thank you so much Don. This has been very, very interesting. We haven't talked to anyone from the Korean War, or anyone who has been in military bands. So, this has really been great. Great story!

DL: I suppose, yeah. I'm kind of one of a kind, ain't I?

NC: You really are, because I think when people watch shows like around on the 4th of July and they see the military bands from all the branches of the service, it just really gives people chills!

DL: It's inspiring for some people.

NC: It's very, very inspiring.

DL: I'm sure it is, yeah. Well I was always happy that I was able to do that while I was in the military rather than stay in the infantry and who knows where I might have been sent.

NC: That's right.

DL: I just thought I was just a lucky person that I was able to get into that part of the service and it made me very happy that I could be there.

NC: That's right, and to go and inquire that day when you were 19 years old about the band school. Very good, thank you so much Don.

DL: All right. But there's one more thing I want to add.

NC: Ok, but the recorder is off now.

DL: Sometimes, if I'm not getting good service with something, I like to say to people, "I'm a senior citizen and a veteran with problems, so you should be good to me. Or they should ask, what can I do to help you out?"

NC: That's right, Don. You should say that!