

Keith Lettice
Narrator

Wade B. Lamb
Interviewer

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KL: My name is Keith Lettice, just Keith Lettice. I was in the service from September 15th, 1942 to December the 7th 1945, and in that time I went through a place where everybody else goes to get your shots and everything - which they lose when you go to the next place anyways so it doesn't make any difference if you have to take them all over again.

I went to Miami Beach for basic training, where I had my shots again, they lost them again. Well, while down there I was assigned to go to radio school in Madison, Wisconsin as a 759 technician, and from there I went to [unclear], Wisconsin, as a 754 technician, then I went to become a 542 technician, which means you're the leader of something. Which [Laughter] I was like a little Hitler I guess, [unclear]. Anyways we studied all phases of radio school, and in Madison building radios and putting up big antennas and then CNS School, which is Control Net Systems School in [unclear], Wisconsin, which is where we told the pilots where they were when they were flying. Called the DF Station, Directorial Finding Station, it was on a triangle at where we were calling an indirect bearing to the pilot at three different locations and that is where he would determine that he was sly. You have to remember this was quite a bit of time, I believe [unclear].

From there, I went to Richmond, Virginia. I was in the Army, the Richmond Air Base and from there I worked on a place down there with real equipment and went out in the field. We went out in the field in the mountains with our units. We had two units - DF Station and then Transmitter Station - which we were all acquainted with Morse code. I went up to the mountains and we trained the people up there. We did some training with our [unclear] and then from Camp Picket, which was a large infantry base. As a G.I., we didn't go to town too much at Camp Picket, because Camp Picket boys didn't like the telephone soldiers. That's what they called us, telephone soldiers [Laughter], so mostly we stayed in our own bounds because it wasn't too safe.

From there I went to Blackstone, Virginia, and in Blackstone we did the same thing - we did training. We did training in the fields. That time was spent training the pilots, where the pilots were flying we were giving indirect variants and re-fixing transmitters and [Laughter] sleeping on the ground, watching for the snakes. Then I went to

Washington, D.C., outside of Washington, [unclear] and I was assigned to the 95th fighter control squad, which was all P47s. From there I was sent out to what you'd call TD [unclear], I was the tax service.

I was in a little town called Parsonsburg, Maryland where we would relay our indirect barings in to the central command to let the pilot know where he was. While we were out there, we were getting five dollars a day to do tax service, and this woman was feeding us nothing but scrapple. We had scrapple every way you could imagine. The lieutenant would come out to pay us and he'd give her [the woman] the check. There were twelve of us out there, six greedy old men and six [unclear]. You couldn't get any worse near our field operation because the type of stuff we had wouldn't let us know if somebody was close by. This woman was getting fifty to one hundred dollars a month – that was nice money. The lieutenant told us how lucky we were, eating all these fine foods, so I said to him, 'Sir why don't you come up sometime?' Unannounced, and there we were eating that damn Philadelphia scrapple again. So he went back to base and he gave us permission to move in to town.

I brought my wife down, she was pregnant and we lived with a nurse that was great to us. She fed us good, [unclear], you ate good you slept good and every other thing. She used to warm the sheets for my wife every night before she went to bed with our first child. Then we got a call to go out to the Coast, which was a long ride to go out to the Coast-

WL: Are you talking the Pacific Coast?

KL: Yes, from Washington, D.C. We took all our equipment with us and on our way out we had guard duty. Everybody had guard duty, even the officers. On every radio truck and directory finding truck we had a guard in the front and a guard in the back. [unclear] flatbeds, we ended up in Sacramento, California and then the Fresno Air Base where we started taking more maneuvers. Taking different troops out to the [unclear] Desert, sleeping with the [Laughter] scorpions if you didn't know enough to get your bag and see if you had any friendly friends with yourself that evening, or snakes. Someone asked me how long we were out there and I can't give you any definite time we were on these maneuvers. Sometimes it would be a month, two weeks, and then other times I'd be on the tax service for three or four months at a clip. It was a really fascinating job.

I believe from there, when the war ended, I was ready to get on the phone – I don't know how many times. For the meantime I think I fought every forest fire that was out in California from the giant Red Woods. We were all volunteer firefighters up there in the mountains, a lot of training that's basically what I did.

The war was over and then they sent me to camp, up in the Red Woods for relaxation. I don't know why they picked us guys to go up there, we never did anything accept train troops.

Then my wife got sick, the war was over so we went back home. It's the [unclear] thing in the world to be in the service, I didn't want to go in, I have to admit that. I don't think any guy wanted to go in.

Well when the war ended I was on top of [unclear] so we were watching the whole San Francisco bay area and my [unclear] he went up there, so I believe him and my grandson was just up there recently. There were a bunch of antennas up there which leads me to believe something was going up there. We had [unclear] up there and in fact I don't even use it, lay them right on top of the roof while I was working up there. It was a great experience.

WL: You worked for General Electric?

KL: Yes.

WL: What were you doing there?

KL: Building and assembling transmitters for the Navy.

WL: So you had radio experience going in?

KL: [Laughter] Yeah building transmitters! I don't know how much experience it was!

WL: You were married?

KL: Yes our wedding was set, we got engaged in April of '41. I met my wife, playing in a band, and we decided to get married January 24th, 1942. She was eighteen and I was nineteen, we're still married! We were doing our little apartment down there when the war broke out, we were fixing up our apartment-

WL: Getting ready to move in.

KL: [Laughter] We were moved in alright! I was getting ready to move out! Incidentally, as long as I'm here, can I just say that our one son was all over the world in the Air Force? He came out as a chief, he was in Korea, Vietnam, Turkey – every place you could imagine – Germany. His name was Wayne and the other boy, Gary, spent twenty one years in the Air Force, and Gary came out as a sergeant. We are strictly a military family, had been from the time that the United States gained its freedom.

I really don't like anybody saying anything about boys and girls in the military. It bothers me terrible when somebody talks about the military the way they do because to me, it's the greatest place where you can learn something, be something, and know that everybody is your buddy because you depend on each other for your life, even though I wasn't overseas. You depend upon the guys that's working under you and the guys that's working over you. You depend on their way of thinking and it's the greatest adventure in the world.

I didn't want to go, I was drafted, but I believe I got a wealth of good stuff out of being in the military. I became a better guy in a better way, a better person.

WL: Even though you say you didn't want to go, there must be one experience that sticks out in your mind as the best experience you had in those three years that you were in the service. What would that be, the best thing that could happen to you during your time in the service?

KL: I think the relationship between the guys, relationship between the troops. You depend on each other, [unclear]. You depend on each other for your life, and you don't have that out civilian life too much. I can see this throughout many years, I'm eighty one now. You can tell the difference, well between a guy and a girl that have been in the military and ones who haven't, ninety-nine out of a hundred times you can tell. It may be sixty years that you can tell if they've been in the military just by the way the attitude is towards people and the world. It's my belief that it's the best thing that ever happened, in my life, besides my wife and children of course.

WL: There's always a flip side of that coin too. What's the worst possible moment of those years that you recall, other than scrapple?

KL: [Laughter] Doing [unclear] for fourteen hours a day, when the cooks would throw sixty pans at you and you're down to one, and then there's sixty more coming at you, for six days a week I guess I would do nothing but pots and pans! I told my wife I did more pots and pans and peeled more potatoes in the first six months I was in the service than you ever will, she doesn't believe me but that's the truth!

WL: So were discharged in December '45 when you came back to this area.

KL: Yes December 7th, I came back to Amsterdam.

WL: What did you do then?

KL: Well GE was on strike and I went to the twenty-twenty, I got twenty bucks a week and I did some playing, and when GE went back off strike I went back to GE. Mostly what I did was walk around and look important!

WL: Now I know that you're a musician, did you play for any of the troops or anything while you were on duty?

KL: Well, I'll tell you a little lie, I used to go in these bars and [unclear] bass player predominated on it, well guess who was a bass player [unclear] was in the army? That was me! That was good for a lot of nice, free drinks, I'll tell you. 'Who'd you play with?' 'Oh I got drafted with [unclear].' It's one of the biggest lies you can tell but it worked! Any other questions I might get embarrassed by? [Laughter]

WL: Oh boy, I guess you've pretty much given us your philosophy on the military. Any last things you say to anybody who is watching this, ten or twenty- thirty years down the road?

KL: I would say we live in the best damn country in this world. Don't forget it and if they need you, go. Go for it. Because we all know what goes on in other countries and the

discrimination, not that we don't have some discrimination here, kids are going to find it everywhere in this world. But all in all, you're damn lucky if you're born and raised in the United States of America, and you die in America. That's the greatest thing on earth. I would like to God bless everybody in the future years of the generations to come. Thank you very much for interviewing me and thank you again.