

Floyd West of McAlester is an Army veteran, serving 1966-1968, and discharging as an E-5 from the 18th Engineers.

"I was already doing carpentry work, so I didn't have to go to Advanced Individual Training (AIT). They attached me to Fort Dix, NJ to Company A Engineers. I was there over a year, then Fort Devens, MA. They reactivated the 18th Engineers and I was one of the guys brought in. I did a little carpenter work and was put in charge of the tool room," said West. "During summer months, the entire battalion was assigned to camp at South Carolina."

West was asked to be a leader in the battalion construction work. "I picked five guys and remodeled an old dental lab to be the battalion headquarters at Fort Devens. I traveled back there three years ago." He said he enjoyed looking around the area when he went back, seeing the changes and remembering his time there while in the military. "My daughter was born there. We took her to see where she was born. The post is no longer active and has been turned over to the state. There is a university on the grounds now," he said. The old hospital where his daughter was born has been demolished,

West married three weeks before leaving for service. "About a year later, my wife joined me – just before I got transferred to Fort Devens."

He said, "I was 'farmed out' with others to work for civilians. I could build anything made out of wood – bunkers, towers and latrines." Before West's wife arrived in New Jersey, he lived in the barracks. "We would make revelry and then disperse out to our jobs. Some people drew guard duty, some got farmed out. Because there were riots at the stockade, we all had to be on standby for guard duty. If called out, we would have to surround the stockade." West said he didn't think there was a specific reason for the riots. "It was just in the middle of summer- and hot - and they would riot," he said.

A task West was assigned while in Massachusetts was funeral detail. He said a deal was struck with civilians to help with burials. "When there was a military funeral, with a 21-gun salute, pallbearers, etc., I would be the van driver."

Prior to his draft, West was a two-year apprentice in a local carpenters union. "My two years in the military continued the apprenticeship to meet the four-year requirement. I was a full journeyed carpenter when I discharged. I had a job when I went in to the military and had a job when I got out!"

West said, "Basic wasn't too bad. I was nearly 19 and in good shape. The worst part was getting used to people hollering and screaming at you!"

Participation in sports helped West enjoy his time in the service. "Ever company had teams. I played fast pitch softball and we won every game. I even did a little boxing."

"I am glad I served. At the time, just married for three weeks, I wasn't eager to go. But I made the best of it."

West said his service experience taught him to do what is asked. "You had no problems if you did your job. I made rank pretty easily. I liked summers because I was really into sports. I didn't play softball at Fort Devens because my wife was going to have a baby and I wanted to stay close to her. I also enjoyed the carpenter work. I had a 1st Sgt. who made Sgt Major over a battalion while I was there. I built a miniature engineer castle for him. I made it about the size of a kitchen table."

West reflected, "The military taught me to respect a lot of things. It seemed like everybody was more apt to keep their word, do what they said, and follow orders without question."

He said, "Service gave 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 no idea what was expected of the military. You learned to respect the guys you serve with, the guys in the barracks with you. Everybody trusted everybody else."

My father was in WWII in the Philippines. My wife's father was shot thirteen times in WWII and survived. He served in France and Africa. Her father was also a guard for Eisenhower before he was President."

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. My advice is to be willing to serve when called upon to serve. I think our military needs to stay strong and even be stronger than it is now. I am a 54-year member of the American Legion. A lot of guys tell me the Legion and the VFW can't get young people to join to carry on the legacy. I think it is something they ought to do."

West said his career after discharge included, "My own construction company with my dad. After I lost him when he was 61, I continued to do carpentry work. I worked for the army base he last twenty years (before retirement)."

His advice for future generations is, "Try to have an occupation – something you can do and be as good as you can. Make a living for your family. I encourage kids to get an education."