



Robert “Bob” L. Duhon
Private First Class, U.S. Army
Armored Division
Korean War

I was drafted into the service in May 1953 and stayed two years. My basic training was done in California. When I was assigned to a barracks, I slept in a top bunk. A black person slept in the bottom bunks on each side of me. That bothered me at first. But after a while, I got to know some of those men, and we became good friends.

The Korean War ended while I was in boot camp. I had signed up for Officers’ Candidate School (OCS) in Florida with three friends, though we weren’t real hot about becoming officers. We had heard that soldiers who went to OCS didn’t have to go to Korea right away. When the truce was signed in Korea, we were delighted and dropped out of the OCS program. Orders had already been set for most of the guys in basic with us to go to either Germany or Korea. But all four of us were sent to Washington for the rest of our time in the service.

We were assigned to a tank outfit in the Armored Division at Fort Lewis and worked with M60 tanks at the time. Mostly we trained on the 4-inch diameter cannon and .30-caliber machine guns mounted on the tanks. We worked with a four-man crew, including a driver, a gunner, tank commander and assistant tank commander. We spent a lot of time in the tanks, learning how to drive them and maneuver around.

For a while, I served as a tank commander. That meant directing the driver and leading the other men. The assistant tank commander was in charge of range finding for the target. It was very close quarters inside a tank and fairly noisy. Later I got busted back to a private, so I became a driver. That was kind of fun. I didn’t have to be concerned about hitting a target.

The first time I got busted, I had gone on a weekend pass and failed to sign out. So I essentially was AWOL (Absent Without Leave). The next time, I was reduced in grade without prejudice about three months before I was to get out of the service. When they promoted me to Private First Class, I didn’t think it was worth sewing the stripes on for. So I returned them to the company commander and told him I would as soon stay just a private.

Fort Lewis was located about 50 miles south of Seattle between Olympia and Tacoma. That was beautiful country with mountains all around. They sure had a lot of rain in the winter,

though. It used to rain for 10 or 12 days at a time, just a drizzle all day long.

Two of my friends from boot camp and Fort Lewis also were from Texas, and one had an automobile. We made two trips to Texas from Washington, covering 2600 miles in 52 hours each way. Taking turns at the wheel, we drove straight through. When you're young, you can do almost anything.

Having buddies during my years of service was very important. One of those friends brought his wife and came to visit me in 1956 after we returned home. He was living in Madisonville, and my wife and I were living in Winnie, Texas. That was the last time I saw him, though I've tried to find him a couple of times. His wife was from Olympia, Washington, so they may have moved back there.

Our division held maneuvers in Yakima, Washington; twice during the time I was there. We also trained once on new tanks in the desert in California.

I was a Christian when I was in the Army as far as thinking that salvation was through work and that I needed to be good. After I got married later, my wife and I went to the Lutheran church one Sunday. The preacher was explaining how simple salvation is, and that was the first time anyone cleared that up for me. In the service, I went to non-denominational services a few times. I didn't hear a lot of religious discussions between other soldiers.

I think I'm a patriotic person, probably more now than before because I'm more mature. Though I didn't really have an aversion to going in the service, I had no intention of enlisting. I just didn't care about doing that. An enlisted man had to serve three years, while draftees only served two years. That was reason enough for me not to join. But I've always loved America, and it was a more moral country in 1953 than it is today. People were also much more patriotic then.

When I left, they were offering bonuses to the men who reenlisted, but I wasn't interested. It felt too good to be free at last. My friend with the car got out just before I did, so I had to catch a ride to just north of Houston with another soldier who was being discharged. I caught a bus to Houston and bought a car and drove home. After that, I went back to work in the oil patch and did that for the rest of my life.

Though the time I spent with military was good, it wasn't good enough for me to stay. One of the things about the Army that didn't set well with me was the fact that there always were specific times to do things, and they had to be done in a specific way. I'm more casual than that.