*Cara:* It is January 21, 2023, and Cara Vanderree of the Ashland City Library is interviewing Cletus Magus. Cletus, what is your birthday?

*Cletus:* March 12 of 1940.

*Cara:* This interview is being done by the Ashland City Library through Humanities Kansas, in conjunction with the NEA Big Read Project. The NEA Big Read is a program of the National endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest. Cletus, what branch of service were you in?

*Cletus:* In the Army.

*Cara:* What was your rank?

*Cletus:* Well, I ended up a sergeant in the reserves, but I ended up only a PFC in the regular army.

*Cara:* What is a PFC?

*Cletus:* Private First Class.

*Cara:* And where did you serve?

*Cletus:* Well, after I went to military police training in Fort Gordon, Georgia, I went to Germany and spent 19 months in Germany at the little town of Miso which is only about six kilometers from Ramstein, which is a big airbase in there.

*Cara:* Now, were you drafted or did you enlist?

*Cletus:* I was drafted in the army, so I only spent two years in the army.

*Cara:* Where were you living when you were drafted?

*Cletus:* At home with my parents.

*Cara:* In Ashland?

*Cletus:* Yeah, and I was working for the elevator there in Spearville.

*Cara:* How old were you?

*Cletus:* Well, when I was drafted, I was 23, but I started working when I was 19.

*Cara:* But because you were drafted, you didn't get to choose which branch you went into?

*Cletus:* Right, you're right.

*Cara:* What were your first days in the service like?

*Cletus:* Well, we went to basic training and we had nine weeks of training and it was in May and June, so it was cold at night but hot during the day.

*Cara:* Where?

*Cletus:* Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

*Cara:* What was it like?

*Cletus:* Well, it was hot. During the day, it was hot and then at night, at times, it was pretty cool at night.

*Cara:* Did you have barracks or were you in tents?

*Cletus:* Well, we were barracks during basic training, but then when we went to the bivouac, for we spent a week in tents. We had to spend a week in the tents and set up, dig a trench and everything. There was two people per tent, so we each carried a half of a tent. The other guy carried a half, and then we put them together and made a two (person), and then we had to dig a trench around our tent for the water drainage in case of rain.

*Cara:* Did it rain?

*Cletus:* Well, no, not in basic, not in bivouac, but we had to have it there. It was part of the training.

*Cara:* What did it feel like?

*Cletus:* Well, basic training wasn't too bad because I had several brothers and a brother-in-law that were in the military and they said, "Keep your mouth shut, don't say a word to anybody in basic training." So, I did. I kept my mouth shut. I didn't say... just spoke when spoken to, spoke, otherwise don't say a word and I got along fine.

*Cara:* You kept your head down.

*Cletus:* Kept my head down and my lieutenant, that was the head of the basic training, he was really great, I really liked him, because he would do anything that he expected us to do. He could do anything, and so I had earned a lot of respect for him because he was a real good lieutenant in basic training.

*Cara:* Is there anything that you remember having to do?

*Cletus:* They had to shoot. We had to crawl... For basic bivouac, we had to crawl about 50 yards or so under fire and they fired over our heads.

*Cara:* Real bullets?

*Cletus:* Oh yeah, real bullets. Of course, I think they were firing enough above our heads that we could stand up and I don't think they could hit us. But we didn't take the chance. In other words, I don't think they were low enough that they would hit us.

*Cara:* They were aiming at you.

*Cletus:* Well, they were above us, but they was far enough above we could stand up but we didn’t take that chance and we had to crawl 50 yards with our elbows. Some of them had bloody elbows by the time we got there, because we crawled in dirt and rocks and we had to go 50 yards under concertina wire and stuff like that. Yeah, but that was part of our training in basic.

*Cara:* And how long did basic last?

*Cletus:* Nine weeks, nine weeks because we had to march with our guns and we had to learn all the commands and stuff. So, we had to learn quite a bit, what each command meant. And then that was part of the training, you know, and then we went out and we spent four weeks of that week just firing in the firing range. We'd march out to the firing range and we'd shoot our weapons and the targets were pop-up targets. So, some were as far as 50 yards to 300 yards and they'd pop-up in different places and we would shoot them down. But we did that for four weeks. We shot weapons, and learned how to shoot the weapons and we used an M 1. We used the old, old M 1, which was from World War II. And then when we got to AIT, we got to use the M 14, which was fairly new then.

*Cara:* What's AIT?

*Cletus:* It's pretty nearly the same weapon, but it was an M14 rather than the M1. It was used in the World War II.

*Cara:* What was the place called where they gave you the M14?

*Cletus:* Well, that's where I went the second week of MP training.

*Cara:* And MP stands for?

*Cletus:* Military police.

*Cara:* Ok.

*Cletus:* Military police: that was my second... it's been too long, but my second tour of duty was MP training.

*Cara:* Okay.

*Cletus:* I got two weeks’ notice between basic training and MP training. I got two weeks’ notice, so I got to come home and then I had to go back for MP training and that was my second. There, I took a test and according to the test they put me where they wanted me. I didn't know what an MP was until I found out. You know, I was drafted into it; because I was drafted, I had to go where they put me and I took a test to find out. I guess on that test I scored where I was an MP rather than the infantry. They put a lot of people in the infantry.

*Cara:* What kind of training do you get if you're going to be an MP?

*Cletus:* Well, we learn military law for one thing, so we go to school part of the time and then we learn how to drive a Jeep. Well, most of us knew how to drive a Jeep, but a lot of people going through training didn't know how to run a stick. They didn't know how to run the stick shift or the four-wheel drive. But everybody in our Jeep got together and we all knew how to drive it. So, we had fun. We just drove it like we knew how to. Then we had 18 hours of judo and I don't know how many hours of schooling. We had to learn the military law and then we had riot control. That was where we had the shields, plus the helmets, plus the glasses, and we learned how to wedge people and break up a riot, riot control. I forget how many weeks of that we had, we had training in that. But after nine weeks of training there, in the military police, then they took us on an airplane up to New York and we caught a ship. But we took an airplane up to New York, caught a ship and went across the sea.

*Cara:* And you went to...

*Cletus:* Bremerhaven, which is at the north end of Germany. That's where all the troops come with the ships, and then we got on a train and went to our base, which was way in the south part of Germany, so we went clear across the state. And that's when I lost my... It was foggy, cloudy and foggy, and so on. I was disorientated every time I was over there because the sun come up in the north every day. I couldn't get it straight. I knew it...

*Cara:* But you had to think about it.

*Cletus:* I had to stop and think.

*Cara:* What was it like when you got there, to your assignment?

*Cletus:* Well, until our clearance went through, we had to give crypto clearance to get in the area and we never used any of our police work whatsoever. That's what's strange. Anything, we learned in the police department, we didn't use, and we just pulled guard duty for 19 months, regular guard duty for 19 months.

*Cara:* What is regular guard duty? What do you do?

*Cletus:* Well, eight hours on, and then you're off for 12 hours.

*Cara:* What do you do when you're on guard duty?

*Cletus:* Just walk. Just walk the fence carrying a gun with 40 rounds of ammo. We had 40 rounds of ammo, two clips, that it. That's when we got the M14's, they would hold a 20-military clip, and we had to carry 40 rounds. Where the M1 only had an eight clip. So that was the difference between the M1 and the M14. One of them had eight and the other one had 20, so that was it.

*Cara:* The big thing was having more ammunition.

*Cletus:* Yes, having more ammunition and quicker. I then carried an M14 for 19 months, I'd go out in the woods, mind you, because our duty was to cover the bunkers. There was a bunch of bunkers out there that very early, the Germans built the bunkers. They had the anti-aircraft missile in most of them and the anti-aircraft missiles was set up along the East German border because the border was for the Chinese and the Russians. Well, at that time the Russians were trying to come in, you know. So, they were set up along there. There's one time I volunteered for a truck that hauled them up there and put them on the border. Right across the border, the Russians owned it, so we had to watch it, right at the border. I only took one truck up there. Otherwise I was in the area walking guard duty for 19 months and it was boring. You talk about boring. Boring, boring because it was out there by yourself. Now, you could see the other guard because they had 18 guards around that whole area. You could see them but we couldn't get together and talk.

*Cara:* Now remind me where this was that you were guarding?

*Cletus:* Missal, Germany.

*Cara:* Missal, Germany, was the name of the town that was closest.

*Cletus:* Close.

*Cara:* And you are guarding bunkers of anti-aircraft...

*Cletus:* Yeah, missiles. Anti-aircraft. Now some of the two, I think, two of the bunkers had the big nuclear bombs, but it wasn't set up for nuclear power. If it were detonated, it would only clear half a mile, that was it. But if one of them went off, we wouldn't be here today.

*Cara:* Did you ever feel threatened?

*Cletus:* Yeah, yeah!

*Cara:* Threatened by what?

*Cletus:* By the bomb! They were out here... Well, that one deal, I was on guard duty and there was another company, an ordnance company. The ordnance company took care of the missiles and we took care of the guard duty, that was it. Then right out here was this platform where they brought the bombs out and I was next door. I was right, well, 50 yards, not even 50 yards of that bomb. I was just within a couple of yards of that bomb and they were down there. They brought them out of the bunker and set them all along there, and this one (bomb), they couldn't get it to... and there I had to stay on my guard duty and they took off running. And then's when I really was scared!

*Cara:* And you had to just stand there?

*Cletus:* I had to just stand there and if it went off, it went off. But they ran all the way. The guardhouse was about from here to the highway, and from where I was, I could see them still running out the gate. Pretty soon here come the Jeep. And that was the only time I didn't see the Jeep stop at the gate because everybody said to check everybody's [paperwork].

*Cara:* Did they come get you?

*Cletus:* No! They came to get the bomb. I had to stay there! They came barreling in with the Jeep and they came up there. Of course, this guy was an officer that was supposed to be able to disarm the bomb. He messed with it and he messed with it and pretty soon he said, "Okay, I got it all squared away." And it was okay. Then they all left and the ordnance company put the bombs back in, you know, and pretty soon they called the ambulance and they came around and picked us all up. After they got away!

*Cara:* Is that the Army way?

*Cletus:* Yeah! They came and picked us up and took us to the great house and then they checked everything out and they put us back out there then to pull guard duty. But they picked us up and I thought, "You're a day late and a dollar short!" because if that thing went off, it would have cleared everything for about half a mile. It wasn't nuclear, we wouldn't have had the nuclear one, but we had the regular bomb, you know, which would clear everything out for about half a mile. Clear everything for half a mile, so I didn't have a chance. I was within, well, 10 feet or 12 feet, 15 feet. You just stood there and said, "Well."

*Cara:* And you just stood there.

*Cletus:* And said, "This is it."

*Cara:* Probably couldn't run that fast anyway.

*Cletus:* My chances were... Well, if that sucker's going to go off, it's going to go off and to get half a mile out of there... So yeah, you're right, I just said, "That's one of the hazards."

*Cara:* Well, quick question. Where was that bomb aimed?

*Cletus:* It wasn't aimed. It was just right there, it was just going to go ba-boom right there and blow the whole area up. The only thing wrong with it was, it might have set the others off.

*Cara:* Well, really quick here, help me understand. Why do you put a bomb on your own ground?

*Cletus:* Well, but they were. They had to have them, what would you call it...

*Cara:* You had to make them live?

*Cletus:* They had to make them live and evidently, wherever they turned, you're supposed to see whether they're live or not, and this one was alive to start with. So I don't know the whole thing, but I do know it was a nuclear bomb and that was the only... probably the only time I was really scared was that one. I thought, well, that's just part of the hazards, right there. But that's about the only thing that happened, that whole 19 months of walking on guard duty.

*Cara:* With one very exciting moment.

*Cletus:* One exciting moment. Now they did have, but I wasn't out there in the unit, but at that time some of the pranks they pulled, these ordnance guys would come out way after dark when they were supposed to be there before dark. Well, in Germany, it gets dark at 4:00 in the afternoon, because it's far enough north. Now, it gets dark early in the wintertime, but in the summertime, it's just the opposite. It stays light till 10:00 at night. But anyway, the prank they pulled and it wasn't my unit but another unit, because there was four units and three of them was on guard and one was off. And then we rotated for the whole 19 months. We rotated day on and day off, we were on three-day shifts, which was eight to four, and then from four to midnight it was a swing shift and then from midnight to eight in the morning, and that was the three shifts, and then one was on guard. We had what they call an eight-day, vacation free. We didn't have weekends, in other words weekends, it's 24-7. In fact, both Christmases, I worked, but both New Year’s I was off. It just panned out that way.

*Cara:* Did you get to go home and visit family?

*Cletus:* No, no, no, not in Germany. If there was a death or something like that, we could come home if we wanted to, but I wouldn't get to because in Germany I would get two weeks off at the most, about eight days, so it wouldn't have given me enough time.

*Cara:* When you had a day off, what did you do?

*Cletus:* We just went to Paris, we went to different places and we went to Frankfort. We went to Munich, we'd go to different places sometimes and then sometimes we'd stay and play cards or hide out. The card game we played was pinochle. There was four of us in our unit. We played pinochle and we did play a lot of pinochle. Yeah, no, no, no money was... We didn't play no poker, yeah, but we played pinochle mostly.

*Cara:* But you've got to travel Europe.

*Cletus:* Oh yeah, I got all over Europe, all over Germany, let's put it. Then I took one of my leaves and went through 11 days of Italy. They called it the highlights of Italy, 11 days and it cost me a $178. Round-trip, 11 days, and my room was paid for and my bus ticket. And then they paid one meal, which was breakfast, for $178! Which back then was quite a bit more than it is now. But still it was fairly cheap then; it was pretty cheap. Then I'm going to see all of Italy and Austria and Sweden, Switzerland, and Germany. I got to see all of them when I took that tour for 11 days.

*Cara:* You used your time wisely.

*Cletus:* I can tell some of the stories. Well, on one of the trips, the bus was coming back from Rome, up through Pisa, and up the west side, which was the West Riviera. Tents and beach all along there, and then we got up in the mountains, which was farther north. Well, the mountain passes are where they honk their horn and the one coming up the mountain had the right-of-way. But the bus was so big, going around them curves, you had to stop. The other people would stop and let the bus out. So they honked the horn and they run around. We got up there in the mountains, quite a ways and the bus quit. All of a sudden. Well, we got off the bus and he said we were going to have to call back down to the nearest city and get a mechanic and all that. Well, first of all, the bus was stopped at a place that they couldn't stop. It wasn't wide enough. So we had to get behind the bus and we run behind and I was running behind. Well, they ran the motor because the foot feed broke and the motor was in the rear of the bus. So I ran at the rear of the bus. He told me what to do and I would run the accelerator and go up the hill as fast as I could run! I'd run the thing up the hill and then I'd get tired and I'd switch off with another guy. He would run it until we found a wide enough spot in the road where we could pull over. Well, we got to our destination there.

We got to wandering around and he said it was going to be a long time before the mechanic got up there and we'd seen this guy over there milking a cow. So we was out there roaming around and we went over there and he could speak a little bit of English. There was different towns that would have a few people that could speak a little or understand. I forget what questions we asked him, but he tried to give us the answer and then we said, "Well, what time is it? We got to get back to our bus." He would lift up on that cow's udder and say, "Well, it's ten minutes to four." So we got back to the bus and that guy, well, there wasn't anybody there yet. There wasn't nobody going to fix that.

We got to telling the people that they could tell the time by lifting up her udder. They said, "No!" and people wouldn't believe us. We said, "Come on back. We got plenty of time," because he wasn't very far from us. So we went on back and he lifted up and said, "It's about four o'clock." And people said, "How in the world do you do that?" He said, "I lift up and I can see the clock down in the village." He was just lifting up the udder to see! And then people were upset and we were kind of upset, too. We thought we thought were really on to something and all he did was lift it up and look down in the village where there's a clock on the church.

So that was one of the highlights of the tour. And then running, I got to do that, running the accelerator to go up the hill. As soon as I let up, we got unloaded, and they switched off and the next guy would run till we found a spot. But anyway, then when we got to Switzerland we stayed all night at Lucerne, which was a big lake out there, Lake Lucerne, and the city was built around that. We ran into people there who were from Kansas, Hoisington, Kansas. There were some people that were on tour and they were in Switzerland. We got a picture of them, but where it's at I couldn't tell you. I took a lot of pictures on slides, so I got a whole boxful of slides from pictures on that trip and I think maybe they are in there. But we met some people from Kansas because the guy I was with was from Cheney, Kansas.

*Cara:* It's a small world.

*Cletus:* That was probably one of the highlights of our trip, we weren't with the military, for one thing. We were on leave. Then I took a trip to... Well that was right about a month before I left, in March. I got finished over there in May and I came home. So in March that year, I went to Berlin and they were still high on the American people. They loved American people because the American people helped them with the air lift. If you know any of your history, the '61 airlift was where they couldn't get food or anything into Germany, to Berlin. So, we flew it in and they had places for the British, the French, and the Americans where they could fly into Berlin because it was four sectors: the east German and then the British, French and the Americans in Berlin.

*Cara:* Were there people there at that time who still supported Hitler?

*Cletus:* No, not in, not in our three sectors, but I couldn't answer that question in East Germany because East Germany was communistic. And you couldn't believe the difference, because I toured... I had to wear my uniform but I toured East Berlin. And there was a difference of day and night between West Berlin and East Berlin. East Berlin had a ten-penny piece made out of aluminum. It took ten of them to make one regular penny.

*Cara:* Their money wasn't worth anything.

*Cletus:* Money wasn't worth nothing over there over in East Berlin.

*Cara:* What other differences were there?

*Cletus:* Well, there was no advertisements, because why advertise? There was no people on the street? The streets wasn't busy. I mean once in a while you'd see a bicycle or so, but you wouldn't see no people on the street, you wouldn't see no cars. It looked like Ashland on Sunday afternoon, just about, and then you'd cross in at Checkpoint Charlie and you’d go in the West and it was booming. I mean it was. They were building and the cars and the traffic was terrible. You can't believe the difference between East Berlin and West Berlin.

*Cara:* What was Checkpoint Charlie?

*Cletus:* That was the checkpoint where you had to crawl.

*Cara:* Between East Berlin and the West?

*Cletus:* Check point Charlie, and they would come on the bus. Well, first of all, the Americans would check everybody out to make sure they was... and then we went through what they called no man's land and then we had to be checked out by the Russians, I guess you'd call them, but they were in East Berlin and they would come on the bus and they'd make a head count. Is all they would do. They wouldn't check our...

*Cara:* Did you have special papers? Passport?

*Cletus:* Yeah, we had to have a special deal to get through Checkpoint Charlie because they checked everybody's... it wasn't a passport. For military, I had to show some military papers and then I don't know what it was for the American people, but it was probably a passport or something.

*Cara:* Did you get checked both ways, when you went in, and when you came out?

*Cletus:* And when we came out, we got checked again.

*Cara:* What would have happened to you if you didn't have the paperwork?

*Cletus:* You got throwed off the bus. Yeah, you had to get off. You had to get off there at Charlie or whatever, and get your own way home. But I got out. I was in Berlin in March. In August, we had heard about some of the people from East Berlin. Some young people strapped themselves to the bottom of a Caterpillar with a big blade on the front. A dozer. They had strapped themselves underneath and turned it loose and went through the wall. And that was after I'd been there. Well, then they closed down Checkpoint Charlie and everything until they got all that squared away. So that happened about four months after I was over there, that these people got free.

*Cara:* They survived it.

*Cletus:* Oh yeah, yeah, they made it because they were underneath and they strapped themselves on and then they turned that tractor loose and the tractor went on through the wall. But I've seen the wall and I have a picture to the wall.

*Cara:* Where they drove through it?

*Cletus:* Well, no, that was after I was there. I was home by then. I was there in August.

*Cara:* But you saw the Berlin Wall.

*Cletus:* Oh yeah, I was there in March of 1965. I was in Berlin and I've seen the Berlin Wall, went through Checkpoint Charlie and then they checked our bus. But then we went to the cemetery and we went through a lot. But there was nobody on the street and there was no advertising, everything was taken over by the government.

*Cara:* And you didn't want to stay there.

*Cletus:* It was quite different to see. But that was one of the trips I took there.

*Cara:* Did you get any medals or citations for good behavior?

*Cletus:* Well, I got an honorable discharge, but that everybody gets that except the ones that are medically discharged. But about the only medal I got was Expert and that was way back in the basic training. I got a top shooter of shooting rifles. What do you call it?

*Cara:* Target?

*Cletus:* You've got the regular...

*Cara:* Marksman?

*Cletus:* Well, marksman was second, but the top shooter in the top expert. Expert, that's what it was. I got an expert medal. It's about the only medal and, like I said, when I come over, all my buddies that went over with me from the basic training, not the military, but the basic training. I run into a whole bunch of my buddies from the basic training and they were all sergeants and I was only a PFC, which is...

*Cara:* One notch up.

*Cletus:* So then, when I got over here in the Reserves, I told them I wouldn't go to reenlist because they wouldn't give me no rank. "Well, we'll make you sergeant." That was here in Dodge, and big deal. Well, a little bit, you know, for Reserve we don't get paid much anyway. So they made me sergeant right before I left, just a month or so before, and then I got out of the active reserves by then.

*Cara:* How did you stay in touch with your family?

*Cletus:* Well, we could call, but usually the phone was pretty expensive, so just letters. I sent letters and pictures back and forth, but not a whole bunch, but I did yeah.

*Cara:* What was the food like?

*Cletus:* We had good cooks and bad cooks. The good cooks, the cafeteria was full and we had good food! He was a good cook on the outside. So he was a good cook on the inside. But then when the other cooks come on duty, hardly nobody would eat there. But I ate there, just because. They put grease on everything. I mean everything was greasy. With the bad cooks, everything was real greasy.

*Cara:* So you paid attention to who was cooking.

*Cletus:* Who was cooking. When one particular good one was, we'd get lieutenants and that from other companies coming over to eat because they knew he was good.

*Cara:* Did you have plenty of supplies to have everything you needed?

*Cletus:* Let's put it this way. We had to go out, no matter what the weather was, raining or snowing, we had to go out 24/7. We had nothing but a cotton coat. You know, and the big shots had wool. That made a big difference! But the big shots got the jackets with the wool and they didn't need them. That was the only supply we didn't get, a warm coat. I myself went to the PX and got a rubber suit and I put my long underwear on, then my rubber suit, which would hold my body heat, and then I put my fatigues on and I kept warm that way. Otherwise we wouldn't have had enough. If I didn't get my own, we wouldn't have had enough to keep warm out in the boonies, because there was days it just rained and rained and rained and rained. Well, we had ponchos, but the ponchos went to your knees and then they dripped down and from your knees down you got soaking wet. And then we were cold. You know that they could have done better with clothing, and then the guys that didn't need them had the wool jackets.

*Cara:* They were inside, anyway.

*Cletus:* Yeah, and they were inside anyway and we had the little army jackets, you know.

*Cara:* Besides when they were running away from bombs, did you feel any pressure or stress while you were working?

*Cletus:* No, not really, just the stress of getting caught, because at night we would kind of get together and talk at different times, at night, when they wouldn't see us. Then at the gatehouse, at the gate, they would warn us when anybody come, they would give everybody a ring and we'd get back to our posts. The only stress we had was when they got that phone call and we had to go back to our base. This was at night.

*Cara:* So, you were more afraid of officers than you were of the enemy?

*Cletus:* Oh, we didn't have no enemy. We didn't have nobody coming up to the fence. Deer and rabbits was the only thing we had come to the fence.

*Cara:* And you only had 40 rounds.

*Cletus:* Yeah, we had 40 rounds.

*Cara:* How did you entertain yourself besides going on tours of other countries?

*Cletus:* Other than playing cards, you know, and then up in what they call the Day Room, we had a pool table and a ping-pong table and we played a little of that. But that was the only time we had off. When we was off, otherwise we slept and we went out on eight hours of duty. So, we didn't have a whole lot of entertainment. Now we did go to the club where you drank beer and have they had a band playing. It was called the EMT Club because I was there when Kennedy got shot.

*Cara:* What happened where you were, when Kennedy was killed?

*Cletus:* Well, when Kennedy was killed, I was in the in that EMT beer joint and we were drinking a few beers, listening to the music because they had a band playing. We were sitting around visiting and we wasn't dancing because there wasn't no women. We were just talking. You know, shooting the bull. All of a sudden, over the loud speaker, they shut the band down and they said, "Your president has been shot." And that was it.

*Cara:* No more information.

*Cletus:* No more information whatsoever. So, we sat there. We didn't know if we should finish our beer or whatever. Then about 30 minutes or so later, they said, "Your president has been shot by a Russian."

*Cara:* Oh dear!

*Cletus:* You know, defected from Russia. And we thought, "Oh shit. World War III has just started." Because Russia was, you know.

*Cara:* What did you do?

*Cletus:* We waited. It took them an hour before they called an alert. When they called the alert, we had to go back to the barracks and then we had to sleep in everything but our boots. We had to sleep in our fatigues and be ready. Then our boots, we slipped them on and then they had to triple the guards. And they did that for about six weeks till they found out more about what went on. Because this supposed Russian killed the president and he defected from Russia to America. He actually was an American that went back and forth, to put it that way. So, for about six weeks, we was on alert and they tripled the guards for about six weeks. But it took them an hour to call the alert because we was expecting it. But we waited till they called it. We sat there and then we didn't drink any more beer. The band, didn't play anymore. We sat there and we was just, "Oh, our president has been shot." And of course, it was 1:00 over here but it was 7:00 over there, 7:00 in the evening. So, we was already in...

*Cara:* So, you didn't know if you might be...

*Cletus:* In war. We thought we was in World War III. For a couple of weeks, we thought we were going to be extended and have to spend more than two years in the army, but it turned out all right as far as we was concerned.

*Cara:* About the time your service was ending. Was Vietnam ramping up?

*Cletus:* Yeah, yeah, April, they started bombing Vietnam in April and I got out in May. So, we heard a lot about Vietnam. We didn't know where it was at, you know, unless we got a map out. But we heard a lot about the bombing and that. So, we thought when we got on a ship to come home, we thought that ship was going to go around and go to Vietnam and we thought we was going to Vietnam, but we ended up in New York and got off the ship.

*Cara:* Does that mean that the army could have put you into service?

*Cletus:* Oh yeah, oh yeah, they could extend, they could have extended me. Sure, I was drafted and I was still in the so-called reserve unit. In fact, they could have activated the unit and made it go to Vietnam, but I didn't go.

*Cara:* Why didn't they?

*Cletus:* Well, they didn't need to. I guess there was enough enlisted people that wanted to go or they were drafted. I don't know. What did Tom Berryman and Jim Daily and all of them do? Was they enlisted? I don't know either whether they enlisted or were drafted, but anyway they went. So there was enough. They didn't need us, I guess, but we was already trained.

*Cara:* They had already put the money into you.

*Cletus:* Talking about money. Back in 1963, military police was $6,000 apiece. To put us through that nine weeks training, $6,000, which was a lot of money back then and we never used a bit of it. We went over to Europe, and 90% of the military police went to the pulling guard duty in the woods. That's all we did for 19 months. All that training went to hell. I don't know. I know a little bit about falling and judo. But all I learned about the military law and all that is not very useful.

I probably used the judo more than anything, and that was learning how to fall, because I had a terrible fall after I got back, I fell 16 feet on cement and lived through it in flying colors.

*Cara:* You think it's because you were trained how to fall.

*Cletus:* Oh yeah, exactly. I give all my credit to that.

*Cara:* That was in an elevator.

*Cletus:* In the top of the elevator from one floor to the other. I was standing on a four-foot wall when I went over 16 feet into the bottom floor, which was still on top of the bin, and it just knocked me out of wind. Then for about an hour or so, I didn't know where I was at. I come to and I didn't know... I'd worked there for many years and I didn't know where I was at.

*Cara:* So you came through the military with no trouble! All right, so you're not exactly sure why they didn't push you into active-duty in Vietnam.

*Cletus:* Other than they have enough, they had enough to go on without me.

*Cara:* Without there was a lot of negative sentiment about Vietnam. When you got back home, how did people treat you?

*Cletus:* Well, they treated me fine. I wasn't in Vietnam, but when the Vietnam (men) come home, they waited till they come home, for they supposedly killed a lot of women and children. Supposedly, and course, they had orders to do it and you had to follow the order. But they treated me great, because I wasn't in that war.

*Cara:* Your timing was better.

*Cletus:* Yeah!

*Cara:* Did you go back to school or did you just go straight to work? Did you use the GI Bill?

*Cletus:* Well, no, I went straight back to work because they had to hire me back where I was working at the grain elevator, so they had to hire me back. I worked there till '68 when I went into Farm Bureau. I got out in '65, so I worked three more years at the elevator and then on my own I signed up to be an agent for Farm Bureau. So that was my living. Yeah, and I didn't go to college.

*Cara:* While you were in the service. Did you make any close friends?

*Cletus:* Oh yes. In fact, everybody you lived with in that barrack was your friend and you would do anything for him and he'd do anything for you because we had to live together. There was two people... Well, he was the guy that went with me on that trip, was from Cheney, Kansas, but he was in another unit. The guy that was from Winfield, Kansas, he was in my unit, in my room. He was a big Bible... he knew everything about the Bible. I was Catholic and we had a big discussion and once in a while the others, there was eight to a room, and some of the others said, "Shut up, we want to sleep." But me and him would go back and forth on our discussion. Anyway, he had a lot of good points and I had a lot of good points that we went over. But pretty soon, one night, everybody in that barrack, in our room, which was eight of us, was involved in the discussion, but we made good friends. In fact, when I came back over here, I went to see him and he seen me several times.

*Cara:* So, you did keep some of your friends?

*Cletus:* Just two of them. The one that was really close was a bicyclist, well, he was a runner, I should say, but he had a bicycle. I would ride his bike while he would run and he was a good friend there. But he run for the Germans and he run for America so he didn't have to do any of the duty. He got to be a runner, which he loved to do. So, we were pretty close, to him, but he was from Minnesota somewhere and I never did get to keep track of him.

*Cara:* Did you join any veterans’ organizations after you got out?

*Cletus:* Well, I tried to get the VFW and my brother was a VFW member because he fought in the Korean War. He tried to get me in. He was at Spearville and he was commander and all that. He tried to get me in, but I'd never been to a unit that was assigned so I couldn't get in. Well. Then I moved down here and they needed some help and I said, "Well, if you'll take me, I'll help shoot the weapons and go out on and do things, but I can't hold an office job. So, they took me in down here. But legally I can't be a VFW member. I can be an American Legion and I didn't look, you know. So that's the only organization I belong to is here but I'm not legal because it was in a foreign war, I wasn't in any combat zone, because you've got to be in a combat zone to be legally VFW.

*Cara:* Well, how did being over there make you feel about military service?

*Cletus:* Well, I didn't like it because number one, it's socialistic as hell. They tell you everything to do. They tell you when to get a haircut, they tell you when to poop, they tell you when to brush your teeth. They took my liberty completely away. That was number one. Number two: it was a bad time because in military police there was no rank.

*Cara:* Okay.

*Cletus:* There was one of my room members. He was 22 years in the military and he was still PFC.

*Cara:* So he got very low pay.

*Cletus:* Well, sure, there was no rank in PFC. The only way is you get out of the military police and get into some other unit and get your rank and then come back, you could keep your rank. At that time, I had bad duty because it was boring as hell, because you go out there, you try it sometime, go out in the woods way away from everybody, and pull guard duty for eight hours straight and then come home and your mind just... So I didn't want to have anything to do with the military when I got out. But there are other good parts of the military. My son was in the Air Force, my other son was in the military in the marines. He spent four years in there. Of course, he got out. But I just put my two years in and I got out. Well, I had my four years of reserves, but mainly because my duty was terrible. I had a terrible duty over overseas. If I'd have been a real MP, maybe I would be in 20 years or something. But I didn't. I went out in the woods and pulled guard duty and that's all I got, with no rank whatsoever in there. So I gave it up.

*Cara:* Is there anything that you would like to add about your military service?

*Cletus:* Well, other than I learned to get along with people, for one thing, and I think it helped me in my insurance business quite a bit. You had to put up... if you didn't like that guy across from you, you had to put up with him. You had to learn to get along with everybody in your unit, and that helped me a lot. You know, even though I was pretty easy-going anyway, I would always look for the good in the people that I served with. But that was probably one of the biggest things. Then travelling all over Europe, the travel. I couldn't put my handle on it because that trip to Italy and back for $178 was the highlight of one of my tours.

*Cara:* You never got to go back to Europe.

*Cletus:* No, I've never had the chance. I've had many foreign exchange students I helped over here that invited me to come over there, but I've just never... I should have.

*Cara:* Cletus. Thank you very much. It's good because it's experiences from our community.