

Eli L. Dietsch
Veteran

Wayne Clarke
Interviewer

**New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center,
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I: Today is the 24th of June, 2011. My name is Wayne Clark. We are at the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center in Saratoga Springs, NY. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth, please?

ELD: My full name is Eli Dietsch. I was born on the 24th of February, 1928, in Detroit, MI.

I: Did you attend school in Detroit?

ELD: Yeah, I graduated from Cooley High School in Detroit.

I: What year did you graduate?

ELD: I graduated in January 1946.

I: And did you go on to college at that point, or...?

ELD: Well, yes, I did. But out in California, we, my family, my father had passed away some years before, and my mother, rather than moved to Florida, decided on California where some of the other family had moved. So, I moved there and I went to junior college at what was then John Newark. Junior College is now just a high school. And then from there, I went up to the University of California at Berkeley, graduated.

I: What did you continue on with?

ELD: A master's degree.

I: What did you get your degree in?

ELD: I'm a zoologist. I'm a fishery biologist, oh, by trade.

I: And once you graduated, what happened next? Did you go into the service? Did you go to work?

ELD: Well, I graduated in 1950, and it was just a few days after that that the Korean War broke out. But I had an affirmative to go into Graduate School for two years after that. After 2 1/2 years, I was inducted into the Army.

I: You were drafted?

ELD: No, I enlisted for two years.

I: Why didn't you pick the Army?

ELD: I really don't have any idea at the moment. I don't have any idea, but I guess they gave me something and they offered me something that intrigued me, and that was entering the Army Security Agency.

I: Now, where did you go for your basic training?

ELD: Well, I went to the old cavalry school at Fort Riley, KS.

I: And what was that like?

ELD: Well, it was just an 8-week cycle. I mean, the regular infantry cycle is 16 weeks. But if you're in some special field like Cook, Baker, radio, whatever, which I was with the Army Security Agency, the second eight weeks is your other school, I see, in training. At least that's the way it was presented to us at the time.

I: Now, did you go to your additional schooling? Was that on the same day that was at Fort Devens, Massachusetts?

ELD: Fort Devens.

I: All right, and tell us about that training. What was it like? What did you learn there?

ELD: Well, I was in cryptography. I, I say I, it was, we don't, I was called the radio traffic analyst as opposed to a cryptographer, but we dealt with the message heading. The cryptographers dealt with the bulk of the message, the message bulk itself. And then, the objective really was to determine order of battle information, really to put it together with information from DF, from idle chatter. That was illegal, you know, I mean, but you know, the operators might chatter and give information on morale or the unit or what. In other words, we put this together and tried to put together an order of battle in front of us. In other words, who were you facing and so forth. So that was the main, main thing. You know, I mean, we were taught a variety of things, you know, including cryptography, a little bare minimum. You know, we didn't deal with things like the German Enigma machine, which the cryptographers did. But we were also given a course in Russian, a brief course.

I: I just want to ask you, did you pick up the Russian language?

ELD: No, you know, I mean, this was so, so simple. We had a sheet, a code sheet which told us how to, you know, if you knew the rudiments of the English language and other foreign languages, subject, verb and so forth. I mean, you know, you could translate yourself with the aid of a dictionary.

I: I see.

ELD: So, you know, that was it. Of course, I wasn't supposed to talk about this for 10

years after I left the service, but we were actually attached to the National Security Agency and the Navy and the Air Force had their counterintelligence agencies, too. I mean, you know, similar to doing. They were doing similar things, you know, as we were. Well, that was about it. And while I was there, I was asked if I wanted to become an instructor.

I: And so you were accepted. OK, so your grades must have been high enough once you got through the course they wanted to, I don't know, second or third in the class. I don't know.

ELD: So you became an instructor there for, I think that's what I had, a college degree background, you know.

I: Now, what rank were you?

ELD: Well, I think it was Specialist Second Class, probably Specialist Four. I don't, well, it's equivalent to a Sergeant, that's all. E5. That's all I know. OK. Today I don't know what it is, you know. Yeah, it would have been what they call Specialist 5, which was equal to a Sergeant back then. But, you know, I don't know. It was an E5 pay I can't remember now. All right, I'd have to go look at my, you know, DD214 or whatever it is.

I: Now, did you spend the rest of your time in the service at Devens?

ELD: Yeah, right. I was there all the time. I met my first wife there and we were married in August of '55, and I got out of the service in March of '56.

I: Now, did they offer you anything to stay in?

ELD: No, they didn't. I enjoyed what I was doing and I, you know, I had my degrees in college and I, I don't know, you know, I didn't know what, I had no idea what I was going to get paid for a job. You know, I'm married now.

I: Did any government agencies approach?

ELD: Well, I, I thought of going with the NSA down in Washington, you know, but because I had no practical field experience, I knew I was just going to get AGS 5, which is what I wound up getting when I went with the Fish and Wildlife Service down at Woods Hole. You know, I, I don't know, I thought about it. I've thought about it a lot since, you know, because I kind of really enjoyed the work. We had a fellow that was drafted who worked for the NSA, you know, before he entered the Army, and they brought him up as an instructor in our unit, but he trained as an MP. So they had him on this, in Georgia somewhere. You know, he was being trained on the streets of Atlanta, directing traffic.

I: How many people were in your unit there at Devens?

ELD: Well, we had, we were a double company. We had I, I don't know, there was the instructor portion and then there was like a support portion, but it was, I don't know, I

think probably over 600 people. We had three or four officers and then a great distance set of two, you know, commander and exec. You know, we had a couple three officers and then helmets.

I: How big were the classes of students that came through?

ELD: Not over 30, I would, I would expect. And I would imagine they were all probably very intelligent to be in that course. Well, yeah. I mean, you know, we were considered to be among the upper echelon of the Army, you know, in other words, like I, I tell people, you know, look, I said in our barracks we had TV's. We couldn't erect an antenna on the barracks, but we could have the rabbit ears inside. Everything had to be clean and neat, you know? It wasn't, It wasn't. You know, they didn't let you go astray. Let's put it that way, OK and so forth. We had a Class A pass on, on and off the post. We never did KP. We had a big repo of incoming students, you know that, which were for a variety of MO's in the Army. They were just, I was just in one of them so that they performed KP and they did a lot of other work, you know, or whatever was.

I: Did you have to pull guard duty at all?

ELD: We finally did. They made us through, you know, Sergeant and corporal of the Guard. I did it once. I never did KP at Devon's. I did it in basic training and that's all, you know, my life was entirely different probably than the regular army. Now where did you issue a weapon at all? Well, we had weapons. In other words, every year we had to qualify. And what? What kind of carving? The M1 carving. Yeah, that was my basic weapon. But they were always housed in the supply and they cleaned them. We didn't do much of anything, really.

I: Did you have to qualify at all with the .45?

ELD: No, no, no.

I: OK. So you were discharged from the Army. Did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

ELD: That, that, no. I had my degrees and everything. I know some people used it to buy a home. And no, not at the time I didn't. I, I don't even know what was available to me in that type of circumstance. I, I don't have any idea. I know I had two kids.

I: Yeah, ultimately. And now, when you were married while you were in the service?

ELD: I was married in August of 1955. I got out in March of 1956, and I lived off both from the time I was married. I mean, I didn't live on both.

I: Did you stay in contact with anyone you were in service with?

ELD: No, not really. I haven't. I had one fellow from California send me a couple of Christmas cards. We got married afterwards, but no, I didn't.

I: So you probably never attended any sort of reunions or anything?

ELD: No, I have, you know, I've been a member of the American Legion for maybe 10 years now. And I've seen a few attempts, you know, to find or locate ASA people, you know, but they weren't, you know, from my time of service. But I called one phone and I said, well, you're having much luck. And he said, no, not really.

I: And did you ever meet anyone from your service days?

ELD: I have met one while I was working for the New York Conservation Department. He was Mike Delaney down in Delaware County. He was an avid radio ham and so forth. And he had been in the service with the ASA. But we never talked much about it. I don't know. We kind of laughed. Here we are, you know, way out here, you know, and I don't know. He was much younger than I was, so I don't know.

I: Now, are you a ham radio operator yourself?

ELD: No, no. I have nothing to do with radio or anything about it.

I: OK. All right. How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

ELD: Oh, I don't know, really. I guess I was kind of like everybody else, kind of glad to have it behind me, you know, and move on with my life, really. You know, I was married and I, I don't know, I guess in the Army you don't speak your piece too well, you know, and I guess I wanted to be able to say what I thought when I wanted to.

ELD: But overall, it was a good experience. Oh, overall, look, I, I mean, I had a life that was unlike anybody else's, you know, that's gone through the Army, you know, gone through combat or anything of that nature. We had people that came back from Korea that had been there, you know, and you know, I just remember the one fellow talking about, you know, he said, like he said, all the units to rotate up online. Now we had units on the frontline, but it was, as I know it, mostly voice intercept. We had people that knew the Korean, Chinese language and so forth. And there were also the intercept operators that were functioning, you know, for Morse code transmissions and things like that.

I: Any humorous incidents at all that you can recall?

ELD: I don't have any real experience with it, but he was kind of funny one time in the barrier. He said, you know, he said the Turks when they rotated up front, he said they went up in their full battle dress. They believed they would meet their maker and they wanted to be dressed, you know, properly. So he said the Canadians came up, you know, the band playing the Maple Leaf Forever, he said. But when the GI came through, he said they were up to their ankles in mud. They were swearing there was no bed. But he said they went and they fought.

I: And any other humorous incidents at all that you can recall?

ELD: No, I, you know, I mean, it was very routine in all life. I, you know, I had a good

life. As I say, I had a Class A pass on and off post.

ELD: I went over to Lowell all the time where my wife, you know, when we, when we were dating and so forth. They had a place in the Y there that you could, GIs could stay overnight for, I don't know, 2 bucks or something. You know, I stayed overnight Saturday night. We'd go somewhere, you know, on Sunday around. I, I don't know, I, you know, I was just, you know, and pretty soon I'd get the train back to Lowell, or I mean the ferry, you know, on the post. And, you know, it was actually, in a lot of ways, better than college. You know, I didn't have to face exams. I didn't, you know, there was no real pressure. Some of the fellows that, you know, they made Sergeant instead of Specialist. I happen to know that I'm not the supervisory type.

I: How long have you been retired now?

ELD: Oh, I retired, what, '83? So you've been retired. I was then in what they called Tier One in the State of New York, and they were paying the full shot for my retirement and they wanted to get rid of us. So they gave me three years credit to go. When I took it, I said why not, you know, and there were a lot of other reasons. My first wife passed away with cancer. My mother died a couple of years before that. I lost my dog. My two kids got married. And I said, where am I? Yeah, I want to find myself. I've been married again for 27 years now.

I: Is there anything else you'd like to add before we close?

ELD: Well, there's not much that I can add, you know. Did you ever have any USO shows come by the post at all? Well, they had, they had a USO place up like a closet at the headquarters. No, I was open. I went a couple of times and, you know, to see what they had in the way of dances up there. But you know, it was most, we had the on post the 276th Regimental Combat Team, you know, and it was mostly black.

I: I was going to ask if the units were still segregated back then.

ELD: No, they weren't. No, we had, when I went through basic training, we had a couple of colored people. You know, I mean in our organization we didn't have any that I know of. You know, in the ASA, but they brought these girls in from Boston. They came out of Boston and went, I said, jeez, you know, there's just not that much here for me. You know, I met my wife at the USO and that might be a bit of humor, I could say. One of my buddies from California, he had met her earlier and it was the time when they knew they were going home for two weeks before they went anywhere, you know, overseas.

ELD: They were destined for the Far East Command. A rider got loaded on the street, walking around drinking beer, and he stood my wife up. He was supposed to go up to the beach to some kind of a beach party. Anyway, I didn't know it, but my wife's good friend was the girlfriend of my company executive officer and he found out where this guy went. So she asked him, you know, when he was in his sort of stupor, "What's going on?" He said, "Here, take your coat." And from then on, I mean, we went out, you know,

and Ellie got married and Kenny Skinner was, he was the exec officer. He got married to Shirley, the other girl. And I don't know, he wound up being a school teacher by trade anyway, and went out to Pittsburg State Teachers College, I guess.

I: Did you stay in contact with them or did your wife?

ELD: No, my wife did a little bit, but not really. Not actually. While we were in Massachusetts, I guess, yes. But once we moved to New York, no, not really.

I: OK.

ELD: All right. The other people, you know, I went back. I don't know. I got a week's duty up at the Fish Pier replacing Sea Sampler while he was on vacation and I went back to Fort Evans and I really knew nobody. There was one follower that was there, and he had met this other girl at my wedding and they got married. But I said, where's Larry Thorne, you know, And he said, well, he's in Japan again. He and his wife, you know, you know, it's like everybody that I really kind of knew was gone, you know, 'cause I mean, George Nays was, he had been in the army. He had been in Asmara, in Somalia, I guess, or Eritrea did, and he got out of the service and like a lot of people, they couldn't find jobs at that time. It was a little difficult. And he re-entered the service. And I know, you know, I heard all these stories, you know, when we were kids in my class, you know, but all of a sudden I saw some of them came back from one or two that came back from Korea and reenlisted this. And I can't get this job.

ELD: If you re-enlisted within 90 days, you could retain your rank, as I recall. And someone came back as a sergeant and stayed that way. You know, another fellow wanted to get on the state police. That was his goal. You know, he'd been in IBM or of course, you know, IBM then was all punch cards and everything in those days. I mean, I have no idea what goes on today. I have no idea. It's probably far more sophisticated, I'm sure, you know. But we had another fellow that came back from Germany and he said he was writing it with his intercept equipment and box cars, you know, through the Russian zone to Berlin, between the American zone and Berlin.

ELD: You know, that's a pretty risky business, sure. But as I, as the war wound down and the need for people in the Far East abated, all of a sudden, you know, there were other offers coming through. We had a follower that went to Madrid, Spain, in the embassy. But he was an intercept operator and we had people going to White Sands in Mexico all over. All of a sudden, you know, they were beginning to open up in other places. But then when I graduated, it was the Far East command. That was it. C com No, that's no, that's about what I can say. You know, really, you know, I mean, my life in the barracks, as I said, I described, you know, in the GI party, we have to keep things clean. I worked nights, so, you know, I slept during the day. The officers never disturbed me while I was sleeping, but they always inspected the barracks. I can remember them coming through hearing, you know, and so forth. We had, this is when we had a lot of students and I went over to what they called. I think it was a branch, I don't know. But

anyway, it was the intercept operators. But we taught them a little bit of what we did and that was my job at night. But we taught 5 1/2 days a week. Saturday morning was an inspection before you went to work. Everybody that lives off post as you get to go through the inspection too, so forth. So they cut you loose around noontime and then there's a report back like Monday morning. Yeah, we got out of school at noon. You just grab your pass and go. You know, we get into our cities if we call it, you know, so they can close and call. And you know when they had, when you were in the school companies, they had a bed check though every now and then. It was never, you know, every night, but every now and then the committee author would go through, and I don't know when I went through basic training. I don't know when. We went through several interviews while we were there, you know, and we were. Oh, you're ASA. Yeah. You know, I'm getting out of things. But several of them, as long as they live close to where we did and they could see us when we fall off in the street, you know, and so forth. And he said, look, he said you got one of the worst companies, you know, for basic training. But I went to the 10th Mountain Division, which is up at Fort Drum, was at Fort Riley, KS and the old barns, old horse barns were there. I went through machine gun training and one of them, you know, it was a miniature course. You know, he had a miniature thing he shot at. It was interesting. No, it's just the time in your life. That's the way I look at it now.

I: All right. Well, thank you very much for your interview.

ELD: OK.