

**WC:** Today is the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 2010. We're at the Maplewood Manor in Ballston Spa, New York. My name is Wayne Clark; I'm with the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center in Saratoga Springs, New York.

**WC:** Sir, for the record, please state your full name and date and place of birth.

**TR:** Theodore Robert Alderman. I was born in Schenectady, New York on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1946.

**WC:** Did you attend school in Schenectady?

**TR:** No, I attended school in Stillwater, New York.

**WC:** And did you graduate from high school?

**TR:** Yes, I graduated in 1964.

**WC:** You did some construction work before you went into the service?

**TR:** That's correct.

**WC:** When did you enter the service?

**TR:** [laughs] After a year of working I decided I better go into the Army or something. I went in June of 1965.

**WC:** So you enlisted in the Army?

**TR:** Yes.

**WC:** Why did you pick the Army?

**TR:** My best friend was going in, and he wanted me to come and go in with him, and that sounded like a good idea. That's the reason I went in the Army.

**WC:** Where did you go for your basic training?

**TR:** I went to Fort Dix [New Jersey].

**WC:** Was that your first time away from home?

**TR:** Yes... yes! First time I ever rode a bus, first time I ever been to New York City.

**WC:** And what was basic training like for you?

**TR:** At first it was kind of tough, but then I really liked the military and I got so I liked it real well.

**WC:** And when you graduated from basic training did you go on to any additional training?

Oh, yes, I went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland. Most gorgeous place in the world. They used to call it APG: that's Aberdeen Play Ground. It was beautiful, it was like a college and I took up wheel and track vehicle mechanics, which is what I wanted to do. The Army gave me everything they promised me. I hadn't any complaints there.

**WC:** How long was that school for?

**TR:** Six months. I went there in August and I left there in December.

**WC:** That was December of 1965?

**TR:** Yes.

**WC:** And once you completed that school, where did they send you next?

**TR:** Germany.

**WC:** Did you get any kind of leave before you went to Germany?

**TR:** I think I took a week before I had to report.

**WC:** And how did you get to Germany?

**TR:** I flew.

**WC:** Commercial or military?

**TR:** They had what they call MATS: Military Air Transport System, it was civilian planes under contract to the government, I believe.

**WC:** Whereabouts in Germany?

**TR:** I flew into Frankfurt in Heidelberg, and then I got ordered to report to Munich, I took one of their trains down to Munich. They picked me up and took me down to the barracks.

**WC:** So you ended up in Germany in the wintertime. What was it like?

**TR:** Yes—it was a lot like here. It was cold, not a lot of snow. There was snow, but not a lot at that time. I landed in the wine country up in Heidelberg, famous for the wineries up there and you could see all that stuff. When I got down to Munich, that was typical big city.

**WC:** So you were based out of Munich?

**TR:** The concern, Eastman Barracks, was Dachau, which is about ten kilometers outside of Munich.

**WC:** Was it what you expected it would be?

**TR:** No, it wasn't what I expected it would be—it was better. It was great: the company was good, the NCOs were good, we had a lot of freedom. There was an artillery company on the post too, and we ate in their mess hall; it was fantastic, it had good food.

**WC:** Now what were your quarters like, did you have WWII barracks?

**TR:** We had [usual?] barracks, which each had individual rooms. The shower was just down the hall, a mass shower, but everybody had their own room. There might have been a couple double rooms, but most of them had individual rooms. Privacy-wise it was pretty nice.

**WC:** What was your typical workday like?

**TR:** You'd start at eight o'clock in the morning, you'd go down to the company [quarters?] and they'd make the announcements. Then we'd go to the shop office. I worked in the shop office, where we'd repair trucks and track vehicles for the whole battalion.

**WC:** Was it pretty difficult work?

**TR:** Very hard work. Changing engines in those tanks and five ton trucks, it was pretty hefty stuff. But I was fortunate, I ended up in the shop office in the production control end of it, so I sat in the office most of the time and lined up work for the shop. It made my three years very nice.

**WC:** What did you do on your time off?

**TR:** Some sightseeing. Mainly just GIs hung around, partied, go to the NCO club or the [M?] club.

**WC:** Did you have your own car?

**TR:** No, none of us—I think one of the guys had a car, but he also had a girlfriend so he was pretty busy.

**WC:** Were you able to rent cars?

**TR:** I don't know if we were able to rent them or not, or if we had the money we could have. I don't remember ever being able to rent one. We'd go on whatever local transit they had: bus, or the trains. The trains were real good. If you wanted to go into Munich, you'd grab a train and go in, same thing coming back.

**WC:** Now, you were there just twenty years after the war ended. Was there still wreckage from the war?

**TR:** From some of our barracks, you could see buildings that had been bombed. And once in a while they'd have trouble with the sewer, and they'd go in the sewer back in Dachau, and they were pulling out weapons that the Germans had thrown down in the sewers when Americans came through. It was quite interesting.

**WC:** Now what was Dachau like, with the concentration camp?

**TR:** Very, very dismal when I first got there. The present museum was under construction, we used to park our vehicles over there. It was pretty hallowed ground, once they got what they were doing straightened out, we pulled all the vehicles away from it. It was a pretty awesome sight to see and realize what had happened there.

**WC:** Now what about the civilians that lived around there? I'm sure a lot of them were living there during

**TR:** Yes, they were. Every one that I talked to, and I talked to a lot of them because I was interested. Most of them knew something was going on, but they were scared to death. A body fell off of a train coming in—I was talking to this guy—the Nazis made his father put that body back on the train at gunpoint. They knew there was something bad happening, but nobody dared to question.

I also talked to some prisoners of war in Dachau that had been over in Massachusetts as prisoners of war, and that was kind of interesting. They loved the [tiny?] cities.

**WC:** I understand, and I've interviewed other veterans that liberated Dachau, and they said that what they did was, they brought some of the civilians in and paraded them through the camp and a lot of them claimed they didn't know what was going on.

**TR:** I believe that most of them knew what was going on, that's my feeling on it. They were just so frightened of the Nazis themselves. Everyone that I talked to in

town, they knew and their parents knew, at least their parents knew, that there was something very bad happening. Most of the Germans were pretty good there, just Nazis—they were a few bad ones who made everything bad.

**WC:** Now how did you get along with the civilian population? How did they treat you, being that you were American military?

**TR:** As a rule, good. Sometimes we'd get drinking, get rowdy and foolish but aside from that we got along good with them.

**WC:** Now I understand that every town had its own brewery in Germany?

**TR:** Very close to it! Beer was a big thing over there. They had it for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They would set it on the stove to warm it up and drink it.

**WC:** They didn't drink it cold?

**TR:** [laughs] No! That was one of my biggest surprises. We'd go to a—they called them "guest houses"—a bar, an inn, and they had these space heaters; they'd fill up a mug of beer and they'd set it on a space heater to warm it up. Ugh! [grimaces].

**WC:** You stayed in Germany two years?

**TR:** Yes, two and a half years. Best three years of my life. It's a beautiful, beautiful country.

**WC:** It is. Did you take any tours to France, or Holland, or you didn't leave Germany at all?

**TR:** No.

**WC:** Did you go back to the States at all?

**TR:** I went back every Christmas. I'd use my leave to go back home; I didn't want to miss a Christmas.

**WC:** Now, did you have to pay your own way back there?

**TR:** Yes.

**WC:** And how long did you stay? Couple weeks?

**TR:** Yes, fourteen days I think it was.

**WC:** Once your time in Germany was over, were you able to reenlist if you wanted?

**TR:** Oh, they wanted me to reenlist so bad. [laughs] I jokingly told the reenlistment officer, you make me an E-6 and I'll reenlist for six. I didn't think he could do it. Scared the hell out of me: he had me appointed where I could make E-6 without going before the promotion board. Then I was caught between a rock and a hard place, and I said I can't, I've got to get back to New York. But I would have made E-6 and I wish now I had done it, because I didn't end up retiring until after twenty years and I ended up waiting.

**WC:** As a young man, twenty years if you're nineteen or twenty, twenty years seems like a lifetime. So you came back to the States, you were discharged in June of 1968: what was the climate like here in the States in 1968? It was at the height of the Vietnam War.

**TR:** It was scary, and very depressing. I couldn't believe that people were acting the way they were towards our government and our troops: I hated it. I never went much with the hippie movement. I can see free love and all that, but let's keep our heads together and do what's right for the country. Of course, I also wasn't aware of what the government was doing in relation to the war; they weren't playing by the books either.

**WC:** Now, when you were in Germany were there any rumors that the unit was going to be sent over to Vietnam?

**TR:** Oh, all the time! Our biggest problem was the Middle East. When they had the first or second war, it must have been in 1967, we all went on alert, wrote our Last Will and Testament, our Power of Attorney. Israel and Egypt were at it, and that's where our biggest fright was, that's where we were going to go. Vietnam didn't scare us that much, but that Middle East did. We figured they'd get enough guys for Vietnam anytime, but if push came to shove the German units would go to the Middle East and fight.

**WC:** Did you have any Vietnam veterans in your unit in Germany?

**TR:** I'm sure there were. Right offhand, I can't remember any particular one.

**WC:** Now what about field maneuvers? Did you spend a lot of time in the field?

**TR:** No. Maybe out of two and a half years I was over there, two weeks. We were mostly making sure everybody else's vehicles were running.

**WC:** Were there any worries or threats about the Russians at that time?

**TR:** No, not really.

**WC:** So you came back in June of 1968—whereabouts were you discharged from?

**TR:** I was discharged from Fort Dix.

**WC:** And what did you do once you were discharged, did you go back to work, or did you go to school?

**TR:** I went to work. I was selling frozen food, my uncle had a small business selling food to restaurants and kitchens.

**WC:** Out of where?

**TR:** Center of Brunswick. I worked for him for a year or so and then I went on the railroad, 1969. I worked there for seven or eight years.

**WC:** When did you eventually retire?

**TR:** 2001, I took a medical retirement, I had emphysema.

**WC:** Do you think your emphysema was caused from the service, was it service-connected?

**TR:** No. Smoking.

**WC:** Did you join any veterans organizations when you came back?

**TR:** I belonged to the American Legion. They're responsible for that power wheelchair sitting there [nods to indicate] Post 90 in Stillwater. I can't wheel a regular wheelchair, and they got me this one, got me set up with this. But that's about the military organization I'd become involved with.

**WC:** Did you stay in contact with anyone you were in the service with?

**TR:** No. I tried to, but I lost track of the one guy I did want to get in touch with. The guy I went into the service with, I see all the time. He lives here in [?]. I talked to him last night. He was a neighbor. I was working in Mechanicville, he came down and said: hey, I'm having a going-away party. I said, where you going, he said I'm going into the Army. I went to his going-away party, and eleven o'clock that night called a recruiter, that was Friday night, Saturday morning I took a test, and the next week I was down in Albany getting sworn in.

**WC:** How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

**TR:** I think it gave me a sense of organization. I'm not the most organized person in the world, but I do have an idea of how it should be done. That's something I picked up from the military, because they're organized!

**WC:** All right, is there anything else you'd like to comment on, or maybe we missed something with your service or any incidents that you recall?

**TR:** Nothing in particular. Just, I'd like to have everybody respect our troops, respect what they're doing, whether they like it or not it's what the government wants, and I think they're on the right track there. That's about all I can say about that.

**WC:** Thank you very much for your interview!

**TR:** Thank you.