

Petrella,RockyJ-8-18-98

[Speaker 2]

Good morning, it's Tuesday, the 18th of August, 1998, at 10.35 a.m. Eastern Time. We are, we, we being William J. Kelch, that's me, the interviewer, and Mr. Rocky Petrella, who is the interviewee in the World War II history project for the University of Tennessee's Center for the Study of War and Society. It's 10.35 a.m., and we are located at 320 Wilson Street in Sharon, Pennsylvania, in the kitchen of Mr. Petrella's house at that address. Mr. Petrella and I have talked a bit about this interview. He understands he's being interviewed and has given his permission to that, and so we will commence.

I'd just like to ask Mr. Petrella, here in the beginning, if you could tell us a little bit about your, why, why you were in the Army. Obviously, it was a war, World War II was going on, but how you initially got in the Army and turned out to, to join the Army and have a, have a military experience during World War II.

[Speaker 1]

I was working as a welder in the defense plant. We were building...

[Speaker 2]

That was where, sir?

[Speaker 1]

In Niles, Ohio. We were building 40 millimeter anti-aircraft guns, and this was before the war. We had no idea that the war was going to happen.

[Speaker 5]

This is what time period then? 40, 41, 39?

[Speaker 1]

Late 39.

[Speaker 5]

Late 39.

[Speaker 1]

And early 40s.

[Speaker 5]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And working there, we were building 40 millimeter anti-aircraft guns, and then they went to the 90 millimeter, and then they started building tanks.

[Speaker 2]

And they did that in the same place where you were working?

[Speaker 1]

In the same place. Also, we're building trail mobile trailers, like Pruhoff trail mobile truck trailers. But that was a sort of a side thing that they did at the plant, you know.

[Speaker 2]

That wasn't for the military.

[Speaker 1]

That wasn't for the military. That was for civilian. That's right.

Okay. So, therefore, I worked there for a while, you know, and then they sent me a letter, the draft board sent me a letter, and I had an interview at the draft board, and they asked me where I was working, and they said, well, we'll give you six months reprieve.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, and this is when, approximately?

[Speaker 1]

Well, this is the same year. This is in the 40s.

[Speaker 2]

Can you remember a little more specifically? Was approximately how long after that was this?

[Speaker 1]

This was before the war, before the war.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, they were drafting then before, oh yeah, over the hill in Ohio and all that, yeah, okay.

[Speaker 1]

And they gave me a reprieve for six months. Well, after the six months was over, they drafted me, and I went into the basic training center in Ohio.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, was this?

[Speaker 1]

Just the induction center.

[Speaker 2]

But was this before the war still?

[Speaker 1]

This is before the war.

[Speaker 2]

Before the war.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, right.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, do you remember when you actually went in?

[Speaker 1]

1940, 1942, June of 42.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, now that would actually be six months or so after the war began. So, you were inducted in June of 1942?

[Speaker 1]

That's right.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, and where, and where, well, how did you, you were, you were drafted?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

So, you weren't a volunteer?

[Speaker 1]

No, I was drafted.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, how did it, and you were drafted into the army, is that correct?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, into the Air Force. Well, no, we were drafted into this induction center. Yes.

We stayed there for a week.

[Speaker 5]

Yes, where was that?

[Speaker 1]

That's in Ohio. I can't think of the name of it now. It was an induction center in Ohio.

[Speaker 2]

Was it northeastern Ohio where you lived? Yeah. Akron, Canton, Cleveland, Astabula.

It wouldn't be Niles.

[Speaker 1]

No, no, I can't think of the name of it. It was, that's where they inducted all the draftees from Ohio.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, the whole state? Oh, well, Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo, Dayton.

[Speaker 1]

I can't think of the name of it.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, anyhow, so this is like June of 42, and then when did you know what branch of the service you were going to go into?

[Speaker 1]

Well, then they shipped us to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri for basic training. Was that in Jefferson City? Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.

[Speaker 2]

Yes, do you know where that was? Jefferson Barracks? Was that in Jefferson City, perhaps?

[Speaker 1]

No, no, no, it was just a few miles from St. Louis.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, okay, all right.

[Speaker 1]

It was right along the Mississippi River.

[Speaker 6]

Oh, okay.

[Speaker 1]

And well, we did our basic training there, and all the calisthenics and all the...

[Speaker 2]

Oh, but you were in the Army then, or was it the Air Force?

[Speaker 1]

It was the United States Army Air Force. Okay, all right. That's before they changed the name later on.

[Speaker 3]

Yes, sir.

[Speaker 1]

So we did all my basics there, and we drilled, and we trained, and I hated it because it was 110 degrees in the sun there. We would march every day.

[Speaker 6]

It was hot.

[Speaker 1]

Hot, hot. So anyway, I spent probably a month there. We lived in what they call Tent City, and they shipped us up.

Then we were shipped out, and I went to Mitchell Field, Long Island, which is in New York.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, let me ask you just a couple questions before we go on much farther into it. Do you have any particular memories of leaving home, anything that happened?

[Speaker 6]

Yes.

[Speaker 2]

In particular, you know, leaving a friend, or having a real hard time leaving mom and pop, or...

[Speaker 1]

How old were you then, sir?

[Speaker 2]

Excuse me. Twenty-one. Twenty-one.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I had already met Helen.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, I see. Helen is your wife, became your wife a little later.

[Speaker 1]

But we didn't get married until just after the war, just before I got discharged, but that's getting ahead of ourself here. But anyway...

[Speaker 2]

So it was a little difficult leaving her then, right?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

More than a little.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I loved her. She was a great person. And, you know, it was sad, and it's an experience that you just don't...

It's very hard to explain, you know? And I wrote to her every day, every day, and she took it pretty good. I mean, she was living with her family, of course, so that was a benefit for her, you know?

[Speaker 2]

That was here in Sharon, Pennsylvania?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, right down the street here. And, well, anyway, it was tough being alone, you know, and they wouldn't give you a... You couldn't get a furlough after a certain length of time, you know?

So anyway, we went into... After we got to Mitchell Field there, it was a bomber base.

[Speaker 5]
Yes.

[Speaker 1]
And a fighter base. And, oh, they had sometimes 2,000 bombers on that field, plus the P-40s, P-47s. They had a lot of military equipment, mainly Air Force, you know?

And they called... They put us... We were new personnel, so they put us with what they call 826 Guard Squadron.

[Speaker 2]
Yes.

[Speaker 1]
And we did guard duty. And my particular job was... They only had one entrance into that field, one gate, and the rest of the perimeter was all patrolled by dogs and guards.

Yes. And that was the only way into the... Unless you climb over the fence, which was pretty high, at least 12 feet high.

And we worked there for a while as a guard, and I worked at that gate, that particular gate there, rain, shine, whatever.

[Speaker 2]
Oh, at the gate?

[Speaker 1]
At the gate, yeah, as a guard.

[Speaker 2]
Not on the perimeter?

[Speaker 1]
No, I never went around. They had special guards. The unit, the dog unit, was special.

They were trained special.

[Speaker 2]
Were they trained right there at Mitchell Field?

[Speaker 1]
They were trained at Mitchell Field, yes. All these pictures here are from Mitchell Field.

[Speaker 2]
So you were trained as a dog handler. You had a dog, right?

[Speaker 1]

No, no.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, no. Okay, I stand corrected. So you were a guard at the gate?

I was a guard at the gate. No dog?

[Speaker 1]

No dog.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

Okay, then they decided to change the 826 Guard Squadron to Squadron P Military Police, which was an upgrade. That's when I got... I made PFC, made corporal, then later on became sergeant.

Well, anyway, anyway, when it became military police, then we really started training, like combat training. You know, we had everything. We did everything.

We run the gamut with 50 machine, 50 caliber machine guns, crawling through wire, going through gas chambers, doing obstacle courses, rifle range, pistol range, learning how to dismantle and dismantle guns, blindfold and put them back together again. The training was extensive, very extensive. And I enjoyed that.

You know, I liked the activity. And then we had 50 caliber machine guns. We tried.

We went to the range and we did all the rifle range for 50 caliber machine gun. So that's, that was, the training was excellent. And of course, you had, you know, you had your duties as military police.

[Speaker 2]

And... So you were, excuse me, but you were with a guard, what do you call a guard company originally? And then you went to like a military police company after that.

[Speaker 1]

They changed the whole attitude of the company.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, they renamed the company?

[Speaker 1]

They renamed...

[Speaker 2]

Oh, the guard company became a military police company.

[Speaker 1]

Squadron police, yeah.

[Speaker 2]
Squadron was it? Yes.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, we had a real good outfit.

[Speaker 2]
Okay.

[Speaker 1]
Most of the, most of the boys there were called, you know, there's something wrong with them. They were, I can't think of the name of it now. They were, they weren't able to go overseas.

But let me tell you, it was quite an outfit. They were a wonderful bunch of guys. Okay.

[Speaker 2]
Let me, you might, could I interrupt here just one second? Let me, let me reiterate something. So you left Niles, Ohio.

Again, I'm going back a bit. Let me just make sure I'm clear on this, some of this stuff. Went from Niles, Ohio to the induction center.

Do you remember how you, how you went by bus, by train?

[Speaker 1]
By train.

[Speaker 2]
By train. Okay. You got to the induction center.

Then you went from the induction center to Jefferson Barracks outside St. Louis, Missouri on the, on the shore. It was literally on the bank of the Mississippi River. That is correct.

And you had your basic training there. And this would be in like still June or July 1942. Right.

And the basic training lasted, oh, and did you go by train to St. Louis also?

[Speaker 6]
Yeah.

[Speaker 2]
Okay. And the basic training lasted about how long? I mean, roughly.

I don't have the exact, but it was eight weeks, 12 weeks, 18 weeks. Eight weeks. Eight weeks.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, something like that.

[Speaker 2]

Okay. And then you went directly from there to Mitchell Field on Long Island, New York. That's correct.

And you, I presume you also went by train then? We did. A different world then, was it?

Trains instead of airplanes and fast moving cars. I mean, not that you didn't have cars.

[Speaker 1]

It was a different world getting out of Missouri, let me tell you.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, oh, did, did you just, again, again, this is maybe an aside, but this is kind of important in a way. Did you, had you traveled very extensively before in your life inside the United States?

[Speaker 5]

No. No?

[Speaker 2]

No. So, up to that point, no. Did you, did you have any, if I can use the word cultural, or did you, did you have any major, what was moving into a different subculture, if you will, of our American culture, meaning the Missouri subculture, and then to the New York area subculture.

Did you notice any major changes? Did you have any big effect on you? Oh, people here aren't as friendly, or they're more friendly, or they talk funny, or they, they think different than we do back there in Ohio, or did you have any experiences along those lines?

[Speaker 1]

The basic, the basic training in Missouri was, was horrendous. They didn't treat you very good. First, the first sergeant would get you out of bed all hours of the night, put the rifle to your shoulder, say go do guard duty, or on the Sunday when you're supposed to be off, go clean a hundred latrines, you know, a hundred toilets.

It was, it was very difficult.

[Speaker 4]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And the whole mentality was, I hated, I hated it, because of what was going on right there at that particular area, where we did, was supposed to be basic training, and there was a lot of, you know, baloney. A lot of stuff went on that wasn't supposed to go on. It wasn't just training, it was, it was harassment.

[Speaker 2]

Harassment.

[Speaker 1]

That's my word, that's my word, not yours. Harassment power. This man had a, the first sergeant had a stick, it was like a whip, and you say one word to him, you're gigged, you know, you couldn't do anything.

[Speaker 2]

What do you mean, gigged?

[Speaker 1]

Well, they make you, put you on KP, if you smart, put you back cleaning latrines, you know, but it was, it was a mental thing. It wasn't a physical thing. I was strong.

I was very strong at that time. I was a very powerful individual, but to get out of there was just like going to heaven, believe me.

[Speaker 2]

So Mitchell Field then seemed like heaven.

[Speaker 1]

It seemed like heaven compared to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri.

[Speaker 2]

Okay. You did, did you, again, this first sergeant in their basic training, obviously you, you didn't like that.

[Speaker 1]

He was only 20, he was only 22 years old. He didn't, he didn't know how to use his power. He just abused it.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, okay. Did you, did you attribute any of this to regional differences in people, or how they thought, or how they behaved, or?

[Speaker 1]

I would think so, you know. I, I don't think he was from the South. He did not have a Southern accent.

Now, the Southern people that I met there were very courteous. Some of the soldiers were nice people, but this particular individual was just, I don't know where he came from. You couldn't even talk to the man.

He was just very, very antagonistic.

[Speaker 2]

So how about when you moved to New York then? Did you have a, well, did you get some kind of feeling of the kind of people who lived around there, as opposed to the strictly military things?

[Speaker 1]

It was a different, when you got to New York, you find a different attitude. We were not assigned at the time, so we were just like thrown into a field where, with no assignment.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, you didn't know you were going to stay at Mitchell Field?

[Speaker 1]

We didn't know anything. No, they wouldn't tell us anything. So they put us, they put us in, in the barracks, and every day we would go to the, what they called the recreation center, and they had us washing walls, you know, because we weren't assigned.

So eventually, after we were there for a few weeks, they finally assigned us to the 826 Guard Squadron.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, and now I guess we're kind of getting back to where we were. Right. And that was subsequently changed to Military Police Squadron, was it with the same number, 826?

[Speaker 1]

No, no, Squadron P. Squadron P.

[Speaker 2]

Squadron P.

[Speaker 1]

Military Police. That was, that was the address.

[Speaker 5]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And then things seemed to shape up. I loved it. The training was wonderful.

It was hard, but it was wonderful.

[Speaker 2]

How about the people who were in charge of the training? Did you think well of them, by and large?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, we had a wonderful sergeant. All our sergeants were great. The first sergeant, the squadron sergeant, he was wonderful.

We didn't have any problem with our NCOs at all. Our captain was named Jim, I can't think of his last name now. He was the, I can't think of his name, but I've got it.

He was the provo marshal, okay? He was a young man, about 26, 27 years old. He was very bright.

He had a lot of training in police work and stuff. He was a captain. It was wonderful.

He treated the whole unit nice. You could go and talk to him anytime, ask him anything you needed. He was always open to you, you know, to the people that he, the soldiers that worked there.

[Speaker 2]

At that time, let me again interrupt you and forgive me, but did you, how did your conception of what the military would be, and again this is back when you were a civilian working in Niles, you obviously knew there was, there was the draft board there and they deferred you for six months, then eventually they drafted you. So before you got drafted, you had a concept of what the military would be like. How did that concept compare with the reality?

Do you understand what I'm... There was no comparison, Bill. You had no idea what the military was about?

[Speaker 1]

I had no idea until I got in there.

[Speaker 2]

You had no concept of what the military would be like?

[Speaker 1]

No, I didn't realize there was so much politics in the military.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, politics.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, great, you know, and so much different people that you meet when you first go in. You learned, you hated it. I didn't like it.

I didn't like anybody telling me that I couldn't do this, I couldn't do that. You know what I'm saying? They had the power.

You had to do everything they said, whether you liked it or not. That, that's, that's part of the mental problem. But...

[Speaker 2]

Oh, okay, that's interesting.

[Speaker 1]

I hated it when I was in basic training.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, that's clear, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

And when I went to Mitchell Field and, you know, it started coming together again, and after we got reassigned, then we started real training, something that was worthwhile.

[Speaker 2]

You felt you had a job then, is that... Exactly. You were, you were spending energy, but it was for something useful rather than just...

That's right. Okay.

[Speaker 1]

We did our own, I washed all my own uniforms, cleaned my own boots, we had leggings, we bleached them white. I liked it, I liked the job I had.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, so you enjoyed that?

[Speaker 1]

I enjoyed that, yes.

[Speaker 2]

When you say the job you had, it was first to be a guard at the gate.

[Speaker 1]

Then...

[Speaker 2]

And then what?

[Speaker 1]

Became a guard after we became military police, this is the main gate here. There were three people there. There was a sergeant inside, the sergeant of the gate, and three outside.

[Speaker 2]

You all have side arms there, huh?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, we had... Well, they started out with 45 automatics, and then they went to Smith and Wesson 38s. But this was good, then after, oh...

[Speaker 2]

But this is after you went to become the squadron P, was it? That's right. Squadron P, military police, okay.

[Speaker 1]

Well, in the interim, we worked with the FBI, you know. They would come into the field every day, and they were looking for AWOLs, you know. They always came in in a different car, two different people.

Of course, we had to let them in. They always went to see the provo marshal.

[Speaker 2]

They were looking for AWOLs?

[Speaker 1]
AWOLs, yeah.

[Speaker 2]
Why would they look there? Oh, the ones that you had apprehended?

[Speaker 1]
No, no, no, no. People that had gone AWOL that were living in New York, okay, soldiers that were from different fields, went AWOL, living in New York, working as busboys, working as dishwashers. They supposed to be in the military, but they weren't.

Yes. They went AWOL. Well, you know how the FBI works.

They do everything undercover until they're sure. I think they pulled out maybe close to 100 AWOLs all together. At Mitchell Airfield?

Found them working in New York City, in New York City and on the island. See, Mitchell Field is on Long Island.

[Speaker 2]
Oh, I see. Okay, all right.

[Speaker 1]
And they found these people working different occupations, you know.

[Speaker 2]
So, they go to the provo marshal, what, to get information on these guys, and then they go look for them somewhere else.

[Speaker 1]
If there was anyone from the field, yeah, but they came in every day. We got to know them pretty well, and we did quite a bit of stuff. I learned quite a bit from them boys.

They were pretty good.

[Speaker 2]
Well, you talked to them right there when they came in?

[Speaker 1]
That's the old FBI, remember, way back. Oh, yeah, we would talk, we would discuss things with them. They were wonderful people.

[Speaker 2]
Well, was your job on the main gate pretty much the same before and after you changed the designation of the company? Did you do more of the thing when it was the guards squadron that you did later?

[Speaker 1]
This was a more important job because you had, that was the only access to the field, and you could not make a mistake and let somebody in there that didn't belong.

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

Of course, they had what they called the AWES, the volunteer women. If anybody would come into the field, they would have to go through this building and be cleared with a special pass and a special escort into the field, and after I did this job for about a year, I became sergeant of the gate. Then I was inside the gate all the time, doing all the paperwork and telephone, and these two right here, these two worked outside, and it was a very responsible job.

Everything you had to make a report every day, what went on, so forth and so on.

[Speaker 2]

Let me ask you one question. Did you have any brothers or potentially sisters also in the military? Any other close relatives?

[Speaker 1]

My oldest brother was in the Navy. He was on a carrier. He was an engineer.

He was, you know, when the carriers always had a repair boat close by, if they needed parts. My brother was very bright in mathematics, calculus, all that. He was a machinist and an engineer.

He spent the whole war in the Navy, and then my other brother, my youngest brother was also in the Navy, he was in the North Atlantic when they did all, taking all the material, you know, the, when they had all the big problems sinking the boats.

[Speaker 7]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

And he, it was pretty rough for him. Then my other brother was in the Air Force. He was a crew chief on a B-17 bomber, and he was stationed in Efrata, Washington.

Well, in the interim, he was married. He married a girl who was 21 years old, and they were getting ready to take off to go to England, you know, and his wife had an appendectomy that burst. And they wouldn't let him come home.

The Red Cross wouldn't give him any money, and he couldn't get a pass to come home. So they sent me a telegram. Well, it was...

This is when now? Approximately? This is about 40, late 43.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And...

[Speaker 2]

You were still at Mitchell Field.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. That's where I stayed. That's where I was discharged from.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, okay.

[Speaker 1]

And they sent me a telegram that her name was Pearl, that she was going to die because she had burst the appendix. So my sergeant was kind enough to give me a three-day pass. So I went home, and I went straight to the hospital.

[Speaker 2]

This is Niles.

[Speaker 1]

This is Niles. The hospital, she was in the Warren Hospital, St. Joe's. And luckily, I made it in time because she died in my arms.

She's just a beautiful person. I got her picture here. I'll show you later.

I'll tell you, it was tough. So he couldn't come home. So when he did get a chance to come home, it was very difficult for him.

Couldn't even come to the funeral. They wouldn't let him out because they were at the base where they were going to take off.

[Speaker 2]

That's tough. So you had several brothers in the military.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. Three.

[Speaker 2]

Three. Three. Okay.

Let's see. Where were they? Okay.

Now you're the sergeant at the gate, and this, that... Okay. First, first you were, and again, just if you can give me just some rough answers.

You were a guard out front from like, what, July, August, September, went along in there in 42?

[Speaker 1]

About about eight, nine, ten months.

[Speaker 2]

After you got to, what, you remember the month you got to Mitchell Field?

[Speaker 1]

June.

[Speaker 2]

You were inducted in June.

[Speaker 1]

July. July, I don't know the exact date, Bill. I can't remember.

So it was in July. We spent about six weeks, I think, at Jefferson Barracks.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

So then we went to Mitchell Field.

[Speaker 2]

Probably been like late July then.

[Speaker 1]

Probably.

[Speaker 2]

And then eight or nine months you were out in front of the building. That's closer. The gate.

Yeah, right. And then, then you became sergeant.

[Speaker 1]

And then I became a corporal.

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

And they put me at the gate outside, one on each side. And then after I was there, oh, I don't know, probably five, six months, they made me sergeant of the gate, main gate.

[Speaker 5]

Right.

[Speaker 1]

There was, of course, another west gate on the other side of the field, but that was all different. And I spent, oh, could, eight, nine months sergeant of the gate. And then they put me, they made me, made staff sergeant.

They put me in charge of the military prison. I became sergeant of the stockade. Stockade.

They had a number of prisoners in there. It was our job to put the flag up every morning, take it down at night, check all the prisoners every day, detail the prisoners what they had to do. It was very responsible.

You had to make a report every day, and that report had to be on the colonel's desk at nine o'clock every morning.

[Speaker 2]

Tell them what's up at the stockade. Everything.

[Speaker 1]

Everything that happened.

[Speaker 2]

Nobody, nobody, no prisoners escaped, or nobody shot anybody, or no riots, prison riots, or anything like that.

[Speaker 1]

No, no prisoners escaped.

[Speaker 2]

So then you were off, you weren't involved with the gates at all anymore.

[Speaker 1]

No, anymore.

[Speaker 2]

So that was a full-time job.

[Speaker 1]

Full-time, 24 on and 24 off. It was work 24 hours steady, and then 24 off.

[Speaker 2]

What kind of schedule did you work when you were at the gate?

[Speaker 1]

We were at three different shifts.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, you had eight-hour shifts? Okay. Where did you, did you live, where did you live, and how did, how were your living accommodations?

[Speaker 1]

We had a good barracks down on the field, and I washed my own clothes and did my own stuff. Most, a lot of the guys send their stuff to the cleaners, you know. Not me, I did my own.

[Speaker 2]

But you had reasonably decent accommodations?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Showers and? Oh, everything. How was the food?

[Speaker 1]

Food was great.

[Speaker 2]

You had a mess hall adjacent, right adjacent to your barracks, did you?

[Speaker 1]

The MPs ate very well, believe me. Oh, well that's good. They did, and also they had a big cafeteria.

Sometimes we worked midnight turn, you know, and instead of going to the mess hall, we'd just go to the cafeteria on the way to the barracks and eat a big breakfast and go down to sleep all day.

[Speaker 2]

So, let me go back just a little bit more now. During this time, and I know there's more to your story, and we'll get, we'll get on with it, but I was just wondering, again, I ask you about when you were in Missouri and then in New York, how you related to the local people there. How did you relate, or what did you think of other soldiers that were coming from other parts of the country?

People coming from, I don't know, Tennessee, Kentucky, Florida, New Jersey, Florida, I don't know, California, where, you know, places other. How did you react to soldiers who you met from all around the country?

[Speaker 1]

We got along well. We were all in the same barracks. They were from all over.

We even had an Indian in our outfit. Oh, is that right? He, he was in the China-Burma-India Theater.

His name was Sergeant Godfrey. That was his name. Yeah.

And he was flying the hump. Wow. In the, in the old C, what, C-46s or whatever they were, them cargo planes, and, uh, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

That's a D, that's a DC-3, right?

[Speaker 1]

DC-6, DC-3, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah. Whatever the military designation for that is. It was a good plane, yeah.

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

And he flew that area for a long time until he got, I don't know, I think he just kind of went, you know, it was too much for him. So they shipped him into our outfit.

[Speaker 2]

Well, that's a long way, isn't it?

[Speaker 1]

A long way. They shipped him there and he, he loved his whiskey though. Loved his whiskey.

[Speaker 2]

Where was he from in the States?

[Speaker 1]

I never asked him. Never asked him where he was from. But he was a full-blooded Indian, believe me.

He would never, you know, he'd go out and get drunk, but he never bothered anybody. We'd drag him in, put him to bed, you know, take care of him. But most of the people were from all over, West Virginia, Tennessee.

We had all kind of people. We, we never had any problem.

[Speaker 2]

You were all pretty congenial.

[Speaker 1]

We were, but really, Bill, I'm serious.

[Speaker 2]

This, you know, that's good.

[Speaker 1]

There were, this kid here, uh, was West, West Virginia.

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

He got married while he's already, he made me be his best man.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, that's interesting. Mr. Petrella is looking at a, and when he's saying this guy and this guy, we're looking at some pictures in front of the guard, the main gate, guard shack at Mitchell Field Air Force Base. He's pointing at some pictures of some fellows standing in front of the gate.

[Speaker 1]

His name is Elwood Swain. This man here was from Missouri, Red Collie. He's the character of the outfit.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, he was a character.

[Speaker 1]

A character. He was something else, let me tell you. He loved his whiskey and he loved his women.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, is that right? Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

But, you know, he did his thing.

[Speaker 2]

Did his job, huh?

[Speaker 1]

He never got in any trouble.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, so, so you were the guard in front of the gate and then you were the sergeant of the gate and then you went to be the sergeant of the guard, as a staff sergeant. That staff sergeant was three up and one, one rocker. That's right.

Okay. The sergeant of the stockade, okay, and then, and what, what, what, how long were you sergeant of the stockade?

[Speaker 1]

Till I got discharged.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, for the whole time?

[Speaker 1]

The whole time.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, okay. Now, what, well, we'll get to that. I was going to ask you about the dogs.

Now, to what extent were you personally involved with the dogs?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I just used to watch where they trained them.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

Each dog, they had Dobermans.

[Speaker 2]

Excuse me, just, just to clarify this, we're referring now to the dogs that were used on the perimeter of the Mitchell Airfield that were trained right there at Mitchell.

[Speaker 1]

That's correct.

[Speaker 2]

Is that, that's what we're talking about? That's we're talking about, what, what breeds did you say they had there?

[Speaker 1]

This, this one here is Bulldog. A Bulldog? Bulldog.

They had, they had Doberman, mostly Doberman. They had Airedale, Airedale. Yes.

And, you know, you would think, say, an Airedale, he can't be a mean dog, but they trained them dogs to be mean.

[Speaker 2]

Hmm. And that's a Doberman there.

[Speaker 1]

That's a Doberman.

[Speaker 2]

This looks almost like a Cocker Spaniel here.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, could be.

[Speaker 2]

Because Cocker Spaniels can be very, very aggressive. Yeah, they were aggressive. You bet they can, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

Well, anyway, this here particular Airedale dog, they had a building, a concrete building. I don't know how, maybe the size of this kitchen here, maybe the size of my dining room, and that's where they kept the Norden bombsight. The what?

[Speaker 2]

I'm sorry, excuse me.

[Speaker 1]

The Norden bombsight. Oh, yes. For the planes.

Yes. And the building just had one door made out of solid concrete block, no windows, and it had a big high fence around it, and it was guarded by the Airedale. And let me tell you, you couldn't even get near that fence.

That was some kind of dog. And then, of course, along the whole perimeter of the field, they had dogs, and each dog had his own master. And as you see here, this was a...

[Speaker 2]

That dog is, he's in training, is he?

[Speaker 1]

Well, yeah, this was one of the training episodes.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, let me explain a little bit about what we're looking at here in this picture. There's like a supervisor, the trainer, I guess you might say, and there's a dog. Well, let me back up.

There's a big tall cyclone fence. A man is climbing over the cyclone fence. He hasn't gotten over it yet.

The dog is on the other side of the fence, and the dog is literally leaping from the ground, having a fit, trying to get at the man who's coming over the fence. And standing nearby is apparently the trainer, the guy supervising this whole operation. In other words, they're training the dog to be very aggressive against anybody who might have the ill judgment to try to come over that fence.

So, and the dog is leaping up about a half, halfway up, I don't know, an eight, ten, twelve foot fence.

[Speaker 1]

Had that been a Doberman, he would have got him, because they could clear that fence.

[Speaker 2]

Yes, and this dog is, Mr. Petrella said, is a box, I mean, excuse me, a bulldog, so he's relatively short. He can't get up too high, but Mr. Petrella is indicating that we're looking at another picture of a Doberman here, and had that Doberman been at the fence, probably would be a little different story. The Doberman would have gotten up a good deal higher.

So, yeah, they're training, actually training the dogs at Mitchell Army Airfield there on Long Island.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, they had a special unit, and each MP had his own dog, and you couldn't even get near them, because they were a one-man dog, you know.

[Speaker 2]

Where did they kennel the dogs, where the dogs kept them?

[Speaker 1]

Right on the field. They had their special place where they kept the dogs, where they trained them. That's as far as I can tell you about that.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, well, that's very interesting, and the dogs were there the whole time you were there. Oh, yes. Those are always dogs.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, absolutely.

[Speaker 2]

On the perimeter of the airfield for the whole war, as far as you know.

[Speaker 1]

That's correct.

[Speaker 2]

And you said you were discharged from Mitchell Field. When was that? October 45.

October 45. Did any, just for curiosity's sake, did the nature of activities at the airfield change a whole lot between, you know, VE day in May, and then VJ day in August, and the time you got out in October? I mean, obviously, it changed in the sense the war was over, and everybody's glad about that, and people thinking about going home, but I mean, did, there's still a lot of activity, air activity there?

Maybe even more, or certainly a lot. Still guarding the fence just the same way?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, absolutely, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

The dogs are still there?

[Speaker 1]

Dogs were still there when I got discharged.

[Speaker 2]

Stockade, obviously, was still there and operating?

[Speaker 1]

They had, it was quite a big airbase. I, you know, I've seen maybe like 2,000 planes on that field at one time. Wow.

They would bring in crews for the B-17s, and when the time came, they would, we had 24s, and then came the 29 bomber, which was a big one.

[Speaker 6]

That's for sure.

[Speaker 1]

And they had, of course, they had quite a few P-47 fighter planes, which they used in World War II a lot, and it was quite interesting, and they had the, they had the submarine patrol. They would go out every day and go out along, you know, along the ocean there, and they would patrol so far in, like three miles out, they would patrol the whole shoreline, make sure there were no submarines. That was interesting.

I went up a couple times with the guys. It was nice. Oh, flew around with them, huh?

Yeah. Oh, that's nice. And winter and summer, and one day when one of the crews came back, their landing gear wouldn't come down.

Fortunately, it had snowed. It was about three, four, or five inches of snow on the field, and they had to do a belly landing. It was quite interesting, and then I saw another.

[Speaker 2]

That was in what kind of airplane? Do you remember?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, like, like a C, what do you call it? Same thing they use in Burma and India.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, the C-40? I can never remember. It's a DC-3.

[Speaker 1]

DC-3, DC-6. They were both, they looked alike, but then we were on the field one day, and when the first jet, they brought in a jet. This in 45?

This in 45. Yeah, yeah. Man, I'll tell you, that thing went straight up, and you know, we were watching.

Pretty impressed, huh? Impressed, boy, I'll tell you. I said, I've never seen anything go so fast, you know.

We were used to the old P-47s, you know, but I did see a young pilot. I don't know who he was. They flew training mission every day, and he was flying, well, three, four miles from the field.

It was up pretty high, the P-47, and all of a sudden, I don't know what happened, that plane just came down, straight down into the ground.

[Speaker 6]

Yuck.

[Speaker 1]

Into a guy's, into a people's yard where they had a big grape arbor. Went right down through that, and I don't know how much the motor sank into the ground. It was quite extensive, but those things happen, you know.

[Speaker 2]

Well, any other, let me ask you this. Did you ever have occasion to leave Mitchell Field? Well, tell me, tell me about your, while you were there.

You were there then for like a little more than three years. Did you have, how often did you get a furlough, and how often did you get back to Niles, and or back to Sharon to visit your fiancé, I presume, at that time? Oh, absolutely.

[Speaker 1]

Absolutely. We would get 72-hour passes, and if you merited it, you would get the pass, and you could come home, but it was a short visit, you know.

[Speaker 2]

I was going to say, 72-hour, not long.

[Speaker 1]

Not long.

[Speaker 2]

How long did it take you to get to Sharon, Pennsylvania, or Niles?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, hell.

[Speaker 2]

Just describing, in case we lost a few words there at the end on the other side, he was describing the fact that during the war, while he was at Mitchell Air Force, or Mitchell Air Field in Long Island, New York, that he would get 72-hour passes during which he would be able to return to Sharon, Pennsylvania, which was the home of his fiancé, the hometown of his fiancé, Helen, and presumably also to his own home. I presume that's correct.

He did not visit the family there as well, and he said it would take about 12 hours, give or take a little bit, to get here from Long Island, and they would come by train. Is that correct, Mr. Patron?

[Speaker 6]

That's correct.

[Speaker 2]

Come by train. Okay, so please, carry on.

[Speaker 1]

Well, anyway, I'd come home, 72-hour pass, and then they'd have a parade, you know, and they would have inspections, and they would have, like, they would check your barracks first.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, you mean before you got the pass?

[Speaker 1]

Before you got the pass. Check your barracks.

[Speaker 2]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

With the white gloves.

[Speaker 2]

White glove inspection.

[Speaker 1]

Check your rifle, make sure everything, your footlocker had to be just so, everything had to be in order.

[Speaker 2]

And that included a staff sergeant, too.

[Speaker 1]

And the officer of the day.

[Speaker 2]

The officer of the day would do the inspection?

[Speaker 1]

Do the inspection, that's correct.

[Speaker 2]

But he would inspect the first sergeant's stuff, too, same way?

[Speaker 1]

No, they never bothered.

[Speaker 2]

At what point did you have to, how high a rank did you have to be before you didn't stand inspection anymore?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I was a sergeant, and I had to stand inspection.

[Speaker 2]

Staff sergeant, even when you were three stripes and a rocker, you still... That's right. Okay.

[Speaker 1]

Or a platoon sergeant, he had to stand same as we did. Then they would have what they call a parade, and they would, I mean spit and polish. Then they would pick out somebody who was the best dressed.

Yes. And give him a three-day pass. Yes.

So, you could see yourself when you looked into my shoes, you could shave yourself.

[Speaker 2]
So, but they'd only give one pass?

[Speaker 1]
One pass.

[Speaker 2]
Is that like one pass?

[Speaker 1]
Whoever won the prize.

[Speaker 2]
One pass a week?

[Speaker 1]
No, no, no.

[Speaker 2]
How often is this? But you had the parade and...

[Speaker 1]
They only did that one time that I remember, the time that I was there. It was a big inspection. They checked your rifle, they checked your clothing, everything had to be nice.

Well, and that was the only 72-hour passes they gave? No, then they would give you 72-hour passes if you desired to go home.

[Speaker 2]
But you just asked for one?

[Speaker 1]
You just asked for one.

[Speaker 2]
And they'd say yes or no?

[Speaker 1]
They'd say yes or no.

[Speaker 2]
Was the answer usually yes if you weren't in trouble?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, well then, then I got married just before I got discharged.

[Speaker 2]
Yes.

[Speaker 1]
In 44. And Helen got...

[Speaker 2]

You got married in 44?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I wasn't discharged yet.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, right.

[Speaker 1]

I had a 10-day furlough, okay?

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

And Helen got pregnant. Uh-huh. And to make a long story short, when she was ready to have the baby, they wouldn't let me come home.

They sent me a telegram and they called for me on the phone, but they would not let me go home for some unusual reason. I never know. And three days later, he said, now you can have your pass.

So the baby was already born at the time. Uh-huh. So that was my oldest daughter.

But it was strange, you know. She was born when? She was born in 44.

[Speaker 6]

She was discharged...

[Speaker 1]

July, July... Wait a minute. She was born July 3rd, 1945.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, so just like three months before you were discharged.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, right. July 3rd, just before Independence Day. And then, you know, after I got discharged, I went back to work.

I didn't like my job in Niles. I got fed up with that. I was welding, you know.

I was a welder. Uh-huh. And of course, I get to go back a ways.

Before the war broke out, I had a... I went and tried out for the University of South Carolina. I played a lot of football in high school.

[Speaker 2]

Oh yeah, that's right, Rocco. And Rocco that I'm referring to is Mr. Rocky Petrella, who I'm interviewing. It's his...

Rocco is his son. I was just going to say Rocco told me about the fact that you were a prospective player, a prospective South Carolina gamecock. Gamecock, yeah.

[Speaker 1]

I had a couple buddies that went there, you know, and they kind of talked me into it. And I went and tried out. They said, well, come back in the spring, you know.

Well, by the time the spring came, the war broke out, and they drafted us.

[Speaker 2]

So that was the end of that. Goodbye college football career.

[Speaker 1]

Goodbye college education, period.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, goodbye college education.

[Speaker 1]

I really, I really miss it. I wish I could have been finished. But after you're in the military that long, Bill, it's not as bad to go back.

[Speaker 2]

Well, okay, let's talk about that just a minute. What kept you from using, like, the GI Bill? Was it mostly family obligations?

There wasn't enough money to support you and your wife and your child when you got out? I mean, the GI Bill was available then.

[Speaker 1]

I used it to buy this house.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, a GI loan?

[Speaker 1]

GI loan.

[Speaker 2]

To buy this house? Yeah. Okay, but you could...

you didn't... you chose not to use the GI Bill educational benefits.

[Speaker 1]

No, I never did because your child was born, then another one came along, then you had responsibilities as a family man.

[Speaker 2]

And just one of them... GI Bill just didn't pay enough.

[Speaker 1]

It just didn't pay enough, and I just... I guess I lost interest.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, okay.

[Speaker 1]

I made a few boners in my life, believe me.

[Speaker 2]

During your military career, did you ever have occasion to go somewhere else? You never went outside the United States on military business.

[Speaker 1]

Oh, no.

[Speaker 2]

No. Did you ever have occasion to go, like, temporary duty to somewhere to do a special project or special duty for two months or three months or a week?

[Speaker 1]

No, they never sent us anywhere like that.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, you're right, you were there. Okay.

[Speaker 1]

We would go get the payrolls and bring them back to the field, and one time I had a pilot that flew, like, I don't know, 30, 40 missions. They brought him back to Mitchell Field. He had a little problem, mental problem, and they asked me to take him to Bellevue for...

to check him out. So I did that, you know.

[Speaker 4]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

Nice young fella. Just too much military, too much action.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, they say everybody has their breaking point, no matter how tough you are.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, he rode pretty good. I don't know whatever happened to him. So the ambulance took him, and they needed to have a guard to go along, and they made me go.

What did you...

[Speaker 2]

Oh, to guard him?

[Speaker 1]
Supposedly, the poor man did not need guarding.

[Speaker 2]
He wasn't, but he was a little bit wacko.

[Speaker 1]
Yes, he was. He had a little problem.

[Speaker 2]
Did your... what was your work week there at Mitchell Field? Most...

most times. I'm sure there were times when it was seven days.

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, yeah.

[Speaker 2]
But were there six-day weeks? I mean, your normal work week, was it seven days? Seven days.

Oh, you worked every day? Every day. Without regard.

Okay, so there was no such thing as Sunday off. No. That was the only advantage of Sunday in Jefferson Barracks, huh?

[Speaker 1]
Yeah, really.

[Speaker 2]
You didn't get at least some of those days off, huh?

[Speaker 1]
Well, they got you to go clean the latrine. See, all the guys would leave and go up to have visitors in Missouri, but I chose to just take a rest, you know, take it easy, and there comes a sergeant. Oh, oh, I see.

Go clean the room.

[Speaker 2]
Everybody else is gone, so you're the one they could pick on, because you were there.

[Speaker 1]
That's exactly right.

[Speaker 2]
You should have gone ahead somewhere.

[Speaker 1]
That's a true story. I'll tell you.

[Speaker 2]

I'm going to ask you something that's slipped my feeble mind here. Oh, when you did get a... well, just guess, and I know this is a wild guess, but during that three years and a little bit that you spent at Mitchell Field, how many...

how many 72-hour passes would you guess? And I recognize a very rough guess that you got during that time. Oh.

[Speaker 1]

One every two months or three months or...? Sometimes once every two months, sometimes once every three. No more than once every three months. That would be the...

[Speaker 2]

That'd be about a max.

[Speaker 1]

About the max, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

And you would always come back here.

[Speaker 1]

I'd come back home to see my honey or see my wife, my family, my mother.

[Speaker 6]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

And of course my other brothers were in the service, so Dad worked in Youngstown, so I would stop in Niles and see Mom and... How far is Niles from here? Fifteen minutes.

[Speaker 2]

Fifteen minutes. Oh, it's that close, Niles. Okay.

And did you ever have occasion to go into the city? Did you ever spend time on Broadway?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, we went to this... yeah, my buddies and... I had a couple of good buddies.

We went and checked out Wall Street. We rode the Long Island Ferry. We went to the music hall and watched the Rockettes.

[Speaker 6]

Yeah.

[Speaker 1]

And we dined at some real nice Italian restaurant over there on Broadway. And we met Jack Dempsey. His restaurant was right there next to this called Romeo's.

It was a little Italian restaurant. Boy, they had good food. And Jack Dempsey's place was next door, and we kind of got in there and met him.

You know, it was nice to see him.

[Speaker 2]

Describe your typical off-duty time. We've talked a lot about what you did as a matter of duty. What did you do with yourself during your off-duty time?

[Speaker 1]

My off-duty time? Well, I did a lot of writing.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, is that right?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah. I wrote a lot. I got some stuff there I have to give you there.

That package is full of writing for you and your girlfriend, whoever. And I still write poetry, you know.

[Speaker 2]

So you wrote poetry then?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. I used to write poetry to my wife, Helen. Oh, that's nice.

And when I came home, I said, what'd you do with all that poetry? She said, I threw it away.

[Speaker 2]

That was your first major domestic, right? But we never...

[Speaker 1]

While we were in New York, we... I'm not a drinker. I'm a drinking man.

Couple of the boys, they would have a few beers, you know. But we never took a cab. We walked from one end of Broadway to the other.

We walked to Wall Street. We'd just see more, you know. And we did that.

We never took any cab or had anybody ride us anywhere. We just did a lot of walking. Of course, we were in pretty good condition then.

But it was interesting. Going up Broadway, you know, sometimes you'd have to get out in the street and walk because the mass of people would just carry you away. Terrible.

But it was something to see. I really enjoyed it.

[Speaker 2]

How about at Mitchell Field? In your off time, you'd obviously sleep and you'd do laundry and that kind of domestic stuff.

[Speaker 1]

Do laundry and rest.

[Speaker 2]

Did you have a nice day room? Did you have facilities for athletics, you know, tennis or pool hall, you know, the day room with a pool table?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, they had rec room. Nice rec room. I had a couple of good friends who lived in Long Island, in Garden City.

And this one particular person I used to go visit, her son was in the house. She'd invite me to dinner. Her aunt lived with her and her daughter.

Her husband, she was a widow. And she was a very, very nice person. I would spend some time with her.

And I used to go to Hempstead. Hempstead was just a few minutes from the field. They had a bus to run there.

And the boys that drank would go in and drink and I'd go in and eat. No, they'd eat. I couldn't drink.

Still to this day, they don't drink. But it was interesting.

[Speaker 2]

You said you wrote a lot of letters. You said you wrote to your wife, Helen, or your fiancée or wife, depending on what time. Every day.

Who else did you write to? Did you write a lot?

[Speaker 1]

I wrote to my mom. My sisters lived at home. And I wrote to my mom now and then.

[Speaker 2]

Was your dad gone at the time?

[Speaker 1]

My dad was still living. My dad was a kind of a strange person. He never took much interest in the military or anything else.

That's a long story.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, okay. He wasn't home with your mom?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, he was?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yeah. He worked in Youngstown. He was a truck driver for a while.

Then he worked in the big warehouse right there on Boardman in Youngstown. Right off of Federal Street there. He was a hard worker.

He did a job.

[Speaker 2]

Did you do any photography while you were there? I mean, personally. I know you have photographs we've been looking at here on the table.

But did you personally take some of these?

[Speaker 1]

All of these were taken by somebody else, and I didn't even know it.

[Speaker 6]

Oh, okay.

[Speaker 1]

This is the only one that I remember being taken. He's here with me. Big jug heads.

No, I never did any myself, Bill.

[Speaker 2]

Did you, while you were in the military, did you ever have thoughts like, what in the world am I doing here? What is this all about? Why in the Lord am I standing here in this funny looking uniform with this helmet on my head?

I guess I don't see any helmets there.

[Speaker 1]

We had red helmets.

[Speaker 2]

Yeah, okay. Yeah, I'm sure you did. Why am I doing this?

What's this all about? Did you ever have sort of philosophic, if you will, mental machinations about the war, about where you fit into it, where Mitchell Field fit into it? Why am I doing this?

Did you have thoughts along those lines? Oh, absolutely. And what, could you recall some of those thoughts?

[Speaker 1]

You wonder, you know, what's happening. When is this war going to be over? How come we're here, we can't be over there, you know?

[Speaker 2]

Over there, you mean in the...

[Speaker 1]

Into the action.

[Speaker 2]

You actually wanted to do that?

[Speaker 1]

I wanted to do it. They would call me in once a month, and they would examine me.

[Speaker 2]

Because you had asthma?

[Speaker 1]

Because I had asthma. Okay. They would not, then they would send me back.

No, you can't go overseas.

[Speaker 2]

Because of the asthma.

[Speaker 1]

Everybody here were limited service, I called it. And unfortunately, you know, but you have many thoughts. After a while, though, you get bored and you say, well, I wish it was over.

I want to go home. You miss your family, and you still have to take orders, you know what I'm saying?

[Speaker 2]

Yes, I do, yes.

[Speaker 1]

Even though you're a sergeant, you still have some of the over you're taking, giving you orders.

[Speaker 2]

Did you ever have any thoughts about other of your contemporaries, guys your age, who didn't go? Did you ever have, oh man, why am I here when old Fred or old Elmer or old George or Bill or whoever, man, they're back there in Niles having a good time and so on, and here I am standing in the rain in Mitchell Airfield, New York. What is all this about, you know?

Did you have thoughts about those guys?

[Speaker 1]

Oh, sure. A lot of the boys were shipped out, different units, different outfits, different companies, different states.

[Speaker 2]

I mean, across the water, either across the Pacific or across the Atlantic.

[Speaker 1]

Some went, yep, but we lost a lot of personnel that were put, sent to different bases, you know, and I was fortunate. I was fortunate. I stayed at Mitchell Field.

It was a wonderful place to be. If you had to be in the military, that was, but I had met a lot of wonderful people there.

[Speaker 2]

You didn't have any thought, particular thoughts, though, about the guys who were back in Niles who never served at all, or did you have such thoughts?

[Speaker 1]

I never used that as an excuse. I, you know, I figured if they couldn't go, they didn't want to go, or they couldn't go, or they were not healthy enough to go, but, you know, I wasn't exactly in the best of health being an asthmatic, but I'll tell you, I was in good shape. I kept in good shape.

I played a lot of ball in my life, and I used to train all the time. You look at me now, you wouldn't see it, but I used to have an arm, but now, you know.

[Speaker 2]

Did you, okay, pretend we're back at Mitchell Field now, and you're thinking about the future. It's towards the end of the war. It was clear that the war was going to be over fairly soon.

I don't know when that would be, after the Battle of the Bulge or something, I don't know exactly, well, or after the... Hiroshima. Hiroshima, yeah, that was clear.

That was going to probably be the end in the Pacific Theater, but in any case, and then you had a plan. Well, I'm going to, when I get out of this military, I'm going to go back, and I'm going to do this, and this, and this, and this. How did, I suspect you had such a plan, and if you did, how did life more or less work out compared to that plan, and how did the military maybe alter your life?

You talked about the fact that it altered your life in that you didn't go to college. You probably would have gone to play football at the University of South Carolina had the war not come along, and that kept you from getting a college education. That's a fairly major life change.

[Speaker 1]

Well, I kind of blame it on myself. I think if I hadn't got married, I probably would have gone, but, you know, you have different ideas when you get out of the military. You say, well, I'm going to take a long vacation, a rest, you know what I'm saying, from the military.

When you get discharged, you say, well, I'm going to go home, and I'm not going to do anything. I'm just going to lay around, and do this, and do that. It don't work that way.

It didn't work that way with me, Bill.

[Speaker 4]

Okay, how did it work?

[Speaker 1]

I got bored. I got very bored after all that training and stuff. I just, I guess I went what they call, when something happens afterward, you know, I can't think of the word now.

Oh, anyway, anyway, I did get bored, and I told Helen, I says, you know, I'm going to go back to work. She says, why? You only been home for three weeks.

I said, well, I just fidgety, you know, so I stayed another week, and I went, finally went back to work. We moved the Niles into my mother's house.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, you were here?

[Speaker 1]

We were here, yeah. She stayed with her mom during the war.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, and you came back and moved in after the war was over.

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, I moved in, then we went to Niles.

[Speaker 2]

Right, okay.

[Speaker 1]

Because my mom and dad were on their way to California.

[Speaker 2]

Well, they were moving there?

[Speaker 1]

They were moving to California with my sisters, and mom didn't know what to do with the house. She couldn't sell it right away, so I told her, well, I went to the bank and made a deal with the bank, and I took over the house. I had no intention of staying in Niles, because I was looking for a better job.

I was down there still working at the old place. What were they doing then? They were still building trailers.

Trailers, okay. Yeah, Pruhooff and Trailmobile, and I got bored one day. Noon, lunchtime at noon, I threw my helmet, my slag pick, all my old clothes into the locker, walked out and never went back.

The same day, I went to the Westinghouse, got interviewed, did a written, they had written tests then. You had to be interviewed, and you did a written test, and give you a welding test the same day. And I went to work for Westinghouse, and I stayed there for 32 years, which was a nice place to work.

You know, I didn't get rich working there, but... You retired from there? I retired from there, yeah.

I had to retire. 19... I was...

Excuse me.

[Speaker 2]

What, 78 or something?

[Speaker 1]

No, 60... 68. 68, I developed.

[Speaker 2]

That would be 78, huh? Wow.

[Speaker 1]

No, and I retired. I retired before... I retired at 63.

I had to, because I had cancer. I developed colorectal cancer, and had to have major surgery, and then I just retired two years early. That's when you could retire at 65.

[Speaker 2]

Did you have any strong feelings about how the war affected or changed you? This is maybe kind of a repetitious question in a certain sense, but did your military experience or the... and or the war or both together seem to change your whole outlook on life in any way, or did it change...

other than the education, college education, which we've talked about. Do you think it changed your direction in life, or the way you think about life, or anything like...

[Speaker 1]

Oh, yes. Yeah, you put yourself in a different perspective. You think about the boys that you were there, and even to this day, I think about the poor guys that died, you know, that gave their life up for our freedom.

And I also think sometimes, you know, I wish I had been a part of it, but I had no control over that.

[Speaker 2]

Well, you served honorably. I mean, there's no...

[Speaker 1]

I did the best I could, you know. I really did.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think there was anything that we, as a nation now, I'm not speaking of you or your unit, but we as a nation could have done better during the war? Things that you saw in the military that you thought were just wrong, or not necessarily wrong, like as in bad, but inefficient, let's say. Things that the military could have done better?

Like, for example, I would guess, and I'm guessing here now, and you can agree or disagree, I would guess that you would suggest that their basic training system, at least for a certain period of time, at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, was not very good. No, it wasn't.

[Speaker 1]

It wasn't very good.

[Speaker 2]

Do you think that was a system-wide thing at that time, or do you think it was just really a function of one first sergeant who wasn't maybe mature enough, or maybe he was a bit of an antisocial or just a nasty guy?

[Speaker 1]

Well, I don't think he was... I don't know how he got that rating. He might have been in the service before, but I'll tell you, he was a very poor sergeant.

He did not know how to handle men.

[Speaker 2]

Did that... Do you think that was an aberration, an exception, or do you feel like that whole base and maybe even the whole basic training system was a little bit...

[Speaker 1]

The whole basic training system, the colonel that run the base had to have a parade once a week, whether it was 200 degrees or whether it was 50 degrees, and I used to see soldiers. We were out in a parade one day. He wanted this parade, and he platformed with binoculars.

[Speaker 2]

Yes.

[Speaker 1]

He watched the parade. I've seen so many soldiers die from heat prostration. Die?

Died. Dead. They would fall like...

You take 110 degrees in the sun, that's how hot it was, and the humidity in Missouri, I don't have to tell you what it's like, and they would just drop, just drop, like tenpins, they were dropping from heat prostration. He didn't give a damn. He's the colonel, you know.

[Speaker 2]

Now, do you, again, do you think that he was a typical colonel, just like the first sergeant was maybe a typical first sergeant, or were these guys just a little strange? In other words, do you think they were typical?

[Speaker 1]

No, I don't think they were typical military. Anybody had good training in the military wouldn't do that.

[Speaker 2]

Okay, so like when you talk to the other soldiers at Mitchell Field, they didn't, they, what were their, did they say the same kinds of things about basic training, or did they have, they'd have their experiences where they, were their experiences quite different from yours?

[Speaker 1]

Well...

[Speaker 2]

Or didn't you talk about that?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah, well, you know, some liked it, some didn't. Some liked the officers, some didn't.

[Speaker 6]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

I never took any advice from any of the soldiers. I just thought for myself.

[Speaker 4]

Okay.

[Speaker 1]

I got to know my officers. We had one lieutenant, he was a little bit of a shavetail, we called him.

[Speaker 4]

He was at Mitchell Field.

[Speaker 1]

He was at Mitchell Field. He wasn't very trained. He's just a young, out of college.

He made first, second lieutenant, and didn't know how to use his power. They abused it. Whereas the captain was, our captain, the provo marshal, was entirely a different personality.

He knew how to handle men. See? So that gives you a little bit of a, an adverse reaction about the military, when you get soldiers like this.

[Speaker 2]

Did, did you have any other major thoughts about the army? They could have done this better, or they should have, should have done this, or they shouldn't have done that, or sort

of system-wide, or what our nation did in the war. We should have done something sooner, or we shouldn't have done something...

[Speaker 1]

I always, I always thought, why were we so unprepared? We did guard duty down in Missouri, with the old infield rifle. No bullets.

You didn't have any, any ammunition. You walked, you walked your guard duty with an empty gun. It was one of the old infields, and they were heavy.

And, you know, I always thought, you know, how would they let you do this, walk with a gun, doing guard duty without ammunition? What if something happened? You know?

But I always thought that they were unprepared at Pearl Harbor. They were warned. They did nothing about it.

All they were doing was having a good time in Pearl Harbor.

[Speaker 2]

Did you, you know, change the subject here just a minute, if, if I may, and that is, when, do you remember anything particularly noteworthy in your homecoming from Mitchell Field? Okay, you're, you're discharged at Mitchell Field, so midnight that night you become a civilian, and you're, you're now happy to be out, and you're headed home on the train, and, and you came to Sharon, and you met, you saw your wife and your baby, and mother-in-law and father-in-law, I presume, there. So, do you remember anything particularly that sticks in your mind about that homecoming?

[Speaker 1]

Yeah.

[Speaker 2]

Did they have, like, parades in town, or special, special things happen with your, you know, a big party, or, you know, you, you understand what I'm looking for.

[Speaker 1]

I know what you're saying. The first sergeant came and told us, we have your orders, you're going home. Okay.

There was no, no, no fanfare or nothing. They didn't see, just, nobody said goodbye to me or anything. I got my duffel bag, got on the Long Island train, rode to New York.

Yes. Rode to the station in New York, bought a ticket, came home, no fanfare, got at the station in Niles, nobody there, got off the train.

[Speaker 2]

Oh, in Niles, not in Sharon.

[Speaker 1]

Niles.

[Speaker 2]

Niles, okay.

[Speaker 1]

Walked all the way home with my duffel bag, which was about two miles.

[Speaker 2]

Nobody knew you were coming.

[Speaker 1]

Nobody knew I was coming, and went home, saw Mom, got cleaned up, and that night, I just come back to Sharon and saw Helen.

[Speaker 2]

How'd you get over here, just for curiosity?

[Speaker 1]

My brother had a car, he lent me his car, and Pa wouldn't lend me his car. He said, I don't trust you.

[Speaker 2]

He's got a, what, a 25-year-old son just got out of the military after three and a half years, and he said, I don't trust you with a family car?

[Speaker 1]

No, that was Pa. But anyway, I came, you know, and I went from there, but there was no fanfare, really, Bill. I just, everything was low-key.

[Speaker 3]

And were there...

[Speaker 1]

I was glad to be home, believe me. I was glad to be out of the military after three years.

[Speaker 2]

Did you ever regret getting out of the military? Did you ever think... They wanted me to stay.

But you weren't having any...

[Speaker 1]

They called me in to stay. They wanted me to re-up. I said, no way.

I'm getting the hell out of here.

[Speaker 2]

Do you ever regret that decision? Did you ever...

[Speaker 1]

No, because you know why, Bill? Because I had a wonderful wife, wonderful person. She gave me three kids, and we lived 50, 40 years.

I loved her very much. I just, kind of more of a family man. I still am.

Oh, I could have did a lot of things in my life, you know, when I was... I had a brother. My youngest, second brother was a bricklayer.

He worked for a contractor out of Warren, and they traveled all over the world doing contracts, you know. They built the blast furnaces and stuff. And he wanted me to go with him as a welder.

You know, I could have made money hand over fist. I wouldn't be living in this little shack here, I'll guarantee you. But I didn't want to travel.

I didn't want to leave the kids. And I'm not sorry to this day that I didn't. You know, if you don't have family, you don't have much, do you?

Today, especially.

[Speaker 4]
Okay.

[Speaker 1]
So that's where we are.

[Speaker 2]
Well, Mr. Petrella, do you have anything else in particular? I've kind of run out of gas here. If you have some other thoughts about what we've talked about or anything related to that, I'd be happy to record them here for posterity and academia for the future, so your thoughts will remain in the University of Tennessee Library.

[Speaker 1]
I don't know what else I can tell you, Bill.

[Speaker 2]
Okay. Okay. Well, then again, Mr. Petrella, thank you very much on behalf of me, Bill Kelch, and on behalf of the University of Tennessee Center for the Study of War and Society. I appreciate very much your time and your efforts here.

[Speaker 1]
Well, I appreciate you doing what you did, and I hope it works out for you.

[Speaker 2]
Okay. Well, thanks so much, Mr. Petrella. Thank you, Bill.

[Speaker 3]
Thank you, Mr. Kelch. There were a part of the military police squadron, organization, and the other thing is I don't know if I can say it, but I just want to say it. Approximately.

[Speaker 4]
Good morning, ladies and gents. This is Bill Kelch speaking to you from the McDonald's restaurant. Testing one, two, three.

Testing one, two, three. Thank you.