

Kenneth Smith, a U.S. Army veteran, served in the 2nd Armored Division at Fort Bliss in Artillery. Drafted in 1959, his rank at discharge in 1961 was Specialist 4th Class. "I was a Cold War veteran," he said, referring to a term of deep political tension between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Smith's job in the Army was a driver in the Motor Pool. "I drove everything from 10-ton vehicles to 1/4 ton Jeeps," he said. "I did a lot of fuel deliveries." Before working in the motor pool, Smith had trained at Fort Bliss as a crewman on Nike Ajax missiles. Once the missiles went obsolete, he was sent to the motor pool.

"The best part of training and service was getting lots to eat. I was hungry all the time, and the food was good."

Memories include a point in training that Smith remembers as uncomfortable. He said, "We had to go to the firing range, where we lay down in the middle of summer at Fort Hood on the hot sand to do some of the rifle training." He also said, "I despised the bayonet training!" Recognitions received during his military service include a Good Conduct medal and Marksman Rifle.

He stayed in touch with family and friends back home through letters. "The letters had three-cent postage stamps!" he said.

"I never seriously considered the Army as a lifetime career," he said. "I liked my home area too well. I lived here (not far from the LeFlore County/McCurtain County line) most of my life. I was born less than a mile from where I live now."

Upon discharge, Smith said he drove straight home. "I had my own vehicle. I only stopped to eat or buy more gasoline. It was about 850 miles. When I got my release, I left before 6 pm and got home about noon the next day!"

"I drew some unemployment, then started to school at Eastern in Wilburton. I was going on my own, not the GI Bill. I got my bachelors, then got my Masters with the GI Bill, graduating from Southeastern Oklahoma State University. I was an Elementary Education Major."

Smith said he taught 20 years at Smithville, mostly 6th grade. "I was fortunate to have a job right at home. I could go to the woods and creek when I wanted!"

Smith said he had been a game hunter in southeast Oklahoma growing up. "I didn't get to hunt while in the Army, although I saw quail around the foot of the mountains!" He said he used to deer hunt, but his eyesight and hearing have diminished, so he no longer hunts.

Although military service was not his career choice, Smith said, "I would not discourage anyone to enter. There are a lot more benefits now than when I was in. For many, it would be a good deal."

Regarding war, Smith said he was neutral. "I can see pros and cons both ways. Sometimes, I think it is necessary, and other times I think it would be questionable."

Smith married in 1969 to Janet Varner Smith. He says he is, "an ordinary old country boy." He is happy to be living in the area he loves.