

**Harry E. Colbert
Veteran**

**Mike Russert & Wayne Clark
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on March 5, 2007
at Alterra Wynwood in Niskayuna, NY**

HC: What's up with—they got a hold of my retirement, that's what—and then I found out that my mother died while I was away. I didn't know when but I found out she left me some money. They got a hold of that, everything! I don't have...they got a hold of everything, everything I had.

Q: Ok we'll start with this. This is an interview at the Alterra Wynwood Niskayuna, NY. It is the fifth of March, 2007 at approximately 1:15. Interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clark. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

HC: Harry E. Colbert. July 24, 1935. Clayton, Missouri.

Q: Okay. What was your educational background prior to going into the service?

HC: I had about a year and a half of college.

Q: Okay. Did you enlist or were you drafted?

HC: I was drafted.

Q: You were drafted into the army?

HC: Yeah.

Q: And you told me before but when was that?

HC: 1958. June, 1958.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

HC: Fort Hood, Texas.

Q: How long was your basic training?

HC: About twelve weeks. It was supposed to be eight. They stretched it out but it was about twelve weeks. June, July, and August in Texas.

Q: Not a good time to be there!

HC: [laughing] Every now and then the temperature dropped below ninety, every now and then.

Q: [laughing] Did you go to a specialty school after basic?

HC: No.

Q: What was your training—your basic training—what was it in? Infantry or—

HC: Just regular basic infantry training.

Q: Mhm, okay. Where did you go after Fort Hood?

HC: Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Alabama.

Q: Now what did you do there?

HC: I was given the MOS of civil engineer assistant and I worked in an office that, other places requested modifications to buildings, and so I stayed there for a while and then I was transferred. Well we got a new supervisor and he did not like me in the office because I was the black guy in the office and there were white women in there. He had a fit, he didn't like me, so he had me transferred out and I was sent to the range and I worked in the range operations.

Q: Where, in Redstone?

HC: In Redstone.

Q: Now, did you uh, the Army had been integrated in 1950, did you find any problems or difficulties being in the South?

HC: Not with the military. But he was the only civilian. I was the only military in my office. They were all civilians. He was an old-style rebel.

Q: But you didn't run into any other problems in the military at all? How about off-base did you?

HC: Off-base Alabama in the fifties, late fifties, was rigidly segregated. That was before [George] Wallace made his famous stand in the door of the University of Alabama so there was no attempt to break down segregation.

Q: You were born in Missouri. Did you have any of the same laws and so on in Missouri, growing up there?

HC: Schools were segregated until 1954. But that was the only thing. Public accommodations were not and when the schools were integrated, they integrated peacefully, there was no problems and, just, there were no problems at all.

Q: What about while you were off-post in uniform any problems or anything. Did it make a difference?

HC: I didn't wear a uniform off-post. As soon as I was off-duty I changed into civilian if I was going to leave the post.

Q: Did you live on base or did you live off?

HC: Oh yeah I lived in the barracks.

Q: What rank were you at that time?

HC: Private.

Q: Now what were your duties on the arsenal range. You said you worked on the arsenal range.

HC: I did primarily surveying. I worked on the flight test range and we surveyed where the rounds landed and calculated the distance, the trajectory and how far off-target they landed and things like that.

Q: Were those your duties the entire time in the service?

HC: More or less. After I was booted out of that office I worked in. It was interesting. We, at that time, the Army didn't handle, well they handled ballistic missiles but that was another company and they did their testing at White Plains, New Mexico. But later on they transferred all the big boomers to the Air Force.

Q: Now what size rockets and missiles were you working with?

HC: Well it was rockets really. Oh, I guess the ones that were used by artillery and tanks. No ICBMs or anything.

Q: Right, right. They were like the smaller little tubes—

HC: Yeah.

Q: Okay, and so you worked there until you were discharged?

HC: Yeah.

Q: Were there any incidents, funny happenings or things you remember that you want to talk about?

HC: No, our detachment was special. Our special detachment—

Q: What was your unit called?

HC: It was called "Detachment A, Army Rocket and Guided Missile Agency." Most of the guys in it had been to engineering school. A lot graduated engineers and didn't go through ROTC. It was practically an all draftee unit.

Q: When were you discharged?

HC: June 10, 1960.

Q: Were you eligible for any GI, under the GI bill at all?

HC: Not originally. But later on they added in, uh, and I think I got my last course in school under the GI bill and I'm still eligible for VA benefits. I've been to the VA hospital in Albany and so forth. What is that Stratton?

Q: Stratton, yup. What kind of work did you do after the service?

HC: Believe it or not I worked for the Army; the Corps of Engineers. I worked for the Corps of Engineers St. Louis district until I was assigned to a section where the work wasn't very challenging or exciting so I, uh a job came up at Fort Dix, new Jersey and I got a promotion for going there and I stayed there until I retired.

Q: Now were you a Quartermaster supply at Fort Dix?

HC: No, no, no, no. I was a civil engineer assigned to the facilities engineering outfit.

Q: Okay. The reason I ask that is I remember speaking to a gentleman here couple months ago that was assigned to the quartermaster at Fort Dix.

HC: I had no idea where they were!

Q: [laughing] Did you join the American Legion at all or anything like that?

HC: Nope, no.

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

HC: No I didn't.

Q: How do you think your time in the service—

HC: After I got out of the service I went back to finish school so I had no time to contact anybody else. I was too busy finishing school and I was working at the same time/

Q: Where did you get your degree?

HC: Washington University in St Louis.

Q: How do you think your time in the service had an effect on your life?

HC: Well, it was interesting. I didn't get to travel though. I was hoping to go overseas but I didn't get to go overseas. When I was at Fort Hood, that was the Second Armored Division and it was a training division for the Third Armored in Germany, and most of the guys at Fort Hood ended up going to Germany. I was hoping to go overseas but I never made it.

Q: Okay well thank you very much for your interview.

HC: Alrighty.