

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
MIKE KARRELS
Mechanic, Army, Cold War
2003

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Karrels, Mike. Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Mike Karrels, a Fredonia, Wisconsin native, discusses his Army service in the Cold War and participation in the Berlin Crisis serving as a mechanic with the Wisconsin National Guard and the 578th Ordnance Company. Karrels recalls enlisting on the buddy system and waiting to be processed for fourteen days at Fort Leonard Wood, where someone attempted suicide. He touches upon basic training, fuel and electric repair training at Aberdeen proving grounds (Michigan), assignment to the 578th, and transfer to Fort McCoy (Wisconsin). He recalls participating in water fights after the sergeants went home for the day. Karrels talks about maintenance work on National Guard vehicles, his impressions of Fort McCoy, and reassignment as the driver for a commanding officer at Fort Sheridan (Illinois). He speaks of being in a Strategic Army Corps (STRAC) unit during the Cuban Missile Crisis and being restricted to barracks in order to be ready for immediate deployment. Karrels touches upon being on alert during the Berlin Crisis, and a miserable journey aboard the *USS Patches* to Germany. Stationed in Frankfurt, he touches upon vehicle maintenance, return to the United States, being shipped back to Kaiserslautern (Germany), and working as a special occasion courier. He recalls trying to fix a 5000-gallon helicopter-refueling pump. He mentions traveling around Europe with an Army friend and discharge in New York. Karrels sums up his military experience by saying "it was the best three years of my life."

Biographical Sketch:

Karrels served in the Army from 1960 to 1963, and he currently resides in Grafton, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Laurie Arendt, 2003.

Transcribed by Jeremy Osgood, 2009.

Abstract by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

LA: This is an interview with, state your name.

Mike: Mike, er, uh—

LA: Mike is fine.

Mike: Mike Karrels.

LA: Who served in the which branch of the service?

Mike: Army.

LA: The Army. What years did you serve?

Mike: September of 1960 through, to September of 1963.

LA: Okay. This interview is being conducted at his home, at the following address.

Mike: 950 6th Avenue, Grafton. 53024.

LA: And today is March twenty—

Mike: Seventh.

LA: Seventh. The interview is myself, Laurie Arendt, for the Ozaukee County Veterans Book Project, and Mike's wife Char is also here. So first question. Where was this in your life? Were you just out of high school?

Mike: Just out of high school.

LA: Okay. And were you drafted, did you—

Mike: No, I enlisted.

LA: Why did you enlist?

Mike: I don't really know, can't remember. It was on the advice of a neighbor boy who had just gotten back.

LA: Oh, okay. Was he in the Army?

Mike: He was in the Army. And I can remember him coming over and saying, "Well, I just got back. Something for you." And he says, "The main thing you should remember is that whatever you put into it, you're gonna get back out."

LA: Okay, good. When you enlisted were you just looking to do it just for a couple years, or were you thinking about it as a career, or you just didn't know?

Mike: Just, really didn't know, probably, but I didn't think I was going to stay in when I went in. And after I got in I knew I wasn't going to stay in.

LA: Why not?

Mike: I guess I missed home.

LA: Okay.

Mike: I missed civilian life. That's honest answers, so far.

LA: And this is pretty common. Okay. Had there been anybody, any veterans in your family, like did your dad?

Mike: No.

LA: Nobody. Okay.

Mike: Father, grandfather on either side. I was, I guess I was the first one in a long line. On my mother's side and my dad's side.

LA: Wow. Okay. Now when you went into the Army did you have any expectations of what you would do? Did you hope to become a mechanic?

Mike: I always liked to fool around with tractors. So I guess I had a good recruiting sergeant who didn't oversell the service. We did take an aptitude test, and obviously I scored better at that than anything else.

Char: And you were born and raised on a farm.

LA: Okay. That's good. Around here?

Mike: Yeah, Fredonia.

LA: Oh, okay. You know I have a lot of guys from Fredonia that have come forward for the second book.

Mike: Oh, really?

LA: But I haven't, like, talked. I just have their names, because I don't really know anything about them. But, yeah, the response has been pretty good from the north part—

Mike: Because the first book was so good, huh?

LA: And they didn't go in the first book. I didn't have that many up there.

Mike: And it wasn't me who, um, got this going.

LA: That's what I've heard. (laughs) Okay. Did you go in at Fort Sheridan, or—

Mike: No, I went in Fort Leonard Wood. That's where the reception center was. I can tell you a little story about it.

LA: Yeah, please!

Mike: We went in, obviously, it was, I'm pretty sure I read my thing right. I went in in September. And as we got to the reception center, the National Guard came through. So all the regular Army, which I was, had to wait, and let the National Guard--we called them the No Goods--coming through. And during that, we were supposed to be processed out in three days. And we were in there for 14 days.

LA: Oh, how boring!

Mike: How boring, yes. It was very hot, and the only excitement in our life was a coke machine, that sold actual coke bottles, you know, for a quarter. And, somewhere around the seventh or eighth day, somebody committed suicide. Or tried to commit suicide, underneath one of the barracks. And, lo and behold, about a year or two ago I was talking to Tom Yozowski. And he said, "Hey, I remember that." And here we were, in the same company, or the same situation, and never knew it until we got back and started talking.

LA: So, was he a mechanic, too, or—

Mike: No.

LA: He just went in at the same time.

Mike: He went in at the same time, he was in the same group, he went off to different things.

LA: Was he from Fredonia, too?

Mike: No, he was Tom, Tom is from what's that word, Mount Morris? Red Granite. That's where his mother's from. Or his mother lives there now, so I'm thinking.

Char: Did you go in on a buddy system? Or a friend of yours, Art Hahn.

LA: Yeah, tell me—

Mike: Art Hahn. I went in with a friend of mine.

LA: Did you stay with him? Is it H-A-H-N?

Mike: H-A-H-N. And we, I'm not sure. We were good buddies in school, and I think we got separated a little bit in the Army. Because he went on his way, and I took up a different career than he did.

LA: Doug went in with his best friend, and they, yeah. He became an MP, and his best friend went into Army intelligence in Alaska. He still lives there now.

Mike: Oh, really?

LA: He's kinda [unintelligible].

Mike: Oh, okay.

LA: That's okay, he knows how I feel about him. He was best man at our wedding. Okay. So, you were there for 14 days.

Mike: 14 days, yeah.

LA: So I imagine your opinion of the Army was pretty high at that point.

Mike: Well, yeah. I mean we all had the same opinion. I mean, there's probably about a hundred and fifty, two hundred guys in the reception center at the same time.

LA: Why did the National Guard come through?

Mike: I have no idea why the National Guard came through. There was a priority.

LA: Were they going in or going out?

Mike: They were coming in. They were being processed. To, I don't know, it was like a late batch of National Guard coming through. I don't have any real knowledge of that.

LA: That's fine. I wonder if they were, like, going somewhere. But what was going on in 1960?

Mike: There's a lot going on, but not at that time.

LA: All right. So, where did you go from Fort Leonard Wood?

Mike: Fort Leonard Wood I went to Aberdeen, Maryland. The proving grounds.

LA: For basic training?

Mike: No, basic training was at Fort Leonard Wood.

LA: Okay, what did-- Did you have any expectations of basic training before you went in?

Mike: It was good discipline. Something I think a lot of kids nowadays need. Expectations, I'm not sure what you mean.

LA: Did you think it was going to be difficult? Was it difficult? Were you in shape? Were you, I mean, if you were working on a farm, you were probably pretty much in shape.

Mike: Yeah. I mean, I didn't have any difficulties in there.

LA: And then you went to the Aberdeen proving grounds? Was that for advanced training?

Mike: Advanced training, yeah.

LA: And that was for mechanics, or—

Mike: Six thirty four point one. Which is fuel and electric repair. I never forgot that number.

LA: Wow. It's like I learned Doug's social security number, because I sent him so many letters during. Still know it. He doesn't know mine, but I know his. Okay. So, if you fuel and electric repair, did that MOS [Military Occupation Specialty] allow, what did it allow you to do? Did you work on a specific type of vehicle?

Mike: No. We worked on all vehicles, anything to do with fuel and electric, from diesel fuel injection through electrical components, including, up to and including 400 amp generators and regulators.

LA: Oh, wow. And that was something that interested you?

Mike: Yeah, it was cool. I remember having a three hour lecture on spark plugs. Which was probably one of the most boring things I ever listened to.

Char: You probably knew everything.

Mike: Well, three hours on spark plugs—

LA: There's not a whole lot to know.

Char: They must have thought it was important.

Mike: Well, I think it was just screw up time for the sergeant.

LA: So at that point, obviously you all took the same test, and you all had some sort of mechanical ability. But were most of the guys that you were with, did you have experience in mechanics? You know what I'm saying? Like, you worked on tractors, but were there any guys who maybe had the mechanical aptitude, but didn't know a hoot about spark plugs?

Mike: I think most of the guys that came through there were interested in hot rods. Had a car that they worked on. And, probably had experience, back in those days, auto shops. Everybody had, every school had auto shops. And kids are naturally interested in—

Char: Were you in auto shop at Port I?

Mike: Yeah. It was called agriculture.

LA: Is that when it was at the old school, down the hill, or were you at--?

Char: Didn't you go someplace for the auto school, or was that--?

Mike: No, it was the original high school, and they had, I think there was a new addition to the high school.

Char: But you talked about walking down town for something else.

Mike: That was the machine shop. That was the machine shop.

LA: Cause it's like where the police department is.

Mike: Oh, that was a vocational school.

LA: That was a vocational school. So that was separate from the high school?

Char: You went there for machine shop.

Mike: I went there for machine shop, yeah.

Char: As a senior?

Mike: As a what?

Char: As a senior?

Mike: I don't remember, it was junior or senior.

LA: Did you have my uncle as a teacher?

Mike: Who was that?

LA: Richard Rokus. Would have been, like, your senior year.

Mike: Teethentalder. Teethenfelter.

LA: So he must have replaced him. All right. Did you take a car with you? Or did you have a car?

Mike: To the service? No, you weren't allowed to have a car for basic, during basic training. And I was too far away to have a car when I was in Maryland.

LA: Then after, do you have any stories about that period? And funny stories, any unusual stories? Were you actually working on things or was it more classroom?

Mike: It was more classroom orientated. I mean, we went out into the shops that they had and we had engines to work on. And we would have engines that were in tanks, outside the tank, and we would work on them. And the big engines we worked on was a 1790 cubic inch V-12 engine.

LA: Wow. Did you want to work on a specific vehicle?

Mike: No.

LA: I mean, Charlie Watry when I interviewed him said he wanted to work on the, I think he said the B-52s, which he ended up working on. But, you didn't have a preference?

Mike: No, I didn't have any preference. After a while, later in my career then, I ended up doing different things.

LA: After you were done with training, where did they send you?

Mike: Fort Riley, Kansas. And there we were for about a month. And, our company moved, the 578th Ordinance Company moved to Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

LA: Oh, okay, well, that was nice.

Mike: It was a stroke of luck.

LA: And were you there your whole tour of duty?

Mike: No. After we moved from Fort Riley to Fort Sheridan, we were there I would say, about a month and a half. And then we went TDY, temporary duty, to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, where we supported the National Guard. In other words, we took care of all their vehicles while they were on maneuvers.

LA: That's kind of ironic considering that—

Char: When you started out—

LA: Yeah. (laughs) What did you think of Fort McCoy?

Mike: Oh. That's about as close to heaven as I'll come.

LA: Really?

Mike: No, Fort McCoy is my kind of place. It's got lots of trees, hills. And in the morning you'd wake up and you'd smell the pine trees and the spruce trees, and it was just like, oh my gosh! This is so neat!

Char: Course you were back in Wisconsin, too, that's--

LA: Yeah, but those barracks, like the Civil War.

Mike: Well, they were. In fact, the barracks that was next to us was a WAC [Women's Army Corps] barracks.

LA: Oh, that must have been nice.

Mike: Well, there was no WACs in it, though. It was just guys, cause the WACs—

Char: That was World War II.

Mike: That was probably pre-World War II. And, we had a, I don't know if you want to write this down. We had a sergeant that was a little bit on the flaky side. And for a punishment for the guys, he made them scrub the girls restroom, which was probably half the size, or a quarter of the size of our house here, with gasoline. I don't know if you want to write that down.

LA: No I probably won't put that down.

Mike: But anyways, we used to have water fights. The sergeants would, you know, we were a permanent party there, so to speak, because the National Guard came in and out, and we would, when the sergeants left at three o'clock, we used to raise all kinds of hell. And we'd have water fights, we had water fights, so much of a

water fight that the floor, the top floor leaked through into the bottom floor. And we'd have these extinguishers that pumped, and then we'd go around, when nobody was looking, somebody'd walk outside and we'd just baste them with water.

LA: Wow. I like the bathrooms in those barracks. Have you ever seen those? Toilet, toilet, toilet, toilet, toilet, toilet.

Mike: No privacy.

LA: None.

Mike: Back in those days, there was nothing called privacy. If you wanted to do it right there—

LA: Take a newspaper.

Mike: Take a newspaper, yeah.

LA: Cause that was where Doug was for a month before he went to Desert Storm, and I went up there on the weekends and I was like, nice bathrooms. Okay. Did you stay at Camp McCoy, then?

Mike: Three months. Until the National Guard came back. And that was, you know, the National Guard, because they're probably a lot of young kids, and had to go back to school, they kind of closed the camp up at the beginning of September. So then we came back to Fort Sheridan.

LA: Now, did you stay a mechanic this whole time, or did you do anything else?

Mike: When we moved back to Fort Sheridan, I became the Commanding Officer's driver.

LA: Cool! Did you want to do that?

Mike: Yeah!

Char: It was offered. Was it offered to you?

Mike: It was offered to me, and it was good duty. I didn't have to pull guard duty or KP. And the Commanding Officer was from Wisconsin, so I kind of got picked.

LA: Do you remember what town?

Mike: I remember his name. Major Adrian. He was from up north. That's all, the best I can tell you on that.

LA: So, being his driver did you have a typical day, I mean did you have to pick him up at, like, 0600, or—

Mike: Pick up his laundry.

LA: Oh, so you were also that kind of driver.

Mike: And then we'd, we had a nuke site down in southern Illinois, southern Chicago that we had—

Char: A mikey site?

Mike: A nuke site.

LA: Missiles.

Mike: It's like, oh, like a battery, to protect, you know if a plane goes over you could send a—

LA: There's a, Colin Sandell worked at the one in Wabasha.

Mike: It's like the patriot missiles.

LA: Because, they used to put those around the major cities. And like, they put them around Milwaukee and Chicago because at that time it was such manufacturing, it was kind of like the backbone of the country. And there was one in River Hills.

Mike: Really?

LA: Yeah. There was one in River Hills, one along the lakefront, where the trapshoot place is.

Mike: Right, and then there was one off of, oh, I think it was somewheres around John Deere Road.

LA: Yeah, that's the one in River Hills. Well, there's one at Summerfest. I did an article on that. So, did you drive him down to the nuke site?

Mike: I had to take him down to the nuke site, yeah. And then we'd spend a couple of hours there, and then we'd motor back. And I would have to take him to Great Lakes Naval Center, where we had sickies.

Char: What kind of vehicle did you drive?

Mike: A Jeep, and a '57 Chevy.

Char: This was his '57 Chevy?

Mike: No, this was, I had to pick him up at the motor pool.

LA: So it was a military car.

Mike: Military, yeah. '57 Chevy, four door, olive green.

LA: That was my next question, what color was it.

Char: How apropos!

LA: At least it wasn't camouflaged.

Mike: No, it wasn't.

LA: That's funny. All right. So, was the trip to the nike site every, was it daily?

Mike: Weekly. Yeah, weekly affair.

LA: Did he do anything down there, or just look at it?

Mike: I have no idea what he did. I stayed out by the Jeep—

LA: That's my next question, what did you—

Mike: I just stayed by the vehicle.

LA: Just stood there, listened to the radio, had a cigarette?

Mike: I just sat by the car. I may have listened to the radio, I don't remember.

LA: Didn't you find that boring.

Mike: No. Actually I didn't. I don't remember what, to be honest with you, what I did there once we got down there.

LA: Now, when you would drive him, would you carry on conversations, or was he busy?

Mike: He was generally, he said, "Keep your eyes on the road." He says, "You're following too far away." He says—

Char: Oh, he was a backseat driver.

Mike: He was a backseat driver. He said, he would say, "If you stay that far back, somebody's gonna sneak in all the time."

LA: Oh, my dad and I used to argue about that all the time. 'Cause he said I drove too close and I needed to be so many car lengths behind.

Mike: And, you know, I said, "I'm under, I was told to drive at least one car for each ten miles an hour you're going."

LA: That must be a military thing.

Mike: And he says, "We're never going to get anywheres that way." So, we had to take some side streets. And somebody cut me off, and I went over a curb, and all I could see was his feet flying in the air. And when he got all recomposed he says, "Now you're learning."

Char: Oh, my gosh! How old a man was this about?

Mike: Oh, well.

Char: You were twenty something.

Mike: I was barely twenty and he probably was about 40. 35.

Char: Oh, okay, I was just curious.

Mike: He was a good old dude.

LA: How long did you serve as his driver? Do you remember?

Mike: I think as long as we were at Fort Sheridan.

LA: Okay. So, as his driver, were you on call all the time, or did you do a shift and then if he needed you—

Mike: No. Basically it was just a eight to five job, I'm thinking. We never had to go out at night.

LA: And did you live on base or—

Mike: On base.

LA: Okay. In the barracks, or did they have—

Mike: In the barracks. No, I didn't have special quarters. I bunked with the regular guys.

LA: Did you mind that?

Mike: No. There was, you know. Once you get to know somebody, it's your security blanket, you might say.

LA: Now, did you stay at Fort Sheridan from then on, or did you go anywhere else?

Mike: Oh, you want to know the rest of the places?

LA: Oh, yeah!

Mike: Well, it came to pass that the Cuban crisis, the missile crisis came. And not only did we stay in our Fort Sheridan, we were restricted to our barracks. Because we were a support team for a STRAC [Strategic Army Corps] unit. I don't know if you know what a STRAC unit is.

LA: Strategic Armed?

Mike: I'm sorry?

LA: Strategic. Is it, No. Tell me what it is.

Char: What is STRAC?

Mike: STRAC, still tough ready round the clock. And we were a unit that could be anyplace in the world in 24 hours. We were supporting vehicles. We were general automotive support, attached to I think it was the 84th division.

Char: Did you have to stay dressed for 24 hours?

Mike: We had restricted to our barracks, I don't remember if we had to stay dressed.

Char: Oh, I thought you told me that once.

Mike: We had to be ready. We had to be ready in like, five minutes.

Char: So you had a bag pack or something?

Mike: Yeah. We had our bags packed, we had everything packed.

LA: Now this is before my time. And I asked Charlie about this. Did you realize the gravity of the situation during the Cuban missile crisis? Were you scared? Because, like right now, to a lot of people, the wars seem so far away and surreal and, you know, it's just something on TV. But, would you remember what that was like?

Mike: I don't really think that we were all scared. I guess it was more of a pain that we were restricted to the barracks, and, restricted to, how should I say that? We couldn't go to the PX, we couldn't do any of our freedom type things for, it was a whole weekend, we were on from Friday night till Monday morning. Monday morning they called the, what do you call it, the alert off.

Char: What year was that?

Mike: Well, that had to be—

LA: '62?

Mike: '61.

Char: One?

Mike: Yeah. And then, when that was all over, then the Berlin crisis came. And we got orders to pack up everything. We packed everything from our dinnerware that we used in the mess hall, to the last nut and bolt for our vehicles. We loaded our vehicles on flat cars. We had, I would say two flat cars of conex containers. You know what a conex container is?

LA: Yes, I do. The square, really, really—

Mike: The huge boxes, yeah? And we put all our gear in there. All our supplies. Air filters, parts used to repair vehicles. In these conex containers. We locked down all of our vehicles on flat cars, and then they were shipped to a port in New York, where they were put on ships. And then we were. Let's see, how did we get to New York?

LA: Train?

Mike: Train. We were put on train and we were, you know, bussed or trained to New York. And from there we were put on a ship, USS Patches.

Char: Troop ship.

Mike: Troop ship.

LA: So you went through New York City?

Mike: Right.

LA: Ever been there before?

Mike: Yeah. I was there once before. But we weren't allowed, we didn't have any—

Char: You couldn't go anywhere.

Mike: Couldn't go anywhere. We were under military contracts.

LA: Wow. So you went, where'd you go?

Mike: Frankfurt, Germany. Well, we actually went to Bramahaven, and from there we were bussed to our TDY station, which would be Frankfurt. A little on the outskirts of Frankfurt.

Char: And the name of this troop ship was the Patches, and right around that time there was a song that had come out called Patches, My Darling, or something like that. So that really meant a lot to him.

LA: Oh, okay.

Mike: That brought back memories. Anyways.

LA: So, when you got to your station, outside of Frankfurt, did you set up camp?

Mike: No, we had military barracks that we stayed in. Which were not too bad. They were not the wooden kind they were a block—

LA: Like cinderblock?

Mike: Cinderblock type barracks, billets. Actually were pretty decent. I think there was I think a six man squadron. Six or eight. I can't remember the exact number.

LA: Okay. And then what happened.

Mike: And we were there three months, and we got orders to come back to the states.

LA: How was it there, during the crisis? I mean, did you stay on base? Or were you able to go—

Mike: No, we had pretty much freedom there.

LA: Really?

Mike: All we were doing is supporting vehicles. Vehicles were coming in for repair, and we had one of the newer shops in Frankfurt, or in Germany. And the rumor had it that Ford Motor Company had put up this building and had abandoned it for some reason. Which could be strictly rumor.

LA: Sure. So you came back?

Mike: So we came back to Fort Sheridan. Where I got orders to go back to Germany.

LA: Wow, okay.

Char: Just you or your whole unit?

Mike: No, just me.

LA: Why just you, do you know? Just a rotation?

Mike: Because they needed the six thirty four point one in Germany. In fact was just about, that's a little foggy. Anyways.

LA: What did you think about having to go back to Germany?

Mike: I didn't wanna.

LA: Why not?

Mike: Well, first of all, when we went over to Germany on the USS Patches, the first or second day out of port we hit a storm. And we weren't allowed on deck. The ship had just been taken out of mothballs, the food tasted terrible. We had powdered dried milk. Powdered eggs. Anything that can be powdered.

Char: Tell her the story.

LA: What story?

Mike: You don't have to put this down, but in the morning we got up the first day and it was, you know, I was in the front of the ship. So you heard that pounding. All night long, I didn't sleep worth a damn— **[End of Tape One, Side One]**

LA: I'll get it, yeah.

Mike: Okay, so we're standing there in a line about the fourth floor up, or something like that. I'm holding my head, and the guys are, everybody's moaning, "What a fricked up ship," you know. Food tastes like shit. All of a sudden we heard this (screams). Couldn't figure out what in the hell was going on. Man I hope they got something to numb this, you know, these stitches I'm gonna have. And all of a sudden this captain walks out. You could tell it was a captain, two bars on his shoulders. And he looked, he didn't look real good. So another guy came walking out and he says, "You know what happened to that guy? He had a boil on his penis and they had to lance it."

LA: (groans) Well we got a good laugh out of that. Okay. We don't necessarily have to put the second half of the story in, but I like the peaches—

Mike: Yeah, the peaches and the blood running down my arm.

LA: Cause somebody else was talking about, because, I don't know if it made it into the book, but eating on board ship, you know? The trays would go this way, and you'd have somebody else's tray in front of you, and then they'd come back.

Mike: Well, I never saw that. Because the eating galleys ran this way, they didn't run across.

LA: Oh, okay. Well, you know there are some fish stories.

Mike: So, I went back over to Germany.

LA: Did you go to the same place?

Mike: No. I went to Kaiserslautern.

LA: Okay. Do you know how to spell that?

Mike: K—

LA: K-a-i-s-e-r?

Mike: Let's see once, here?

Char: Did you take a troop ship the second time?

Mike: Darn it. Yeah, troop ship. The USS Gordon. And I think I was discharged from Kaiserslautern.

LA: Cause then it would be on your DD214, wouldn't it?

Mike: Well I actually discharged at New York, from New York. I saw it in here. Okay, just keep going and I'll—

LA: Okay, so, you didn't, how long did you spend in Germany the second time?

Mike: Nine months.

LA: Did you like Germany?

Mike: Yeah.

LA: I mean, like, to be there? Did you do any sight-seeing?

Mike: I toured Europe when I was over there. A friend of mine bought an old '60 Opal. '58 Opal. Fixed it up. And we went up to Norway because my buddy's--

LA: That's kind of a trip, isn't it?

Mike: Yeah. Oslo. Oslo, Norway. We took a month off and we went up to Oslo, where the land, we got up there and the land of the midnight sun. At ten o'clock at night or eleven o'clock at night, it was still light out. And it started getting hazy. And then at one, two o'clock in the morning, it started to get light out again.

LA: Man, that would be a really long trip. So, did you, what nationality are you? Did you go to where your family came from at all?

Mike: No, my family came from Luxembourg. And I did happen to, we did go to Luxembourg on the way back.

LA: Did, traveling in Europe, did people obviously know you were soldiers? Or, I mean, were you dressed in civilian clothes?

Mike: We were dressed in civilian clothes whenever we left. We didn't really use our military clothes anywheres.

LA: Was there a particular country that you thought was prettiest, or that you enjoyed the most in Europe?

Char: Austria. Austria? Salzburg?

Mike: Salzburg, Austria. Rome. Sweden. England.

LA: You crossed the channel?

Mike: Yeah, the English Channel, saw the white cliffs of Dover.

Char: He took many, many slides.

Mike: Rolls of pictures.

Char: Slides, in those days, that was cheaper.

LA: My dad had a ton of slides.

Char: We have I don't know how many reels of them.

LA: For Christmas one year I went through his slides and I took two of the pictures and I had them blown up. One of his ship, and then one that he had taken of formation of his planes.

Char: Wow.

LA: It's in the basement somewhere.

Mike: Oh, here, Kaiserslautern. K-a-i-s-e-r-s-l-a-u-t-e-r-n.

LA: Oh, I was one letter off.

Char: Good for you, Laurie. You're good.

LA: Missed the R.

Char: You're good.

LA: Okay. Did you see the Eiffel Tower? Did you see—

Mike: No, France, we just went into France to say that—

LA: We were there.

Mike: We were there, because the French, we heard the French were very unfriendly.

LA: My dad was there in the mid-eighties, and he said the same thing. He hated France.

Mike: Everybody warned us, don't go to France. And I don't think I ever missed it, especially now.

LA: So, did you know each other at that time? Did you have a girlfriend you were writing to at all? Because, like, Charlie said he got a Dear John letter when he went in.

Mike: Yeah, there was a gal. Then she stopped writing, and I never even got a Dear John. I really got screwed.

LA: I think it was Charlie who said, well maybe it wasn't him. Somebody said they thought they had a girl, and they came home and she was pregnant.

Mike: Oh, that couldn't have been—

LA: I don't think that was Charlie, that was somebody else, though. Like, recently that I interviewed, they told me that. No, it was a man that lives at the Brookshire. He

told me that one. Okay. So, were you, by this point, were you ready to get out, you had enough, you wanted to come home? Did they try and convince you to stay in?

Mike: Well, yeah. They tried to convince me. The commanding officer even talked to me. I mean I had three guys. Cause, I had a secret clearance. And I ran a section. They wanted me to stay in, and they promised me rank, and they promised me this, and that, and I says, "No," I says, "I want civilian life." Looking back, probably the best three years of my life. One of the best three years, I learned a lot. I enjoyed my work over there. I moaned and groaned a lot like the rest of the guys.

Char: Did you have any experiences on your trip, on your second trip over to Germany? The troop ship?

Mike: The troop ship, no.

Char: You stayed in the sick bay all the time, right?

Mike: No, when we, the first time that we went over on the USS Patches, we had a sergeant that went directly to the infirmary. He was on the ships before, and he got sea sick, so he went directly to the infirmary and that's where he stayed the whole trip.

Char: So you did better the second trip.

Mike: So, the second trip, I told ma, I says, "I hate to go, because," I says, "I got sicker than a dog." I didn't throw up, actually.

LA: It's like morning sickness.

Mike: Yeah, like morning sickness. The dry heaves. So ma went to our family doctor and got some Dramamine, and I slept the next trip over. Wherever I could I sat down, I slept. Everybody was complaining that they were so sick, and I was sitting there sleeping. Of course, the first time I forgot to tell you this, when we ate, the food was so terrible, most of the guys said the food tasted better coming up than going down.

LA: Oh! (laughs)

Char: Where was the experience you had with Newfoundland? Or was it Iceland? Was that on a trip home?

Mike: Oh, that was on our trip home from our first trip.

Char: You took a plane.

LA: Oh, you took a plane.

Mike: We took a plane coming back. On our first trip over there. I'll make it real quick.

LA: Oh, you're fine.

Mike: We got on a MATS, military air transport system, which was like a DC-9. And we got on in Rhein-Main Airforce Base, and we flew to, gee.

Char: Goose Bay?

Mike: No, no, not Goose Bay. We flew to Scotland, where we refueled. In order to refuel we had to get off the plane. An hour, hour and half later, we got back on the plane and went out to, taxied out to the runway, and all of a sudden we had to turn around and come back in. It was cold. And what happened is, the wings iced up. So they had to come out, deice all the wings, took another hour. So, we taxied out back to the end of the runway, got ready to take off, and all of a sudden we taxied back in. Everybody off the plane. Well, we all got off the plane, and they used so much fuel up during the taxiing and the de-icing, that they were low on fuel.

So, we finally got back on the plane and got up and then, our next stop was Goose Bay, Newfoundland. And there a guy came down the aisle, and he says "You all got upchuck bags in front of you, you're gonna need them. Because there's a sixty mile an hour wind we're gonna have to land in. We gotta land." So, the plane came down, and you could feel the plane go from one side to the other. It was almost like being in a ship. You could tell the pilot had a real struggle. And we finally got down. Refueled. Took off.

So, hey, we're getting close to New York. We're coming in. Hey, there's New York. And we circle around New York, and we circle around New York, and we circle around New York. And everybody's wondering, what in the hell is going on. Well the pilot says, "We gotta get rid of our excess fuel." Why do we have to get rid of our excess fuel? Well, one of our landing gears don't work. So after about an hour in the sky, then we finally made it back down.

LA: Wow! There's that one in the first book, I don't know if you read it, but it's Joe Jacubitz. He was flying on Rich International Airlines. It's really funny. And he said, it was a piece of crap plane, and he was, like, special forces. And he said, "So we kind of flew covertly, and we're looking at this plane wondering if it's going to get us in the air, and all of a sudden the pilot comes on the intercom," and he said, "He was kind of joking with us, you know, welcome to Rich International Airlines, you know, here's the temperature, here's the time, we're leaving from here. My name is Rich. And he kept talking." And he said, "All of a sudden we put two and two together, this guy owns one plane, and his name is Rich!" I'll show you the page. The plane ended up starting on fire in mid-air.

Mike: Oh, my goodness!

LA: Yeah, but it was just hilarious. And a lot of the stuff he told me I couldn't put in the book, cause it was, you know, confidential. So I said, "Well, let's just put the Rich International Airline story."

Mike: Okay, I gotta go back. Once, I'm not sure if it was Fort Sheridan or the first time we went over to Germany. But I did get a security clearance.

LA: Yeah, why did you get that?

Mike: I had to carry secret papers. From one place to another.

LA: Do you know what kind of secret papers?

Mike: No, they weren't, they were sealed envelopes.

LA: I know, you couldn't look at them. So you were a courier?

Mike: Courier, yeah. Special occasion courier.

LA: Just think of what you could have been carrying.

Mike: Yeah, who knows what I could've been carrying. I could've been carrying some love letters between two captains. And, you know, you don't know what was in that letter. It could've been something just to check to see if you were looking for it. And my mother writes a letter, "What are you doing over there, because people are asking about you, to find out, are you a citizen, are you a criminal or," you know, so.

LA: Well, when Doug's friend went in, the one that's in Alaska, the FBI interviewed people in around Port Washington. And he never talks about what he did. I don't think he did anything, but, you know.

Mike: Well, it's like me, I carried about four or five envelopes, and that was the extent of my-- But then when I got over to Germany the second time, I wanted to go to East, or West Berlin. And I couldn't go because I had a security clearance.

LA: Oh, wow. Okay. That kind of stunk.

Mike: Yeah, but, oh well. I went and did other things.

LA: Did you go to Oktoberfest?

Mike: No. That wasn't a big thing back in those days. I don't remember hearing of it.

LA: Did you like the beer over there?

Mike: Oh! Loved the beer. Loved the beer. Especially the boot of beer.

LA: Somebody else talked about boota beer.

Mike: Yeah, boot of beer. Do we have a little knick knack? That little boot? Well you know what a woman's boot, slipper looks like, one of those long slippers. Well, when you go to a guest house in Germany, they fill this up for you. And then you sit there and you drink it. And if you're a novice over there, everybody tells you to make sure the toe is up in the air. Well, that's the wrong way. Because once you get down to a certain point, and the air rushes into the toe, all the rest of the beer comes back and gives you a beer wash.

Char: I can't get it.

Mike: Well, she knows what it is. Sunday afternoons we used to go to this one guest house, and the people, you know, thought we were kind of neat because we spent a lot of money.

LA: Yeah. Okay. Any other stories you'd like to talk about.

Mike: Yes, I had, in my last nine months that I was in Germany, my section chief, who was, you know, kind of a drunk. In trouble all the time. So they appointed me section chief. And, we were on call basically 24 hours a day. And one night we got all cleaned up, sitting there watching TV at eight o'clock at night. All of a sudden the CQ comes along and says "Hey, you guys got a job at the motor pool." Which was across, I'm believing it was across Kaiserslautern. It was across town. I believe that. I don't remember exactly, and I don't want to stretch the truth. So, we got over there, and here's this great big 5,000 gallon transport. Aviation fuel. And the pump, or the water separator pump. It's some sort of pump, and I had it in my letters somewheres. They couldn't pump fuel out of this thing, pump it in. That's right, that's what it was. It was a auxiliary pump that was mounted underneath the tanker to pump fuel in helicopters. There was some big general coming in, and he, they needed fuel. And because they couldn't use this pump they brought it to our place—

LA: To try to fix it?

Mike: To try and fix it. We had no parts. So we went, we did the next best thing we could. We went into the, see, we were fuel and electric. And we went into the member pool part, went in there. And we appropriated a whatchamacallit. Meanwhile, this is not too bad, except we had guys with fire extinguishers standing there. Because this is highly volatile fuel, and least little spark you have it goes whoof! So, we were trying to figure out, and we were laughing about it,

are they trying to protect us or are they just gonna protect themselves when the fire comes. You just never knew. But anyways, that's I think that's the most exciting thing. I mean, kind of dull, as far as—

LA: No. No, that's kind of cool.

Mike: Things happening.

LA: When you came home, what did you do? Was it hard to adjust back to civilian life?

Mike: Absolutely not. No. I adjusted. The first day I adjusted. I was a little cocky at that time.

LA: Did you continue working as a mechanic? I mean did you get a job as a mechanic, or did you do something else?

Mike: No, I started out by going, working at Door Electric. Assembly line, and the balancing line. Then I went to Gehl Brothers in West Bend, did assembly there. Then I went to GM training center in Milwaukee for auto, for Oldsmobile, put it that way.

Char: Were you working in Moody's at that time?

Mike: No, I wasn't.

Char: Didn't know that.

Mike: I quit my job at Gehl, and went to school full time. If I had known that—

LA: Free?

Char: See I didn't know that.

Mike: Well, they didn't charge me anything.

Char: See, I thought maybe they'd send you there.

Mike: Well, they sent me there, but they didn't pay me anything.

Char: But you weren't working at—

Mike: I wasn't working there, so I wasn't getting any money.

Char: How long after that did you start at Moody's then. It was '64 or something.

Mike: Well, it was a three month course.

Char: And did you see the ad in the paper for Moody, or how did that all come about.

Mike: No, I bought my first car there. And I stopped one night, and I says, "Are you ever looking," and, "Yeah, it so happens we are." And they said, "Well, we even send you to school. But we won't pay you."

LA: It's like being a student teacher.

Mike: Student teacher, yeah. So, other than that—

LA: Do you want to go through your stuff?

Mike: Oh, yeah.

LA: Didn't you, your kids are in there?

Char: Yeah, I didn't get a chance to talk with them on it. I'll be seeing them this weekend.

LA: But I try and (unintelligible, cross talk)

Char: Okay.

LA: Two kids?

Char: Yeah, we have two, two boys, are oldest and our—

Mike: I also, oh, excuse me.

LA: You're fine.

Char: Marty.

Mike: When we were in Fort Sheridan I was a training NCO.

LA: Really?

Mike: Yeah, a training NCO and the reenlistment NCO. That was short lived. The training, or the reenlistment NCO. Cause they said, I believe it was two months that I was a reenlistment training NCO there was nobody that re-upped.

LA: That isn't a very good track record.

Mike: No, that wasn't a track record.

LA: You were on commission.

Mike: No, I wasn't on commission.

Char: Well, did they come in and say, well do you want to join, and they say no, and you'd go okay.

LA: That's fine.

Char: That wasn't something you were going to do.

LA: Were you discharged as a sergeant?

Mike: No. Spec 4.

LA: Spec 4.

Mike: My MOS didn't allow a Spec 5, otherwise I would have made Spec 5.

LA: Really? Why not? Do you know?

Mike: Because there was another, they didn't, it's funny how the Army did things. They only had, the six thirty four point one, their company only allowed you to get to a Spec 4. If you wanted to make rank you had to change your MOS into something else. It was kinda stupid. Here are some of the training, I got to make out the training roster for the day.

LA: Wow.

Mike: See, what else did I find?

Char: Your enlistment papers and all that stuff is in here.

Mike: Yeah, and here is the ordnance—

[End of Interview]