

Veterans interviews – RETURN TO: Judy Allen, Choctaw Historic Projects, PO Box 1210, Durant OK 74702 – judy.allen@choctawnation.com. 580.513.7984.

Interview conducted by: Judy Allen at (location): Phone call Date and time: 9-12-23 @ 2pm

NAME -- Floyd West

Birthday --11-7-46

Are you Choctaw? Can you share a copy of your CDIB and/or Membership card? Y

In which branch did you enter? Army

Division -- 18th Engineers when I got out.

Unit --

Were you Drafted or Enlisted or Commissioned? – Drafted

(If given a choice) Why did you choose that branch?

RANK at discharge: E5 : when first got in didn't have to go to AIT because I was already doing carpentry. They attached me to Ft Dix, NJ to CO A post Engineers. There over a yr, then Fort Devens MA. They reactivated 18th Engineers and I was one of the guys brought in. I did a little carpenter work and before Got out was in charge of the tool room. During summer months, entire battallion was assigned to camp at SC. I picked five guys and remodeled an old dental lab and made battallion HQ in Fort Devens MA. I was back there athree years ago. My daughter was born there. She had to go back to Boston and Fort Devons was about 40 miles west, so we took her to see where she was born. The post is not longer an active post. It is turned over to the state and ther eis a college or university on the grounds. I got to show her a few places that hadn't changed oo much. The old hospital where she was born is torn down now. We spent a week touring main rhode island, and massachusetts.

Married three weeks when I got drafted. About a year later wife joined me (1967). Just before got transferred to Fort Devens.

Years served – from- 66 to -- 68

Peace or wartime? VN

Where did you attend basic training? --only son of an only son so did not go to VN Basic at Fort Bliss, straight to NJ, then MA. That is where we got out.

Were there any animals (work or pet) around the areas you served? If so, what was their role? –

There was deer, even on the base in NJ. Som of my duties as a carpenter – I was farmed out with others to work with civilians. I could do anything made out of wood, bunkers, towers, latrines. Our job was to keep the up. Before wife came, I stayed in barracks. We would make revelry and then would disperse out to our jobs. Some drew guard duty, some got farmed out because they were having riots at stockade and we would have to be on standby for guard duty. They would hosue about 50 of us in barracks. If called out would have to surround the stockade. They didn't have a real specific reason to riot, it was just jht in middle of summer and they would riot.

Was there a point during your service, that you decided the military was, or was not, the right career choice?

(Please explain) – I didn't mind being in military - When was in MA, I got stuck on burial detail. The civilians made a deal with licensessed examiner.

When they had a military funeral, we needed 21 gun salute, pallbearers, etc, I would drive the van to haul them.

Is there a battle or point during your service that you would like to describe so that future generations can better understand what military life can be – for better or worse?

I was doing carpenter work with day before I went in. I was a two year apprentice in local carpenters union. You have a four year apprenticeship. My two years in military continued the apprenticeship and I was a full journeyed carpenter when I came out. I had a job when I went in - and had a job when I got out.

MEDALS AND CITATIONS RECEIVED

How did you get to your initial point of entry?

Flew out of OKC to Dallas then to Fort Bliss near border at El Paso. A lot of duties at winter months while at Fort Dix, we run snowplows in winter to make sure roads were clear to hospital and the four gates entering the base.

What type of training or schooling did you have?

What is your most vivid memory of your time training or in school? What was the BEST part? What was the WORST part Best – basic wasn't too bad. I was nearly 19 and in good shape.

Worst get used to people hollering and screaming at you to get you to do something.

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- I am glad I served, now. At the time, just married three weeks I wasn't eager to go. But I made the best of it. I played sports in summer. Every company had teams. I played fast pitch softball. We won every game. Did a little boxing.

Did you serve alongside other Native/American Indians? How did that inform your experience?

I met a friend who was Navajo. He was real quiet.

What did you think about the chow? (at base and in the field!)

Pretty good food. Pulling extra duty (for a fee) I sometimes did kp. Got to know the head cook. We ate pretty good. Our steaks were pretty good. When we pulled snow duty and plowed the roads, it was an all night deal. We knew where every mess hall was in that post and we could show up anytime and they would feed us breakfast, or cook what we wanted. Everyone knew what we were doing was a priority. Once we would get our area plowed, if it was snowing, we would have to go over it again. We made sure what job we had was done, when day duty took over we could go eat.

Did you qualify with equipment (vehicles, aircraft, radios, weapons, etc.)?

(If Yes) What was training with that equipment like

Everybody had to qualify with three weapons m14, sidearm 45 pistol, and 30 calibre and 50 calibre machine gun.

How did you stay in touch with family and friends?

What did you do for recreation or when you were off duty? After wife arrived we would go to movies; visit other families; sightseeing. Wife enjoyed the country side. All I had very been around was OK, NJ and MA post, as long as out of city, I was comfortable.

What was the best part of your service experience?

Learning to do what is asked of you. You had no problems if you did your job. I made rank pretty easily. I liked the summers because I was really into sports. When I changed from Ft Dix to Devens, one of first questions asked was if I was going to play softball but I said no, wife was going to have a baby and I wanted to stay close to her. Job duty – I enjoyed the carpenter work. I had a first sgt who made Sgt Major over a battalion while I was there. I built

an engineer castle for him. All I had to go by was the picture. It was miniature – about the size of a kitchen table. Put it right outside of Co HQ.

Reflections

How did your military service experiences affect your life?

It taught me to respect a lot of things. Kids nowadays take things for granted. Seemed like everybody was more apt to keep their word, do what they said and follow orders without question.

How has your military service impacted your feelings about war and the military in general?

It gives me a lot more respect for the military for what they do and what they are called on to do. Before I went in I had not idea what was expected of the military. You learn to respect the guys you serve with, the guys in the barracks with you. Everybody trusted everybody else.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to share your recollections of your military service.

Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this interview?

Her father was shot 13 times in WWII. And survived. My father was in WWII in Philippines. He worked in a CC camp. He dug a survey chain down Yukon Highway – to hear him tell it, he went across Alaska. Her father was in France in midst of it, also Africa. He was a guard for Eisenhower before being president.

Is there anything else we should talk about that we haven't covered?

What do you wish more people knew about veterans?

I would encourage people to do a stint in the service. I think it makes a better person – and people have a better outlook on life. Be willing to serve if called upon to serve. I think our military needs to stay strong, and even be stronger than it is now. I still believe (I am a 54 yr member of Amer. Legion) it is not very active now. A lot of guys tell me Legion, VFW can't get younger people to join to carry on legacy. I think it is something they ought to do.

Native American veterans?

Questions not related to your military life:

Where were you born and who were your parents and siblings? Any of them veterans?

Born in McAlester, lived in this little town virtually all my life. Three or four years ago, we were going to remodel her home. Parents were Robert Turner West and Ida Mae Brown West. Indian comes from my mother's side.

What did your parents/grandparents do for a living?

Where did you go to school? (youth and adult)

Grade school and high school. Bates school for grade school. HS Haileyville

What was it like growing up Choctaw? Did you ever face adversity as a youth, or as an adult?

Do you speak any Choctaw?

Did you marry and have children? Tell me about them, including their names.

Two daughters and two sons.

Did you have a non-military career after service?

Had my own construction co with my dad. After I lost him when he was 61, I continued to do carpentry work. The last 20 years I worked I worked for army base. I went out on a special project to re-do igloos and things and we redid several. Then I went to work for them.

Do you have advice for future generations?

Try to have an occupation – something you can do and be as good as you can – and make a living for your family. I encourage kids to get an education.
