

A Veterans Oral History
Heritage Education Commission
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Moorhead, MN

Dick Klosterman
Narrator

Les Bakke
Interviewer

July 27, 2001

LB: This is Friday afternoon, July 27, 2001. We're here with Dick Klosterman and he's going to do an oral review of his experience in the Army. So, Dick, if you would, first of all tell us who you are, maybe where you grew up, where you spent your childhood, those kinds of things for us.

DK: My name is Dick Klosterman and I grew up in Morton, North Dakota, born and raised. Went to grade school in Morton and then to the high school in Wahpeton, North Dakota. I entered the Army on March 9, 1953, in Fargo. March 10th was when I was sworn in. From then I went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. Spent a couple of days there and then they put me on a DC-3 airplane, one of those parachute airplanes with the benches on the side.

I remember we landed in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The pilot had to switch fuel tanks on the airplane and he was just having fun, so he shut the engines off and the plane fell. I remember that. Then of course he chuckled and he started the engines up again and we made it.

Went down to Fort Gordon, Georgia, and spent four weeks down there in basic training ... quite an experience. Its right out of Augusta, Georgia ... never seen the south before. Then they sent me up to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, for camera repair. That was a deluxe camp and there were people from foreign countries there doing training. That's where they shot the first radar shot to the moon, was from Fort Monmouth.

Then I got signed into USFA – nobody knew what it was. They put me on a troop ship out of New York and we went to Leghorn, Italy. Got down there and we were standing in line getting our assignments. Almost all the guys were going to Austria. By golly, they assigned me to Leghorn, Italy.

I wanted to go to Austria where there were snowcapped mountains, drink a lot of good German beer, and yodel and everything else. So I got back in line. I saw I was assigned to Leghorn, Italy. I got back in line and it was

about 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon. They go in alphabetical order, got through the Z's. Here was a Klosterman, K. "What are you doing here?" Well, I said, "I get sick from the heat." I said, "I faint from the heat." The guy couldn't believe it. He said, "I'll send you to Austria," he said, "but don't you ever tell anybody that I did it."

LB: We can tell them now though.

DK: Yes, I got sent up to Camp Roeder, south of Salzburg, and I enjoyed it very much. I didn't know how to type and I didn't know anything about radios, of course they made me a radio parts man. I had to learn to type one finger at a time. I got the job done. I set up my own parts system. The inspectors came in and checked me out and they said, "Your system's real good. Your parts recording system is real good." "But," they said, "You should do it the Army way." You know, that's the way it is.

Anyway, our major problem down there was Marshal Tito. He wanted to take over Trieste. Three times we loaded up, issued rifles, and down through the Alps we went. Beautiful trip, but the minute we would start going, Marshal Tito's forces would back off. Three times we did that – slept under the evergreens. Made sure you'd have your combat boots in your sleeping bag, because if you don't they are going to be frozen, you know, you're in the snow.

Then I joined a chorus that they had down there, the 350th Infantry Chorus. We won several awards. I got the records right back here. We spent a lot of time. We sang from the Leaning Tower in Pisa, Italy. We sang a joint Christmas live concert with the Vienna Boys' Chorus, Christmas Eve in Vienna. We went to Linz where Hitler was going to retire. That was his hometown. We sang from Innsbruck. We'd do joint concerts with a lot of people ... really had a good time.

The best time was after the concert was over. We'd get over to a beer joint and we'd have a beer and they'd sing a song and we'd sing a song. Yes, it was 17 months over there in Austria.

It was interesting but the trip over and back on those troop ships was really tough. I remember one was named the [USS] General Hodges. I always wanted to buy an airplane with one torpedo and I was going to sink that son of a gun. They were so bad. They were really tough ships. Henry Kaiser used to weld ships together in the Second World War and the Hodges broke in half in the English Channel before we were on it. They welded it back together and, goll darn it, I'm telling you, that was basic transportation. But I made it over to Austria. Spent 17 months and had a great time, really. Lots of good, fond memories ... made 'ere back. That's, I guess, the story of my war trips.

LB: Were discharged right after you got back to the States?

DK: Yes, I forget the name, Fort Mix, is that it? Right out of New Jersey?

LB: Ft. Dix?

DK: Dix, yes, that's it.

LB: There's a Fort Dix in New Jersey.

DK: Yes, it was about 20 days earlier than the two years that I had signed up for. I was sure glad to get out of there and get back home and get back to my wife, my "present wife."

LB: There you go. You sang in a choir over there. Were you a singer before you went in the Army?

DK: Oh, I sang for many years. You had to interview, yes.

LB: Then after you got back, did you continue singing, playing any instruments, do anything like that after you got back.

DK: Oh, Rup's Gorillas [sp?]. Boy oh boy.

LB: What were they?

DK: Well, it was Rup Goerger and Tex Goerger and Bob Gillivan [sp?] and we had a great time, yes. We played a lot of times. In fact, the neighbor next to us that's building the new house used to run the Rock Garden Bar and he remembers when we used to come in there and play and sing. We had a lot of good times. I enjoy singing.

LB: Do you keep in contact with any of the people you served with in the military, any lifelong friends out of the group, anything of that nature?

DK: I've been to some reunions, but they are down in Carolina and Georgia. That's a long ways to go. Yes, I have some friends.

LB: The best part of the military was, perhaps, what for you?

DK: Of course, the chorus and then they had a night shift. They had so much demand for radio parts that we would run a night shift and I'd do it at night. I'd turn on a captured, a radio from the Army and I could pick up the radio from Russia.

LB: Oh, really?

DK: And they would talk about our American friends and play music and it was interesting. Of course, our supper was about 5:00 o'clock in the morning. So we would get out there and we ate bananas and eggs and pancakes and everything else. We had the best meal you'd ever find in the world. Finally, they complained that we were stealing all the food. They had nothing left for breakfast for the other guys. Remember listening to that radio station to our American friends from Russia.

LB: And that was an English broadcast?

DK: Oh yes.

LB: Did you sing mostly in English or did you learn German songs, Austrian songs?

DK: Oh a little bit of German, yes. That's about it. Otherwise it was American songs. I liked to sing the old songs that you don't hear on the radio. There's no use singing a song that you can hear on the radio.

LB: After you got back, you spent the rest of your working life as a farmer, I understand.

DK: As a farmer, yes, enjoyed it.

LB: You want to tell us a little bit about that?

DK: Well it was interesting. I see farming today. Our son is on the farm. Everything is on a computer. He knows when he's broke ... I never knew. When the checking account went dry, I just hauled some corn to town. But now he knows when he's broke. It's really changed. I enjoyed farming, yes.

LB: Anything else you'd like to say out in the recording land for us before we wrap it up?

DK: Well it has been a wonderful life; it really has, yes. I've enjoyed it. Love my wife, like I call her, my current favorite.

LB: Current favorite wife?

DK: Yes, 46 years – wonderful. She gets more beautiful every day. She really does. I enjoy it at the lake. I enjoy going out to the farm but, goll darn it, it's really changed. I don't know the names of chemicals anymore. I don't know the names of the varieties of grain they raise and they do so much better than I ever did. Yes, times have changed.

LB: That's for sure. Well Dick, we really appreciate your taking the time to give us these stories and you can listen to them on the computer.

DK: Okay.