

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Karl Vorres

Conducted by Deb Barrett

August 31, 2005

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library
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(Note: Corrections made to original transcript by interviewee are noted in parentheses.)

Part 1: Introduction:

This interview is being conducted on August 31, 2005, at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Deb Barrett, and I'm speaking with Karl Vorres. Mr. Vorres was born on March 14, 1927, in the Hyde Park section of Chicago, IL, and now lives in Willowbrook, IL. He is a retired professor, scientist and researcher, most recently from Argonne Laboratory, and learned of the Veterans History Project from someone at the Genealogy Club here at the Library. Mr. Vorres has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project. Here is his story.

Part 2: Entering the Military:

Before you entered the military, what were you doing?

I was born in Chicago, but my father wanted to have an estate, much like his peers in Greece had. So he bought a farm in Michigan, almost a square mile. And I spent my sophomore, junior and senior high school years on this farm, six miles north of Fremont, Michigan, doing all kinds of dairy farm chores. And, as the oldest of three brothers, pretty much responsible for the work that was done there. My father continued to coach at the University of Chicago, so he would spend Monday through Friday, coming to the farm on the weekends only. As the oldest I was pretty much responsible, or charged with being responsible, for getting many things done.

I felt academically inclined. It only took me six and a half years to complete the first eight years of my grade school education. The teachers simply moved me ahead. I had spent the first year and a half of my high school time at Hyde Park High School. I then moved to Fremont and was encouraged by the teachers there, as elsewhere, to continue in academic fashion.

I realized, however, that our knowledge of farming was inadequate, and the kind of soil on the farm was not going to provide what is needed so that my tuition in college would come from what we earned on the farm. For that reason I wanted another way of getting tuition and expenses, realized that enlistment in the Army would provide just exactly what I was looking for, and so I signed up for two years. These records, however, were not adequately maintained, and I ended up with only about seventeen months of service.

So you said you enlisted in the Army. Why did you choose the Army?

It was best known. I didn't think I wanted to be in a ship which might have dire consequences if it sank. And I didn't really feel at that time that I wanted an Air Force career.

Where were you inducted?

I was inducted in Battle Creek, Michigan. And from there went to Fort Sheridan for the initial processing, let's say, before shipping off to basic training at Fort Knox.

What were your first days like after you were inducted? Was it what you expected?

I had no idea what this was going to be like. So it was all very new – reasonably organized, but the process was not clear to me, so I felt somewhat confused. But I felt, simply, if others could do this I could do this, too.

How old were you when you went in?

I was nineteen at the time. I had graduated from high school when I was seventeen. I had spent two years on the farm before enlisting in the service.

You said you were inducted in Battle Creek, then went through processing at Fort Sheridan and on to Fort Knox. Is Fort Knox where you had your boot camp?

I had my basic training in Fort Knox. Fort Knox is a place where they train you for tank operations. And our basic training consisted of a lot of general things that everyone would get. And, in addition: driving a tank, firing the canons on a tank and a variety of similar things.

How long was the basic training?

It was eight weeks. And I remember having one weekend break (laughs). The whole six guys could all see the folks again.

Did you get to go home during your weekend?

Yes. I hitchhiked both ways. Well, one way and I took the bus back.

I would say. From Fort Knox up to Michigan?

Yes, it was.

That was a long hitchhike! (laughs)

It was. But people were sympathetic to guys in uniform, so I made it.

So you were able to do that and get back in time.

Yes.

What do you remember about your basic training? Was there anything that stands out – good, bad or otherwise?

Well, it was a training in disciplines of various kinds. It was so different to have to put your clothes on a hangar and arrange them just so, so that every Saturday morning they would pass inspection and you would not find yourself doing other things like KP or other activities that those who were not able to learn quickly enough were required to do.

So there was some motivation there!

(laughs) Yes. They knew now!

Did you ever end up on KP?

Oh yeah. We took turns. Nobody got permanently stuck with it, but we all had to be trained. And they had arranged it so that you could take a turn at KP and also participate in the training.

Okay. What do you remember about your instructors?

They were of non-uniform capability. Some got my respect right away. Others, I realized, were in there for the long haul. They had found a place they were comfortable with that would take them regardless of their capabilities.

Okay. Did anything stand out as far as interactions with your mates – with your fellow soldiers there?

Yes. I had some good friends. It was easy to make friends, especially if you were reasonably out-going and not too shy. And I enjoyed a lot of these. But these were short-lived. At the end of the eight weeks we were dispersed. And a lot of them – most all of them – I never saw again.

Did you have free time?

In the evenings we had free time. And Fort Knox is a big old base with recreation halls, libraries and things like that, and movie theaters, so that a person could find reasonable entertainment to get his mind off of what was going on during the day (laughs).

So that's how you entertained yourself during the evening?

Yes.

Okay. Were you in contact with your family while you were in basic training?

Letters passed back and forth as they did for everybody. That was the only form of contact other than the one trip home I made.

So you had that one trip home. Did you get any kind of leave after your basic training?

Yes. When basic training was complete we got travel orders to go to the west coast – Pittsburgh, California, if I remember it – and the travel was a bus trip that was several days on the bus, getting off to eat and sleeping on board and ultimately arriving there. We spent several days in Pittsburgh and were told the troop ships would be leaving from there in the reasonably near future, and you will go up to Camp – let's see: maybe the one in Pittsburgh was Camp Stoneman – and we would go up to Fort Lewis near Seattle. And so we took a train. It was a night train – I can still remember the moon coming out and illuminating the landscape as we went. And I thought this is a pretty nice tourist thing to be able to do.

I spent a month at Fort Lewis waiting for the ship. That month was interesting because they didn't have much for us to do, but they needed to keep us busy. And so we could be assigned to KP or guard duty. And that got to be boring – not very fulfilling. And I realized or learned that the United States Air Force – I mean Armed Forces Institute – had all kinds of courses that people could take and get credit for. And I found out that I could look up at this large library like bookcase, and say I would like that book, and they would give it to me. And I would say, "I'd like to take an exam on this," and they would schedule an appointment for this.

So I looked and saw that there were five courses on automobile mechanics. I could take the first book, and if I felt I was a good enough student I could make an appointment the following day for the exam on that – which I did. And that continued until the fifth day and the last of these were taken and passed. And the sergeant responsible for my appointments and so on and guard duty, felt I had taken advantage of this as much as any right I had to expect (laughs). And I wasn't able to do that anymore. But I did have these on my record. And later, when I got settled in Japan, I was offered the job of supervising the motor pool on the basis of these credits.

I, at a later time, took a number of other courses – I think perhaps fifteen of these – and all of these were on my record. And those that were equivalent to college courses were on the record that I could present to colleges for appropriate advance credit. And I took advantage of that (laughs).

So when you were back in Seattle, and the sergeant decided after five days you had enough of that, what did he say to you? Or did he just tell them and they said ...

He wasn't very talkative. He just said, "I think that's enough," or words to that effect.

Okay. So what did he have you do instead?

KP and guard duty.

Not nearly as interesting! (laughs)

(laughs) Right! But I only had three weeks of that and found myself on the troop ship.

Now, was this a military troop ship, or one they had leased from some other source?

That kind of detail I did not know. I assumed this was a military ship.

This looked like a military ship.

It had nothing but bunks in it. It was not a luxurious cruise liner (laughs) or anything like that.

There were actually some that were leased for that. That's why I was asking. Do you remember the name of the troop ship?

No.

Where did you head on the troop ship?

To Yokahama. And after a number of days – I don't remember how many – we arrived in Yokahama. We were very glad to get there. The ship had some stormy weather to pass through. A number of the fellows "fed the fishes" as we would say. I was fortunate enough so that – I mean I didn't have the seasickness that others had. But not everyone made it up to the deck in time, and it was "fragrant" in an undesirable way onboard that ship!

So, other than watching other people get sick, what did you do? How did you, how did everyone pass the time on the ship?

We had things we could read. We had a movie theater on the ship and different groups of us could go at certain hours – the theater wasn't big enough to accommodate everyone. I think there could have been anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 men on that ship.

Okay. What was the food like when people were able to eat (laughs)?

(laughs) Well, I don't remember the food as much as I remember being served on this tray. And this tray stood on a platform and you had to hang on to the tray. Because as the ship moved back and forth...

The tray would slide (laughs)!

You might lose your lunch (laughs).

In more ways than one (laughs)! Did you have an assignment on the ship?

No. But if my memory serves me correctly, I had needed a way to earn some extra money – my parents were not able to send me money – and I had managed to get a pair of clippers and learned something about haircuts and barbering. And, so, they were short of barbers onboard. They let it be known that if there were barbers on board, they could practice their art. So I tried that for a while.

I was not very professional, to put it bluntly. And so it was not something I needed to continue. Though I was able to do this in college later (laughs) to make extra money, too.

It came in handy.

Right.

So. When you got to Yokahama, did they tell you what you'd be doing when you got there?

They told us that there were several divisions – bases – in Japan, in Honshu, the main island. One of the fellows there was a big strapping paratrooper there. And he gave a stirring talk about this elite group, that only special could handle this – sort of challenging us; “If you're a man, think about this. And by the way, your \$21 a month would be augmented with this \$51 a month ‘jump pay.’” He said the right words!

So, I decided I was man enough. I was willing to give it a try. I would sign up. And, in a few days, I found myself on a train headed north – going to where the paratroopers were dispersed to different bases where they would eventually train.

In what year was this, do you remember?

In 1946. All of my time was “occupational” duty. I never saw a combat.

Okay. You got on a troop train, you headed north, and what as that like?

It was very interesting because this area of Japan had been bombed a lot. I saw many what looked like factory types of buildings that were now only concrete floors and a few girders standing up. They had been damaged pretty ugly. Got to Sendai, which is a major city about two hundred miles north of Tokyo, also the home of Tohoku University, which is an interesting sidelight on my time there. That was basically the central location from which all of the paratrooper recruits were then sent to other places, and found myself sitting in a meeting with the trainload of troops there, and remembering that the man in charge – the officer in charge there – said, “Look to your right; look to your left.” One of the three of you is not going to make it through jump school training” (laughs). That was not very encouraging, but I figured if the rest of them could make it, I could, too.

I was then sent to a base in a small town called Chimachi, which had been a Japanese Air Force base during the war. This was a base that was now for a parachute field artillery. We were sent to there, and in about another month I went to the jump school, as we called it.

Back in Sendai – we were sent back to Sendai – and spent two weeks there. The first week, essentially the rudiments – what were the rudiments – of how to land. You didn’t need much training in how to jump, though that was important too, so people wouldn’t get squeamish at the last second. Basically we learned that we would jump, or depart the plane, out of an open door in groups of ten, called “sticks.” And before we were to jump, we were to check our chutes and then check the man in front and the man in back of us to make sure everything was okay. We didn’t have to pull any ripcords because we had a snap. There would be a steel cable and we would reach up and hook on this cable that went the length of the plane. And on command we would bail out, bunched up and going out just as fast as you could so we would be as close as we could be.

So you weren’t physically connected to each other, but you were just very physically close.

We were no closer than 100 feet, one to another. We were well spaced in the air and typically jumped from 1,000 feet, which is more than in combat which would be 500 feet. It would take us a minute to get down. We had to remember that people were targets when we were in the air. And you didn’t want to be a target any longer than you had to be.

What was your first jump like?

I was the first man out of the plane in my stick. I was glad. I looked out at the horizon. I did not want to look down because that could cause hesitation. And I

was given the command with a slap on the rear. And I went out. And in a few seconds I felt this great jerk.

The chute opened.

The chute opened. And I thought, “Thank God!” (laughs) What we do then is simply to check the chute to be sure it is okay. Sometimes, very rarely, there’s a malfunction and you can do something to correct this malfunction to see that it opens completely. It had opened completely and I was very grateful for that. And I executed a parachute landing fall as we were trained to do, got up and walked away very happily (laughs).

Did anyone ever have an accident in your stick?

One of the things you watch out for is somebody’s helmet bouncing near you or off of you. When that chute opens it jerks you quite hard, and if you have not properly attached the helmet you can lose it. And when you do this parachute landing fall, your head comes close to the ground. Without a helmet you could be hurt. I have seen malfunctions when the main chute did not open, and the person was coming down in trouble.

You also have a reserve chute on our stomach. The main chute is 28’ in diameter, the reserve is 24’. It gets you down faster but still survivable. That’s what counts.

Okay. How many jumps did you make in the school before you went out to do this for real?

Everybody had to make five jumps before you got your wings, which was the goal of this training. Then you had to make qualifying jumps at least every three months. I made a total of nine jumps in my limited time in the paratroopers. I think I only spent from February through October in Japan making jumps. There really wasn’t much demand for it. We didn’t do a lot of jumping as part of our training – it gets expensive (laughs). That has something to do with it.

How long did this school last?

One week of training and one week of jumping. Jumps were Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, depending on the weather and such things. And if things went very well you might get two jumps in on one day shorten the period.

What happened after the school? Where did you go?

Back to Chimachi. The very interesting part of that was that we went back to Chimachi, and an officer would take a look at the records of all the people. And I had taken what is called the Army General Classification Test in Fort Sheridan. And I got a score of 142. This is a number that by itself didn't have much meaning until one of the people on Chimachi told me this number is close to your IQ. Basically it said I had academic qualifications. The officer who had looked at all the records asked me if I would like to go to another place – Tohoku University – for six weeks training. I would be given college level courses. I would be given credit for this that would appear on my transcript and be useful for college entrance. Well, when I was asked this I said, “Well, gee, will I have to take KP and guard duty, too? I mean, this sounds pretty demanding.” He said, “No, you wouldn't have to take any KP or guard duty.” A micro-second after that I decided this was for me.

I see. “Pay me to be a student.”

That's right! Now, it was a U.S. Army officer that did the teaching. I took college algebra. I took Shakespeare, and I took some other courses. I was given an exam I passed with flying colors. So doesn't everyone take college algebra or Shakespeare in Tohoku University in the center of Japan? (laughs) I was very grateful for that. I think it reflects on my classification test score reflected that limited time I spent in elementary school.

And I was later asked if I wouldn't like to go to West Point and was given clear sailing for that, too. I declined that invitation because I had civilian goals in mind. I wanted to be a scientist – a chemist in particular.

So after that, how long were you doing the university courses then?

In Japan?

In Japan.

Just for six weeks.

Okay. And after those six weeks what happened?

During that six weeks they had enough volunteers so that we had enough people in our battalion to do training as a group. We didn't have enough when I got there, which was fortunate for me because that had provided me the opportunity for me to go to this six week training, teaching school.

So when these six weeks were up and you had enough people there to be a battalion, what did you do?

They looked at our scores again and put us in different things. And I was assigned to the group that was responsible for aiming the canons. And you do this by setting up a couple of tripods with compasses and so on, much like what surveyors use. And you identify your surveying position and the second surveying position and you can focus on particular targets and then focus on the different canons, essentially, and are able to give them the kinds of information they need to site on a particular target.

I slowly found I knew as much about geometry and trigonometry as the people who were teaching it. And I was told to teach the people responsible for this activity. I was given my private first class stripe and then my corporal stripe, and then a sergeant stripe – all within the eighth month when I was there.

That sounds pretty cool.

Even less than that, because this didn't happen until after I finished the schooling. So, yes, it was quick. But the officers there apparently recognized ability and would take advantage of it, which I was happy to do. (laughs)

And you were happy to oblige!

That's right! And I found it quite interesting, and benefited by it.

So you had a chance to do some teaching yourself, then.

Right. At an early age – nineteen. Well, by then I was twenty.

How long did you do that teaching?

I kept at this, let's say, until I left Japan. I was the battalion survey sergeant. That was my title.

Okay. While you were there, what were your living conditions like? Were you in barracks with everybody in one place, were they smaller barracks that were scattered?

We were in barracks. There were a number of barracks for our group. Let's see. Our company I guess you would call it, this company had 120 some people in it, and it must have taken five different barracks to hold that many. And we had single bunks in these and our own foot lockers to hold our miscellaneous small items, our individual little racks to hold our uniforms, and that was "home, sweet home."

What was the food like? Was it a mess hall type of situation?

Yes. One mess hall to serve a company, and we had one chief cook, let's say. And he would supervise what was done. And KP was one of life's experiences there, too (laughs). Not very different in many ways. You also served guard duty.

With your meals, did you have any of the Japanese food, or was it all American?

All American. I did have an opportunity to sample Japanese food. Toward the middle closing months we had a request to go through northern Japan, seeking previously undiscovered remains of men who had died in all of the Air Force types of casualties. So we were broken into little groups – a jeep driver, an interpreter/translator, and a person responsible for seeing that the individual meetings were held. So I was assigned the “person responsible” role. And we spent probably at least a week going through Japan, staying in Japanese hotels, visiting the mayors of the different towns. The interpreter would ask if there were any remains that had not yet been reported that turned up since the last time we were through. And nothing additional turned up. But at least we got to do this.

In the Japanese hotels we were fed Japanese food – that's all they had.

Right.

So I got to eat a lot of things I couldn't even describe! (laughs) But I got to eat a lot of rice (laughs). I was a little squeamish about some things, but that's all right. It broadened my education to be involved in their culture.

Since you had a chance to mingle a little bit with the Japanese citizens there, how did they respond to you?

Generally aloof. They'd just finished a war. They had been defeated. We were the conquerors.

If you wanted to go to a dance and dance with one of their girls, the girls didn't think anything positive about this. The guys weren't very happy. “Thanks, but no thanks.” (laughs)

So they basically put up with you.

Now, once in a while there were some exceptions. I think we had a weekend in a ski resort. That was an hour's drive from our base. And it was a hot springs, too. I had never skied in my life. But here was a chance to go to a ski slope and have this weekend and so on. And, so I got to mingle a little with some of these. And when you're all soaking in these hot springs it can be a little more informal.

But, then, there's this question about language. All they spoke was Japanese. Very few spoke any English. So the most I could do was learn a few words, like “ohiyu,” and “komichiwa.” And I learned to count (counts a little in Japanese) – I can still do this, and this is evident.

These are positive kinds of things, and I have nice memories of them.

Did you notice any difference when you were in the city versus more rural areas in how people responded?

In the more rural areas you really didn't have a chance to get to meet people. There was another larger town called Yamagata – maybe 10 to 15 miles south of Chimachi. And, apparently, because it was larger there were more troops in the area. And they had a Red Cross kind of thing there. You could gather in larger numbers. I think we celebrated Christmas or New Year's there.

But that gave us no opportunity, really, to meet people – to see people on the street or cross paths – there was not a great opportunity for social interaction.

Some of the fellows, I think, had a chance to meet some of the locals. I think the fact you might have had a carton of cigarettes and somebody in the family would appreciate cigarettes – feeding a habit – allowed a chance to meet and socialize and so on (laughs). And I know that happened.

All right. So, how long was this job you had of going out and looking for the remains?

That was a week.

That was a week. Okay. What was your next assignment there?

Well, that week was sort of taken out of that whole training period, when we were trying to learn how to do our individual jobs – like operate this transit so you can properly locate different things around you and a target. And then, to go out in the field and say, “Okay, there's a #1 on a billboard about a half a mile away, and there's a #2 on a billboard in a different direction maybe about three-quarters of a mile away.” The officers, then, would say, “Let's aim at that pine tree 100 yards to the right of #1 (laughs).” Sometimes the communication got garbled a little. “Oh, you want to shoot at the board #1. All right, guys let's get this all set. Guys, give the canons the information they need.” We also had to tell them how high – at what angle to raise the canon, so that the range would be right. And we kind of damaged billboard #1 (laughs). I guess our job was done a little too well (laughs). They got us to understand better what they wanted.

During the time that you were in Japan, other than these details when you went out to recover remains, did you go into the cities at all? How did you spend your free time?

I got two days of free time to go to Tokyo. But I can't remember what the reason for it was. But some related thing. I was planning to meet one of my high

school buddies while I was there. I know I traveled on the train. I got there. I looked around. I did something related to my military responsibility, and then I came back.

Free time was primarily on base. And I was busy with Yusaki courses, and taken a number of these.

I also was interested in photography. I was given – well, everyone on base, had been given a chance to put your name in a hat, let's say – to buy this press camera; then about \$200 for this thing – 3 ¼; 4 ¼, as I remember it, film size. And I thought, “Gee, I'd like this. I could take this up with me and take pictures from the air. And that would be neat.” And I did take this up.

We also flew in gliders. And a poor boy would have, in some cases, the mission of packing a glider with ten paratroopers and taking us someplace – cutting the glider loose and pilot landing in some appropriate place. So I got some pictures this way from the air. I got parts, and I had a dark room, and I would develop film for others for a fee and essentially process and print pictures. I had an enlarger, too.

I had a certain entrepreneurial streak in me, and a certain desire to bank a few dollars so that I might be able to buy my first car when I came back from Japan! (laughs) Money did not come easily on the farm. And I felt that I think it motivated me more than most other men who probably had a somewhat more affluent upbringing.

So you used your opportunities well to make a little bit ...

I identified my opportunities, acquired the necessary skills and then used them.

(Tape turns over)

Okay. We were talking about what your free time was like in Japan. You said you were doing some photography for yourself and using the opportunity to bring in a little bit of extra cash by developing photos for others there. Did you go to any shows? Did the USO come there?

The USO did come! And I think we had one or two shows while I was there. So that morale was kept up in this way. I can't particularly remember them.

The Red Cross, or some – it must have been Red Cross – had a couple of ladies there to be present in the recreation hall that we had. I know one of our non-commissioned officers, a career man, was keeping pretty steady company with one the ladies (laughs). But he was an honorable fellow, I think, when all was summed up.

So you don't remember any well-known people coming.

No. No Bob Hope's. But in the evening the fellows could go there. These were shows. There were books you could read and magazines. I think if you were bored, it was more that you were hard to interest than you lacked opportunity.

Were there any particularly funny or poignant, or special memories of anything that happened while you were there?

Oh, quite a few. But one thing I do remember is that I could go into our headquarters building for the company, and gain access to the typewriters that were in there. And one of my courses was "Teach Yourself Typing." And I think I got to the point that I could type 20 to 30 words a minute, which is a skill I have used for the rest of my life. And it puts another fringe benefit, but it shows that in the evening, when I had this free time – and I spent quite a bit of time with that particular skill – and as long as I left the typewriter in as good a condition as I found it, I got no trouble from anybody. So it was another fringe benefit.

Not everyone chose to use their time productively, but for those who had the inclination the opportunities were certainly there.

Other activities and memories.

I can remember that we had opportunities to go to the beer hall – whatever name it was given – and bend elbows. I got to know that all this 3.2 beer, less alcohol, more sobriety (laughs) was okay. I acquired a reasonable taste for this stuff, but never any overwhelming to go back for the fifth or sixth – one or two was quite sufficient for my needs and desires.

I can remember the skiing that I had – no teacher, but I learned that you can get up to a height and you can plow snow with your face initially – but you could get so that you could make it almost all the way down upright after enough tries. And Japanese skis are much shorter than U.S. skis. Just as Japanese men are much shorter and don't need ... (laughs)

It's proportional (laughs)

Oh, what were some of the other experiences.

Did you have any experiences with your fellow soldiers?

Well, we would go out on these training things in the nearby area, which was kind of mountainous, much like Tucson is. That is, you can look out and there are mountains in one direction, and there are mountains in another direction – this was kind of a valley area. And since I have lived half the year in Tucson I have come to appreciate that kind of topography much more (laughs).

Those are some of the special things. Probably more will come to mind as we progress.

Okay. Were you in communication with people at home? Did you get care packages, letters?

Care packages were not very common. Things were just not that necessary, and they were harder to ship. I got letters quite regularly – not only from my family, but high school friends, others.

You must have celebrated some birthdays.

Yes. I celebrated my twentieth birthday in Japan. That was March 14. I probably had finished jump school then. I was back in – let me think for a minute – I may not have finished jump school then. This may have been about the time that I was there.

Birthday parties, as we commonly celebrate them, don't exist. (laughs) You do the best you can. You get a few buddies and you might go and celebrate and bend your elbow a little bit, share a few stories.

Anything else happen while you were in Japan?

While I was in this school thing – this six weeks – it was then I got a chance to see some of Sendai and Tohoku University. And read about it. But this was a pretty good size school. Their dormitories did exist, and that's where we were billeted. Some of the rooms were used for classrooms.

The important thing about that is that I returned to Sendai many years later, when I had been involved in coal research and worked with the Argonne National Laboratory. And as part of that work, had developed a set of eight different coal samples for use by basic coal researchers throughout the world. Orders came in after we had developed the capability and made the samples, from different places doing basic coal research. And one day an order came in from Tohoku University, and I said, "I recognize that place!" And Professor Inoue had been doing the research.

So Professor Inoue was sent samples. And a few months later apparently the work had gone well and he ordered more samples. I don't know how many sets of samples I have sent over the years. And, so, I felt I had developed a knowledge of this individual.

We also, as part of the total work that basic coal researchers do, held significant conferences every other year in international sites – in Canada, in the U.S., in Europe – Germany, Holland, France, and on; England. In 1989 we held a conference in Tokyo. And after a week of conference activity we had also arranged for a trip north to have some more talks, to visit laboratories in the northern area, and Tohoku University was known for its work. A program was set up and I became the primary speaker for that. And I spoke to a group of world scientists, and also the Japanese students there, who listened very attentively and politely.

I met Professor Inoue in person. My wife and I were invited to his home, where he and his wife and their two sons were present and provided supper. I learned

that this is, literally, an unheard of experience – people are just never invited to the homes. To be honored or visited with you go to a restaurant. You don't get in the house! (laughs) But I learned this. I learned that the two sons were very quiet during the evening. They had taken English, they were tutoring others in English, but their father the boys to hear a native English speaker speaking the language so that they could test their language capability.

I also had another very interesting experience. Because, in our time there, there was a major earthquake off shore. We were in the sixth story of a hotel. We woke up in the night feeling this rocking back and forth. At first I thought it was part of a dream, but when I awoke it was still there. (laughs) And I realized that the whole building was rocking, and had been engineered so that it could withstand what I hoped was an indefinite period! My wife and I both figured we were very fortunate to have the experience that we could tell about it later! (laughs)

Let's go back a minute to when you were in Japan in the Army. You had done all this work, you had done all this training. When it was time to come home, what happened?

Apparently the leaders of our organization received word from higher up that people were going to be discharged early. For the draftees this was very good news! But those of us who had planned on a certain amount of service time to get a certain amount of college time, this is something we viewed with mixed emotions (laughs). But, they weren't going to change their plans because of my plans and desires (laughs), so I had to sell my camera – actually, I didn't sell my good camera – I had to sell my darkroom equipment. And that was a little tricky. I couldn't sell it while I was still there – I had to put it into the hands of someone else with a promise (laughs) that he would send me the proceeds.

Why couldn't you sell it while you were there?

Well, there were enough people leaving that the buyers were relatively few. And the relatively few didn't see much of a market, and so on. It turns out I never did see anything of the proceeds for it (laughs).

You mentioned you had returned home early and you had mixed emotions about this. And you mentioned something when we were off line about going to your sergeant and talking about this?

Yes

Could you tell us about this?

I told the sergeant during my basic training days, when I learned that I was essentially only signed up for eighteen months instead of twenty-four months, that my

records were not right, and I needed this twenty-four months in order to get a full four years of college training. And I wanted him to do something about it. And he looked at me with a very straight face and said, essentially, “Shut up! You don’t know how lucky you are! Don’t bother me.” End of conversation (laughs). Well, I guess I really shouldn’t object too much in retrospect. But I did have some concern.

So, you knew you were going to be discharged. How did you get back to the States? And where did you end up going for that?

Well, I went back to Yokohama – possibly Tokyo; my memories of that are a little indistinct – and got on a troop ship again. I have pictures of that.

Do you have the name of the ship?

No. I did not learn the names of these ships, and I’m not sure they were very evident. But it was like my trip over. There were a lot of others like myself wearing the same kinds of clothes and wanting to get back and all looking forward to it. I was looking forward to a chocolate malted (laughs). I hadn’t tasted one for a long time – not before Japan. And this was one thing I did miss.

We went back. It was a relatively uneventful trip – a little of the same kind of rocking ... (laughs)

Same kind of reactions? (laughs)

And I fortunately did not suffer any seasickness. But others did. And I can remember our first visions – sight, really – of the Golden Gate Bridge. We all cheered and knew this trip was about over. Troop ships are not fun ships, but they get the job done.

Where did you end up going for your discharge?

It must have been Camp Stoneman. And processing there was processing there was fairly swift and efficient. I think it took about a week and I was a civilian again.

During that week that you were there, what kind of activities did you have?

Oh, a variety of paperwork things. I don’t think we were given any more immunizations. (laughs) I do have memories of that! Now that I think of it.

Basically it took a while just for everything to be checked and double checked to be sure it was correct. We were paid (laughs). That, by the way, is something that didn’t happen until I had been in the Army about three months – they were just always behind. And I was writing home to see if the parents could spare a couple

dollars (laughs). But there was nothing very eventful that stands out while I was there.

So after you were discharged; do you remember how you felt when you were discharged?

Elated. I was able to go into San Francisco, which was close by, and buy a civilian suit! I'm not sure my tastes were very well educated, then. The feeling with having civilian attire. (laughs)

You bought a suit a twenty-year-old would pick out.

Yes. (laughs)

How did you get back home?

By bus – Greyhound. It was something I was familiar with, I knew it would get me there – I used to get across the country – and would get me to my home town and, that's what I wanted.

Did your parents know you were coming back? Had you called them or written them?

No. I wanted to make it a surprise (laughs). And I think I had not written about this. I'm a little a fuzzy again as to exactly what I did. But it was kind of a surprise to them. And the last day or so I think I contacted them to come pick me up at the bus station.

How did they react when you told them where you were?

Very happy! (laughs) Yes. Surprised.

So, what was it like when you got home? Did you take a little time to relax? Did you go back to school? Did you go to work?

I arrived in October – end of October or beginning of November. On the farm – there was work to be done on the farm – I did that. I milked cows again (laughs) and the other things with them.

I had gotten in touch with Michigan State, was accepted and enrolled. Winter quarter started right after New Year's, so I went there.

One of the things that I did a day or two after I got back was locate and buy a car! (laughs) I now had my own wheels! I felt independent.

What kind of car was it?

I bought a '39 Ford. And it was not in the greatest of shape, and it had not been nicely treated, let's say, but it was viable on my budget, and for that reason I was happy to own it. I could drive to Michigan State with it.

So you got your Bachelor's Degree at Michigan State?

I got my Bachelor's and Masters degrees there.

In what areas?

In chemistry. Bachelor in Chemistry and Masters also in Chemistry. Inorganic chemistry was my specialty for that. The chemistry itself only had the general degree in those days. I found that my GI Bill did cover me, because I was able, with the credits I had and the policy that Michigan State had. Let's say, if you take our basic courses, which run three quarters, and you get an "A" in the first one, you will be given the option of taking a final exam for the whole year. If you goof that up you will get the goofed up grade for the whole thing, or, if you get an "A" on it, you will get the "A" for the whole thing. I studied an average of 1 ½ quarters for all of those and I got an "A" in every one. So I could learn something about cramming. I did well academically.

I was President of the local honorary society. I was named the Outstanding Senior in Chemistry. I have access, I think, to favors, let's say, because of the academics and things I could do for that department. I got good recommendations for graduate school – that helps, from the department chair – and I could use it later. All of things were very beneficial. And I think if one applies himself that he can do very well.

I felt the need for a little more financial resources. My brother said to me, "I'm going in the Air Force." He's two years younger than I. "I have this brand new Ford. I'm not going to keep up the payments. If you will keep up the payments you can have it." The GI Bill doesn't really stretch that far. So I became what is called a "dormitory resident assistant:" a person responsible for a number of the rooms on a given floor. And I had my room and board paid for. So now I could use the room and board money to pay the car. And so I bought the car, essentially, and had pretty nice transportation. (laughs) Wow. I think I gave the wrong image to those who would see this – here's this guy with the new car.

So you went straight through from your Bachelor's to your Master's?

Yes.

And then what did you do?

I went on for my PhD.

At Michigan State?

No, at the University of Iowa. The head of the department at Michigan State recommended this. I got a scholarship – a fellowship – and that basically provides enough money for you to live on. And by the way, I received my Bachelor’s Degree, and I was a bachelor for two more days and my “bachelor” status changed to “married.” (laughs)

Did you meet your wife at the school?

Yes. Blind dates. Things have a way of growing. And so, after a couple of years of courtship and dating and so on, we got married. And by the time I had gotten my Master’s Degree, we were just a month shy of having our first child.

There was an interlude when I went to the University of Southern California, also on a fellowship, I ran into some problems with an examination that you take prior to this. For reasons I do not understand, I did not pass that and was told “you will not get a PhD here.” The department head at Michigan State said go to the University of Iowa – they’ll fix you up with a fellowship, which they did. I shall be eternally grateful to that department head!

In two years I got my PhD – record time for that – and was given a teaching position there.

So you started out at the University of Iowa.

Right. And by that time we had four children. (laughs)

So you were married, four kids, you were teaching at Iowa State, I’m sorry – University of Iowa. But you didn’t stay there, then.

No. I went then to – while I was teaching, my professor for whom I had worked was on a two year sabbatical. I’d never heard of anyone getting two one-year sabbaticals back-to-back. He spent a year in Australia and a year in Europe. I never heard of anything like that. He wanted to have his job covered while he was gone by someone he could have confidence in. Apparently I filled the bill. But he wanted his job back when he returned.

I had gone to an American Chemical Society meeting and had met a person recruiting faculty for the University of Miami. I met him at breakfast. We chatted at some length, and essentially I was offered and accepted a job there. I taught for two years at the University of Miami, teaching a group of graduate students, as well as courses at the graduate and undergraduate level.

I was offered a faculty position at Purdue University. Its reputation was somewhat more attractive and desirable. And so I accepted that, and was on the faculty there for three years. I wrote some papers, but not enough. And they said tenure would not be forthcoming. And I said, okay, I would resign. And I did that.

I accepted a position as a consultant for a company named Babcock and Wilcox. I was well known to them, and they offered me a position to head their chemistry research at their research center, and also their combustion research. I became their manager of this research, and had that position for a total of ten years.

In the later two years of that time, I was also asked to go to Washington D.C. to see if I could bring back money so that the grants that could be attained could finance some of the research they were doing.

At that time, another organization learned of my activities and said, we'll make it more worth your while if you come and work for us, and we're in Chicago. That would mean coming back to my birthplace.

The research center for Babcock and Wilcox was in Alliance, Ohio – a city of 26,000 at that time. And I was supposed to raise a family but liking some of the amenities of Chicago.

So I was interviewed, was offered a position and accepted it. And I spent a year's time going back and forth to Washington bringing back money. And I was quite successful at that. And bringing in the Atomic Energy Commission, and then the Energy Research and Development Administration and then the Department of Energy, because these different names are given to successive versions. I spent eight years with the Institute and brought back money as Congress would appropriate it.

What was the Institute?

The Institute of Gas Technology in Chicago. Then, Congress figured the country doesn't need coal research. We're getting plenty of oil, and energy is not a real concern any more – we have other things to put money into. So they slashed the funding, which meant there was no money for me to bring home. And my job of bringing money home, essentially, was useless. So we parted good friends with the company, and I learned what being unemployed was like.

But I had known knowledgeable influential friends who said, "There's a job at Argonne National Labs you should apply for, and we'll put in a good word for you." And the first day I could legally do the interviewing I was there. It took a few more months and I got the job. I owe a debt of gratitude for it, but it helps to know many friends and being influential.

My years in these other jobs, and my years of being an active member of the chemists and field chemists division of the American Chemical Society certainly helped in that. It helps to be part of an organization dealing with or concerned with your professional specialty.

So, Argonne is actually where you retired from.

Yes. I spent fifteen years at Argonne. And the first two years we built a very unique, huge enclosure called a _____ which, if it were in a straight line would be 40' long, would be 13' tall and 4 to 6' wide depending on where you were in it. In processing coal, we would go to a coal mine, people from

the US Geological Survey would certify that this particular spot in this mine is typical of this type of coal – not all coals are the same. They vary very widely according to their qualities and properties. We wanted eight very different coals to be representative of the kinds that were important to people in this country. So I made trips to eight different places once this facility was built. We would go underground into where the mine was where they had freshly opened up a site, where people from the Geological Survey would say, “Yes, this is okay.” You could, you know, reduce it. And we had stainless steel drums we brought underground, and we would fill these drums with coal, take them up to the surface as quickly as possible, and enough drums so you would have a ton of this coal. That’s what typically happened with the drums. At the surface these drums would be loaded into a special semi that had been hired for the job of getting it to Argonne. In the semi I put cylinders of argon gas, so they could displace all the air that was in it so that oxidation, which would change the coal, did not happen. At Argonne we would process this. And these samples became available, that’s how I met Professor Ioué.

Back in Japan

Right.

Okay. You told us about that a little bit later. So, you kind of came full circle in your military experience, too.

I had one other experience that I thought I might relate because it was meaningful to me.

When I was ready for my ninth jump, I realized this was the last jump I would be scheduled to take. And, therefore, if I ever wanted a picture of what it was like to jump, I would have to take my camera with me. But, if I take my camera with me, I’m going to have to be sure that I have it so firmly strapped on to me that it wouldn’t come loose while the chute opened. (laughs) So I very carefully wrapped it around my reserve with a leather strap to get it there. As soon as my chute opened, I got my camera out and I was able to get seven or eight pictures of my canopy opening up. And the other fellows in my stick, the group of people coming out. And those pictures are very meaningful to me. They were unique. And I’ve treasured them among the slides that I have.

Since you’ve been back in the civilian world, have you been in contact with anybody that you’ve met in the military?

No, I haven’t. One day at Michigan State I was entering a building, and it was – the last name was Kelly – from the group that I was in, in Japan. And it was just a come-and-go and that’s it.

Okay. Did you join any veteran’s organizations?

No, I didn't. I was so involved in getting my schooling in and other things that were a part of what followed – my teaching profession and so on. I've been very active in a variety of civic things. There literally wasn't time.

How did your military experience impact your thinking, your life? What impact has that time had on you?

It had many impacts. It did discipline me, or teach me discipline. To this day I still line up my clothes in the closet, just like I did in the barracks (laughs). That's only one of certain organized things that I do.

The organization of things essentially become very important. And I've used this in becoming a manager, and I've taught management courses to others. This kind of thing that got me into it, that's an outgrowth of the Army, really. I think the Army is, how shall I phrase it, a good experience – it's good for you, whether you like it or not (laughs)! Like castor oil!

Is there anything we haven't covered in this interview that you'd like to express before we go off record?

I think we've done it pretty well.

Okay. Well, in that case, thank you very much for sharing your story.

You are more than welcome!

We're going off record now.