

**Kevin Kilduff
Veteran**

**Interviewed by
Rome Free Academy H.S. Rome, NY
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Interviewer: **Q**
Kevin Kilduff: **KK**

Q: State your full name.

KK: Kevin Andrew Kilduff

Q: When and where were you born?

KK: January 30th 1949, the Bronx, New York.

Q: How would you describe your childhood?

KK: I grew up in the Bronx till I was almost ten years old, and it was a lot of fun. I came from a good family, a loving family and I was going to some good schools and then we moved. I was one of seven children, I have six sisters I was the only boy and then in 1958 we moved up to Rockland County, New York. New city and that's where I spent the rest of my childhood.

Q: How did you feel about the conflict in Vietnam before entering the service?

KK: The way I recall it there was some, was very mixed feelings. I was the son of a world war 2 veteran who had spent time in a prison of war camp and that was kind of as Tom Brokaw's said that was kind of the, you know, the greatest generation. Those guys kind of just did what our country asked. So now I was kind of brought up with a lot of that, you know, do what your country ask of you but the year before I went into the service I lost a very good friend of mine. Killed with the 101st Airborne out at the A Shua Valley in Vietnam at a place called Hamburger Hill and there was a lot of anti war protests going on back here at home at that time, 1970 and so as I said a very mixed feeling. I felt a stronger obligation to do what our country asked of me and that was to go into the service and eventually go over in Vietnam.

Q: How did you feel about the protestors and draft dodgers?

KK: Well the draft dodgers, to be honest with you, I had no respect for them. I thought that they were, a lot of the number was what I would call conscience of convenience. That was a very cowardly way to go there were probably other things they could have done rather than, as I've heard it's kind of a twist on the acronym, ROTC, it was like running off to Canada. So those folks I had no respect for. Some of the anti-war protestors I also thought it was a little conscience of convenience but some of those folks might have been more of a genuine opinion and you know I had a little bit more respect for them but not a heck of a lot.

Q: When did you enter the military?

KK: June of 1970

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist voluntarily?

KK: I enlisted. I was probably going to be drafted and I went and saw a recruiter so I would have a chance at a school I thought maybe I wanted after I got out of the service. I wanted to get into law enforcement as a career, and so I enlisted so I would get the Military Police school which I did get.

Q: What did your family think of you entering the military?

KK: Well I know my parents were a mixed emotion because of some of the prior reasons I stated. I know they felt the same way but again it was, you know, that they were of the generation of world war 2 so if this is what your country asked of it you have an obligation to your country and you know they reluctantly you know felt it was what I should do. So yeah they pretty much backed what I should do.

Q: What branch of service did you go into?

KK: I was in the Army the Military Police.

Q: What training did you receive?

KK: I did the basic training, you know, that every enlisted man gets. I did mine at Fort Dicks, New Jersey and then advanced school was at Fort Gordon, Georgia and I spent eight weeks at training. I was held over the two extra weeks down there for background clearances that eventually led to a top secret crypto clearance. So I spent ten weeks at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

Q: Do you have any specific memories from your time at basic?

KK: That it was very, I did it in June and years before for a number of years I had gone to the jersey shore in the summer and had some very nice memories of the sand and the beach at Jersey. Fort Dicks, New Jersey was at what they called the pine barons and I had to come away from the with another version of jersey and the sand and the summer so that was different form being at the jersey shore.

Q: Where were you first assigned to?

KK: When I got my orders out of Fort Gordon, out of MP school, I was sent to what was called ARV, United States Army Republic of Vietnam and further orders came down to military assistance command of Vietnam, which was headquartered in Saigon. So I went through Oakland Army base and went, I believe they were calling it the northern route, we went through Anchorage, Alaska, into japan, I believe it was Skoda, Japan and into Bien Hoa in [unclear], I'm sorry it was Bien Hoa we landed in outside of Saigon. November of 1970, I went over with three other guys I trained with.

Q: Where did you spend most of your time during the war?

KK: Pretty much in the Phu Bai Way area, which was in what was called I-Corps, the northern part of South Vietnam. A bit, I believe we were about eight kilometers, eight to

ten kilometers south of the city Wai, along highway one was pretty much where I did most of my service was in the Phu Bai area.

Q: What were your specific duties or skills as a soldier?

KK: A lot of what we did was security work, we were assigned, until the top secret crypto clearance's came down, we were assigned basically to do convoy and security work that entailed going out possibly along highway one, basic guard duties on convoys. We did things of a similar nature around what was called the Phu Bai Combat Base. There were watch towers, bunkers, internal and external security patrols in jeeps. It was pretty much of a security nature. When the clearances came down I was assigned to the 138th Aviation Company, which was part of the 224th Aviation Battalion. They did basically spy in the sky stuff for the Army Security Agency and we were the security detachment for that. There was, most the crew, there was five men out of that unit.

Q: Did you ever go into combat?

KK: Not what I would say close combat by any means. At one point along highway one we were ambushed and kind of, our convoy was stopped, there was a whole bunch of shots fired, into the distance probably six eight hundred yards away. That was probably the closest I came. I know I took in some shots there were a bunch of tracer rounds going in and we all kind of shot in that direction. Did I kill anybody I seriously doubt it I suspect I tried as much as everyone else in the convoy. We took some harassing mortar and rocket fire on occasion and you know that was scary moments with that. I was blessed that not much in the way of combat.

Q: What was the weather like?

KK: The weather was either extremely hot or extremely wet. We were relatively close to the sea so I suspected it wasn't maybe as humid as it was in some of the other areas of the country but when the monsoons came it was usually four to five months in the area where we were. You could be, you know, hip deep in mud that was literally the case

Q: How did your equipment function?

KK: For the most part 1970 and 71 they were originally coming out with night vision goggles that weren't particularly good but just about everything else we had at that point, I know there had been some prior problems with the M16 rifle and those were pretty well worked out by the time I got in country and so I didn't see any jamming problems with the M16 at the time I was there and most of the other stuff we had was, you know, we all felt pretty comfortable and that was reliable.

Q: What were everyday activities like for you?

KK: That could depend on, there were times where, you know, we were doing some security stuff and if you were scheduled to do night security thing it would be different, obviously, than the day stuff. Usually it was 12 hours on 12 hours off, you know. Occasionally you would get a day off if you did that you could go to a PX. Most of the guys would just lounge around the Quonset hut you know and try to relax and kick back. There were enlisted men's clubs and you could get yourself a beer or there was ration. We did have, you could get cigarettes and bottles of booze on ration cards but if you

wanted you could probably drink yourself into a stupor but that was kind of frowned upon but it was, you know, it was something that could be done.

Q: Were you ever wounded or ill during your service?

KK: While I was in service no. I came down with an Agent Orange condition afterwards and I get disability from the government for the Agent Orange condition. That's the foliage that was sprayed and we were in an area that was pretty heavily sprayed so yeah. I am one of the guys that's had to deal with some of that.

Q: You mentioned earlier about the Tet offensive, how you weren't apart of it but there were, you had events related to that?

KK: Well Tet comes once a year. Its basically I believe the Chinese new year and usually like the end of January or beginning of February, you know and I believe the year I was there we took some, we might have taken some mortar rounds but we were using up all the ammo that night particularly we had what was called the mad moment just to let, using up the old ammo that was expired and kind of letting Charlie know that this was not the night to come around us because we are ready for you. That's my recollection of pretty much of Tet. We were fortunate in 1970 and 71 that nothing serious happened the worst Tet was in 1968 when they tried over running a lot of different bases and you know a lot of the guys that were there would tell you that was not a fun time to be in South Vietnam.

Q: How did you feel about U.S. involvement in Vietnam?

KK: Personally I don't think we had a real focus on what our mission was and you know a lot of other wars we went out to win it. A lot of us felt that wasn't the case in Vietnam that we were kind of playing for a tie. You know that I think its American culture that we get involved in something we want to win and you know we felt from some of the things I saw, I didn't think that the South Vietnamese were very energetic and their own defense. We were stationed near the South Vietnamese basic training unit and the way they conducted themselves was sloppy as the devil and we didn't have a great deal of respect for the way they trained or the way they operated and we felt that we were laying our lives on the line out here, they could be putting a better effort into it and you know that was the way a lot of the guys in my unit felt.

Q: Would you draw any comparisons between the Vietnam conflict and the war in Iraq today?

KK: Some better ones. I think the country learned hopefully from what happened in Vietnam that while policy itself, that generates out of Washington, that rather than a lot of us had some tough times, if you went back to college like I did or a number of the guys did that came home from Vietnam, there was a lot of trash conducted toward individual service men or returning veterans and I don't think that's the case today. I think the country is pretty much respecting the efforts of our troops our young men and women over in Afghanistan and Iraq while people may not agree with the policy or what the president is doing. I think they at least have a better grasp that they should respect the service men and women and the veterans and maybe we did learn something from Vietnam in that regard.

Q: What were your relations with fellow soldiers and officers like?

KK: Well in particular the guys, the few guys I went over with and one other guy you know, we knew we were looking out for each other. Come hell or high water you know, I suspect most guys will tell you that. Mom and apple pie were not really considerations. You were looking out for the guys that you were with and they looked out for you, you know, that's just the way it was. The officers for the most part, I didn't have a problem with them. They were particularly, when I was assigned to the aviation unit a lot of the pilots are probably a little less what we would call strack, they were a little looser than the real super decorated infantry officers or something like that. They were a little easier to deal with. Most of the time we were surrounded by the 101st airborne, we worked with them a lot and they were officers that were very professional so you know. They were something we respected and you may not agree with them but you respected them. Any of the NCO's I saw some of them maybe drank to much but for the most part they did their jobs and they were pretty good people.

Q: Did you have any problems with drugs or misbehavior among soldiers in Vietnam?

KK: Any MP unit we saw, our unit because we had top secret crypto clearances we were tested occasionally on the golden flow test. It was basically urine analysis to make sure nobody doing anything but there was a major drug and particularly marijuana and heroin problem in 1971 over there. Yeah that was undeniable and I saw some guys who used marijuana but I never saw anybody. We did in fact lockup of Vietnamese mama son who was trying to pass heroin on to a G.I. and we did in fact arrest her. She had a pretty good quantity of heroin on her but there was marijuana users for sure and there was definitely heroin users.

Q: Did you turn her over to the Vietnamese?

KK: What happened is we hand her over to the kind of be like a street cop handing her over to the detectives. We handed the lady in question over to the criminal investigation division who were kind of like the detectives of the Army. They in turn because she was a civilian, a Vietnamese national civilian, she was handed over to the Vietnamese National Police who didn't handle her very nicely form what we heard and were told. So you know.

Q: Can you explain what the top secret crypto clearance was?

KK: Top secret crypto clearance is, there's a series of different levels, I think top secret crypto was probably fourth or so in line. It means, you know, I think it started secret than top-secret and I think there was one between but what it means is that you have authorization to be accessible to certain intelligence level different types of information. Now we as the security detachment, the people that were in our outfit were basically doing radio and voice analysis of different things. Intercepts on Ho Chi Minh trail in the southern part of North Vietnam. We as the MP detachment had no need to know exactly what they were doing, we just had the need to know that nobody was mishandling information on our side or that anything was being misplaced or handled according to best practices that were in place.

Q: Do you remember any cases where there was a mishandling?

KK: to be honest with you what would happen was occasionally some of the crews that would come back and there were special things on these planes, we would occasional have to do sweeps of these planes these being U8s and U21s and the usually four to five people on them, some messages or equipment was left on them and it shouldn't have been left on them. In practice you were supposed to report it up the chain of command. Generally you kind of try to grab the guy on the side and say hey come here, you might want to grab ahold of this or you know, this was, you might want to go back and check what's up, you know. So generally these guys were generally friends of your and you know it was generally one of those things we didn't want to go and get their chops busted but we did make sure it was take care of but we probably didn't go up the chain of command sometimes the way we probably should have.

Q: Were there any events that stuck out to you as particularly interesting or inspiring?

KK: I would say just more than anything the comradery of the people and the people from all over. I met folks from all over the country, you know. It was a learning experience. For instance one of my very very good friends was a fellow by the name of Harold Eugene Pratt. HE is from Bonaparte, Iowa a small area of Iowa I believe it was in the southeast corner of Iowa and they would send us, once a week it was a small-town paper and it was classic small town Americana. So we would all sit around probably have a beer and listen to him read how Mrs. Jones cat was taken down out of a tree by 4-h club or something. I'm exaggerating but it's kind of the way things went or whoever had the biggest pig at the 4-h fair and then guys like us from the New York or guys from the west coast, California or Chicago would be laughing our tail off because this was stuff we never saw but now we were young guys 20-21 years old. Now we were seeing guys from around the country and it was a nice group of guys.

Q: When did you leave Vietnam?

KK: In December of 1971, I was over there for 13 months.

Q: could you explain some of the items you brought in and how you received them?

KK: basically most of the ribbons here, I wish I could remember what they, they're pretty much either campaign ribbons or unit citations. I believe there is one in there is the Army Commendation Medal and I think that was, if I remember correctly that was probably for grabbing the woman with the heroin, if that's what that was. We had some unit citations that I didn't bring with me. This is basically the MP Broussard, I forget what it was called, what's the MP shoulder piece. That's basically myself as a young G.I. This is the soldiers handbook that, this book here is from Fort Dicks New Jersey and it's basically the infantry training pictures of our cycle going through it. The bayonet back there and the scabbard is, I believe that is one from our arms room. I think it might have been on an M14 and these other badges here are just, I think one might be expert on the rifle and the I think other might be pistol sharp shooter. I don't have my glasses with me so. The other one is kind of a jungle hat there with a few notations on it, where I was, my nickname, I was called Duff and when I was in Vietnam and this is the military police miniature badge on it. So that was just a picture of myself in my Chief of Police uniform with Senator Hilary Clinton.

Q: How was your life affected by your wartime experiences?

KK: Well I'll tell you. It made me you know kind of appreciate the good things here in the United States. Vietnam was a third world country you know it was a war ravaged country. Basically dependent on an agricultural society pretty much. So when I got home here it was god bless America and I was very thankful to be American. I guess also it probably put a sense of discipline and appreciation in my life, you know and got me focused on a career in law enforcement which was went into for close to 31 years.

Q: Had law enforcement been an interest for you yet?

KK: It had my grandfather, my cousin, an uncle were all in it before and a couple of friends of mine were entering it when I went into the service which was why I asked for the Military Police.

Q: Had you been drafted you probably wouldn't have been able to enter the military police?

KK: The way it was going for the most part I mean you were given a whole battery of tests when you went into the military and I was offered warrant officer school, special forces school and OCS school, officers candidate school but all of those required another two or three years enlistment and I was half engaged when I was in the service, so I was in love. So I wasn't going to stay in.

Q: Do you still have any relations with any soldiers you met over in Vietnam?

KK: Yeah. One in particular, The fellow from Iowa. The other guys, the other three guys that I was very tight with, he has spoken with one of them but to this day if I got a call from any of the four guys I was tightest with, if they needed help I would do whatever I could for them.

Q: your service affected any decisions later after you got out?

KK: Oh yeah. I was, it was the main reason I went into law enforcement and you know to me I think the self discipline I learned in the military helped me in my law enforcement career.

Q: Do you have any interesting stories from you law enforcement career?

KK: Probably a few. Some of them I probably wouldn't want to put on tape but yeah. I was, in 1981 October I lost two friends, guys I had known for a number of years in Rockland County. Its called the Brink shooting and it was the left over bunch of Black Liberation Army and the students for a Democratic Society who had gotten together they were just left over radicals from the late 60s early 70s and they surfaced in Nanuet, New York and Nyack, New York and right on the border of the town of Clarkston and the village of Nyack by the entrance of the through way. It was a major shoot out and two of my friends from the Nyack Police Department were killed. I was down therein the woods that afternoon, looking for one of the guys and you know we wound up locking up a whole bunch of people and you know there was two cops dead and two others wounded. So that was one. A whole series of other ones. I've been involved in saving some lives. In a drug raid one time I came close to, came too close to taking a life and I was fortunate I didn't have to. I almost shot somebody and that's not a feeling you want to have to go through. I mean if it was necessary to do it I would have done it but I was fortunate enough that it didn't happen. After 911 I was chief of police for the town of

Clarkston and within about 6 hours after that I had to send 25 guys down and we didn't know if it was going to be a rescue or a recovery operation, at the time we thought it was a rescue thing and these were guys I worked with. A number of them were very good friends of mine and we sent them down to ground zero and we saw the explosions and we didn't know what, the country didn't know what was going to happen for the first six hours and I had 25 of my guys down at ground zero and that's not a fun feeling. As much as I wanted to join them, my place wasn't there but you know. With the explosions the fires, some of the plate glass windows coming down from god knows how high up I really thought there was a potential, you know, we didn't know if there was suicide bombers out there potentially 25 of the guys that I knew for a lot of years I was sending them to their deaths so it was a very uncomfortable feeling. Thank god none of them, there was one very minor injury among our people and that was it. So I was fortunate. Yeah we lost, from the town of Clarkston that day, well from Rockland County we lost, I believe it was 72 people and the town of Clarkston I think we lost 24 and it was three people I knew personally that got killed down there.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to mention or touch on?

KK: No. I just, I think it is a wonderful program you folks are doing here you guys are doing and I cant commend you enough and it was a privilege and an honor for me to be asked to be here. I hope I gave you a few insights and it's nice to see your generation doing what you're going and we old timer knuckles heads appreciate that so thank you very much.