

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Naval Reserve Project

Reserve Experience

O. H. 382

JOHN VARLEY

Interviewed

by

David Arms

on

April 30, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Naval Reserve Project

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN VARLEY

INTERVIEWER: David Arms

SUBJECT: Early Naval Reserve Activity, Korean Conflict,
Building of the Reserve Center

DATE: April 30, 1975

A: This is an interview with John Varley for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by David Arms at the Naval Reserve Center, 315 East LaClede, Youngstown, Ohio, on April 30, 1975, at approximately 4:00 in the afternoon.

Jack, could you give me some of your family background starting from a young boy on up, just to brief me on what has happened?

V: I was born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, on the east side. I attended Sacred Heart School, and from there went on to East High School. I graduated from there in 1933. I worked in the steel mills for awhile, and then went to work for the government in 1936. After being in Washington for awhile, I went to night school there at Columbus University. I obtained a BCS degree, a Bachelor of Commercial Science. By today's standards, that is an associate degree, but at that time, that was all that was necessary for me. In other words, I have all the accounting background and associated subjects, with no liberal arts.

A: When did you leave to go to Washington?

V: I left Youngstown in 1936. I worked in the steel mills on and off, when I could get employment, for about a year and a half. Then I went to work for the government in 1936. I stayed there until 1941; at that time I was

transferred out to Cleveland, the Internal Revenue Office in Cleveland. Then in 1942, I was inducted into the Army.

A: So you were in World War II?

V: Yes.

A: You went into the Army as a what?

V: Originally, I was drafted. When I went into the Army, I was assigned to the signal corps. I worked in the signal office at what is now Fort Campbell. At that time, it was Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

A: You served with the Army throughout World War II?

V: I served with the Army throughout World War II, yes. I went overseas. When I went overseas, I went with the hospital unit, 200 general hospital. I was a statistical clerk.

A: Where was that headquartered at?

V: Soissons, France. It was halfway between Remes and Paris. I was there for almost, well, about a year I would say, somewhere along in there. We were there until VE Day. Then we were to be redeployed to the CBI when the VJ Day came up. They started to break up the various personnel in there.

A: So did you see any action per se?

V: No, just what came to the hospital. I saw the results of the action, but I didn't see any action myself. I saw quite a few of the prisoners of war that came back in, who were processed back in through the hospital at the time. We saw quite a few of those.

A: Was this a pleasant experience? Did you or didn't you like the Army?

V: It was an experience you will never change or trade for anything. Actually for I, myself, it wasn't a pleasant experience as such, but it wasn't like the combat men. It wasn't a hard experience. You didn't have any hard times traveling with the hospital; you always had the best of everything that they could offer, food and otherwise, and your quarters were always fairly good.

A: After the war was over, what happened then?

V: I decided, just for the sake, if they were ever going to have any conflict again, I didn't think I particularly cared for the Army; I was getting too old for that. So I enlisted with the Naval Reserves.

A: How did you do that, how did that come about?

V: I inquired about it. At that time, the recruiting office was in the Union Bank building in Youngstown. I went over there with another fellow from the office, who also was a veteran of World War II, Elmer Stapleton. He and I joined the Naval Reserves together. Of course being with the government, we were permitted to go to the active Naval Reserves. We were given two weeks of training during the summer. That was good time with the government. They paid us while we were there. It is one of the few times the government will allow you to keep a dual paycheck, the one from the Navy and your own paycheck from the government.

A: Could you tell me a little bit about your first impressions, or your early impression, of the Naval Reserve, when you did join?

V: Actually, when I first joined the Naval Reserve, it was just starting to really get started here. The classes were being held in South High School, and there wasn't too much activity there. They were just bringing the fellows in and trying to get them separated or segregated into what units they thought they should be. I know we went out and drilled a couple of times at the South Field House, and if you will pardon the expression, this was where I had to laugh at the Navy drilling. After being in the Army, I could see quite a bit of difference. Then they moved up to the Naval Reserve Center where we are sitting now.

A: Could you give me an idea of what some of the meetings were like at this time? What did you do at the meetings?

V: At South High School, the meetings were just put in to fulfill the required number of hours. I think it was two hours a month, something like that, that we were required to put there. We would have to come after we were issued our uniforms. We were required to come in uniform, if I recall correctly. Of course, that has been quite a while ago, but I think we did have to report in uniform.

A: Did you get paid for this?

V: Yes.

A: Do you remember any of the pay?

- V: No, I am not sure, but I think we may have gotten paid quarterly or something like that. That has been quite awhile ago; my recollection kind of slips on that, but I think we were paid quarterly.
- A: Do you remember if it was a large amount?
- V: No, it wasn't a large amount at all.
- A: What did you usually do with your money you got from the reserves?
- V: Right now, I wouldn't know. I imagine I spent it on a few beers or something like that.
- A: Could you discuss a little bit about the real reasons of why you wanted to join the Navy Reserves?
- V: As I mentioned, after being in the Army, it was my understanding that they would have to accept me in the Naval Reserves. I think that if it was my choice to begin with, I would have went into the Navy. I had a physical handicap, eyesight. I knew that before I went in. Actually, when I was drafted into the Army I was always limited service throughout the Army, including overseas, because of my eyesight. I thought this would be a good opportunity to get into the Navy. They had to accept me, being that I was a veteran of World War II. That was one of the reasons.
- A: Can you give me an idea of some of the activities that you were involved in within the Naval Reserves?
- V: Yes. Elmer Stapleton, the fellow I mentioned to you, and myself spent two summers here, at the Naval Reserve Center. At that time, they had completed the outside of it, and they were then in the process of installing the various things pertaining to the Navy itself, the training of the personnel of the recruits, or the reserves that would be coming in here. We worked two summers up here on that. I enjoyed it very much. We did quite a bit up here, various miscellaneous details. I couldn't tell you what it is now, installing machinery and various equipment around the place.
- A: Do you recall any of the occurrences during this period? In other words, anything specific that comes to your mind?
- V: That one I mentioned to you is always in my thoughts. We put that overhead crane, hand crane, back in there in order that they could take things off of trucks. I think from the middle bay there, we installed an I-beam, and overhead I-beam, that the crane could move back and forth on. How we got that into position . . . they had the foundation in there with the lug screws coming through. It consisted of three I-

beams really, with the overhead I-beam where the crane would travel. The only way that we could get it up . . . we jacked it up, and kept putting boxes and various things up as we lifted it up. We kept easing that up until we got it to the point where it was almost ready to go over. A fellow got into the truck and pulled that onto these lugs, and then they bolted it down. That was a very primitive way of getting it up there, and if anything would have happened we would have all been killed. But we did get it up there without any trouble at all. I always can remember that because I always think back to what could have happened at the time.

- A: Can you remember any of the people that might have been with you at the time, helping you out?
- V: There was Elmer Stapleton and myself who worked here. Of course, I can remember the one fellow here who is well-known around town, that is where I got to know him, Judge Leskovansky. He was here with the reservists at the time. After things got rolling here, I was under Lieutenant Covington and Lieutenant Ashton. I saw in the paper just recently something about him regarding his church. He became a minister, Lieutenant Ashton. There was another fellow and I can't recall his name; he was the chief mate here for the reservists. He worked with the Metropolitan Bank. I think he has been dead for about four years now. Also at the base here as permanent personnel was Jay Ferranti, I think. He was known as Jay and there was a fellow under him who we used to call Stoney. I think his last name was Stone. We always referred to him as Stoney.
- A: Did you have any specialty? What kind of a job were you really assigned to do?
- V: When I was placed under Lieutenant Downing, he was more or less, I guess, in the administrative end of it, and into the personnel end of it. We gave aptitude tests. Elmer Stapleton and myself both did the same thing. That is about all that we did while we were here. We were excused from the drilling part and that because of trying to get this program set up. It was something I think that was new for the reservists here, something they were trying to start to get into action.
- A: Do you remember what they used the results of this test for or anything like that?
- V: No, I never did. I never was that far in the program. I will have to go back and recollect on that, but I was picked up or requested to report for the Korean conflict, just before they started using it.

- A: When you joined back in 1946 or 1947, what was the feeling around Youngstown or the area about the reserves? Can you give me something on that?
- V: The feeling of the reserves was very good. As a matter of fact, I think you had--I don't know what your numbers are here today--a very high personnel here. The reservists that were from World War II just automatically joined the reserves. There were quite a few novitiates you had here with the reserves. I don't know because you weren't exposed to the personnel that long, at any one time, that you really became acquainted with them. Only those that we worked up here with for two weeks, we really became acquainted with. I know there was a Chief Oriz I am quite sure, who was the chief that was responsible for most of the installing of the equipment and that around here at the time I was here.
- A: You mean by the installing of the equipment . . .
- V: Well, your motors and the various things that were necessary to bring the center in, so that they could use it for the training of the reserves. In other words, I know that they were installing some motors and various things like that around here.
- A: He was in the Navy, this Oriz?
- V: Yes, he was in the Navy.
- A: All of the work was done here by whom?
- V: All of the work was done by Navy personnel.
- A: On a two weeks or what?
- V: I would say most of it was done on a two week basis.
- A: How about the acceptance by the people of Youngstown of the Reserve Center, do you remember any problems in that area?
- V: To my knowledge there was nothing. I never heard any feedback on it, one way or the other, that was negative toward the reserves being here.
- A: Can you recall any community activities that you participated in as a reservist?
- V: No, I never did. I never participated in any community activities.
- A: Did you march in any parades?

- V: No, right at that time, for some reason or other, I don't know what it was, whether they had them and I was not there, I have no recollection of anything like that at all one way or the other. I would say that they didn't march really. I think most of the marching at that time was done by your veteran's organizations, your American Legions and so forth, and all of your high schools. I don't think the reservists participated right at that time.
- A: Do you remember a big Memorial Day parade around Youngstown?
- V: They have always had them, but I myself was never overly interested in them. I never participated in them or even went to see them, to tell you the truth. Although from reading the paper, I knew they had large parades.
- A: When you joined the reserve what was your understanding at the time? In other words, you came in for a hitch . . .
- V: Yes, when I joined the reserves, I was in for a four year hitch. Of course because of the Korean conflict there, I was extended for one year. I was frozen for an additional year by executive order from the President. So I served five years in the reserve instead of the original four.
- A: Why was this again?
- V: Because of the presidential proclamation on that or executive order, I forget which it was, but President Truman had extended it one year.
- A: So this was all reservists, not just yourself or Youngstown?
- V: This was all reservists.
- A: Do you remember what it was due to?
- V: Because of the Korean conflict it was extended one year.
- A: You didn't serve in Korea at all?
- V: No, I was called up and I went to Pittsburgh and had the physical there. They turned me down right at the time because of the eyesight; the Army had me on limited service. Of course, I am not sure, this had always been my personal opinion. I thought that there was a time when the forces were moving awful fast toward the north, and it looked like the whole thing was over. I think if it was the reverse of where they had been, being pushed into the south there, I probably would have been taken into active duty right at the time. It looked like the thing was about over, so I think they were getting a little selective in their physicals.

This is all my personal opinion, so I couldn't tell you if I was correct in that or not because no one ever told me.

A: What was this physical about, do you remember?

V: The Korean conflict was in 1950, so I would say that it happened around 1951 or somewhere along in there. After that, when I came, they put me on inactive reserves so I never had to attend the meetings or anything else. This is one of the reasons that I didn't know too much more about the center here. All I had to do was just wait until my hitch was over and then they gave me my discharge.

A: Was there any intention on your part on staying in the reserves?

V: At the time, I think I would have, but I don't know. That is hard to say right now because I think I was in there two years or three years after that physical before I got my discharge. So I don't know what the situation would have been. I had no reason to weigh it one way or the other really. Of course, there are years in there, two or three years, so you can't tell what your decision would be by the end of that time.

A: Was there any patriotic influence on your part?

V: Yes. I don't feel myself being a flag waver, but I worked for the government all of my life. The government, as far as I am concerned, has been good to me, and I think you do owe yourself a service to your government. As a matter of fact, I think that at the time I got out of high school, I would have joined, but that was in the middle of the Depression. You had no chance in the world to join anything at that time because all of the ones that were in there, were staying in there; you couldn't get a job on the outside. I think they had a waiting list so long that you would never be able to come to the top of it. Your old Army, your old Navy, your old Marines, they were all staying in there.

A: Let's say in the 1950's, had you ever talked about shifting over, possibly rejoining? Was there any intention on your part?

V: No. I knew once they discharged me, I don't think I would have got in. I would have had to have been subjected to a physical and I wouldn't have met the physical qualifications because I was too tall for the Navy. I think you have a limitation of 6'2" or something like that. This was another restriction that was exempted to me when I came from the Army right into

there. I am 6'5" and 3/4", just under the Army specifications maximum. It would have been interesting.

- A: Can you recall any of the commanding officers of the center here or during your time?
- V: The only one that I ever knew was Stansberry, Commander Stansberry. Outside of talking to him at the bank, I never personally came in contact with him at the center or at South High School.
- A: He was employed by who?
- V: The Union National Bank. Of course, I got to meet him through my outside work with the Internal Revenue. I got to meet him that way.
- A: Can you recall any different Navy policies at the time that might have affected you in any way? We often hear of the government and its fine policies.
- V: I never came across any that would have had any effect on me one way or the other. I think the only policy that came into being, was an Army vet was given one stripe or something automatically. When I came into the Navy, I can't even remember what my rank would be at the time; I think you had one stripe or something like that. They had changed the rating since then, both the Army and Navy I know, but we weren't the lowest rank at the time because of being an Army vet. We were given some preference in rank as an enlisted personnel. That is about the only time that I came across any policy.
- A: What were you in the Army? What was your rank?
- V: I was what they call a T-4, which would be equivalent to a field sergeant. I was a T-4 because I was doing administrative work.
- A: Did you carry any of your experience over to the Navy at all?
- V: Not really, because I was just a statistician. Of course, I was giving these tests and that, and actually that was administrative in a way. Just general administrative ability, yes, I carried that over. Of course, I had training for that in my civilian life, too. It was a straight carry through to both the Army and the Navy really.

A: If you were an administrative specialist of some kind, what were you doing working construction out in the back?

V: Well, it is like everything else. You have to get the house set up before you can administrate it. Things were pretty hectic around here at the time. Rather than do sea duty, you could put your two weeks requirement here at the base; this was an alternate. So we took this rather than go to sea. Both of us were Army vets, who had never been exposed to boats or anything else. When I say both of us, I am speaking of Elmer Stapleton. It would be a questionable thing how far we would be able to get in the Navy, not knowing any of the terminology or anything at all about it. This was an easy way of doing it. So we chose this way of helping them out here at the center.

A: So you never did, per se, go on your two weeks anywhere else?

V: No, never shipped out at all.

A: Can you recall anybody that did, where they were going to?

V: At the time, I think you had the choice and almost a selection of when you could take your two weeks. I think one of them was Kingston, and I think the other was Jamaica. You would put in about a ten-day sea trip on that. I think those were the two that were available if you wished. I forget where you were shipped out from; I am not sure whether it was New York or Boston, or Philadelphia.

A: Do you remember how they got from here to Philadelphia or Boston?

V: I think they got there by train. That was the way, as a matter of fact, when I was recalled I went down to Pittsburgh.

A: That was back in the 1950's or so. They were still riding trains?

V: Yes, very much so.

A: You mentioned a Lieutenant John Downing, could you tell me a little bit more about this fellow? You worked for him?

V: I never knew the gentleman until I met him here as my officer, but subsequently, I found out that he was an

attorney in Warren. I had worked with him after being dismissed from the service, when I went up to Warren. Being with the Internal Revenue, of course, I came into contact with him up there. Outside of that, to know him socially or anything like that, I never knew the gentleman.

A: You mentioned that you worked up here two weeks during your summertime. Can you remember any of the occurrences. I am not trying to ask you to put yourself on the platform, but anything that went on that you thought was a little funny. I mean do you remember any alcohol being used?

V: No.

A: The Navy has always been famous for their beer, or whatever it is?

V: No. As a matter of fact, things were a little bit primitive around here by today's standards. There wasn't anything at all around here. They had their coffee, there may be coffee, but that is as far as it went. Actually, when we worked here, both of us were close enough that we went home for lunch and then came back. To my knowledge, it wasn't used at all around here.

A: Do you remember any social functions that might have taken place at the time?

V: I don't think there were; I can't recall any. As a matter of fact, when I was here, they were just putting the floor tiles down. They were just getting the center portion of the place in shape to become a drill hall.

A: I guess at that time, this part of the city wasn't as built up as it is now?

V: It was pretty well built up. Cardinal Mooney wasn't here and the Army Reserve wasn't here. This was here by itself. As I mentioned before, the back lot there had just enough room to drive in and park a car for the full length of the building. There was no parking lot or anything else back there at that time yet. The reservists parked all around the building when they came here for their meetings.

A: Was the automobile the major way of getting here?

V: Oh yes, definitely.

- A: There wasn't any public transportation of any kind here?
- V: Market Street had busses, but I don't know of anybody that came here by bus.
- A: Can you think of any other interesting things that I might not have asked that you might just like to throw in?
- V: I would like to tell you a little story.
- A: Sure.
- V: The day that I left to go to Pittsburgh for the physical, the fellows from the office went down to the Erie station, which was close by. The last thing this fellow said to me getting on the train was, "If there is anything that I can do for you, let me know." I said, "Okay, fine." So I got on the train and went down to Pittsburgh. Of course, this was about 8 o'clock in the morning. I got off at the Erie stations, went over to the phone, and I called the office. I told him who I was, and said, "Remember you told me anything you can do for me, you will do?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, will you get your car down to the Erie station here and take me home? I am here with my duffel bag and I have no way of getting home." He couldn't believe it.
- A: He hadn't run into too many that turned around that fast?
- V: No, not that fast.
- A: Do you recall anybody else that that could have happened to? Were they turning them away left and right at the time?
- V: No, not that I know of. I was the only one. As a matter of fact, I know one fellow who was a very close personal acquaintance who did serve his time over there in the Korean conflict. I think he was called in after I was, but I am not sure.
- A: When you were called up, were you called up at the beginning of the Korean conflict?
- V: No. I don't recall the time. It was evident that the reservists were going to be called up; it was just a question of time.
- A: You were called up one by one?

V: No, we went down there. There were several being examined at the same time. Now I do recall the one fellow who went down with us saying, "Well, where are you going now?" I said, "I am going home; I don't know where you are going." He said, "Come on now, quit kidding me." I said, "No, I am going home." He said, "Well, I guess I will have to find somebody else."

A: You say this was in Pittsburgh. Was this a Navy facility?

V: Yes, it was. We had to walk across the river. We walked to the building; it was on the other side now. I can't recall whether or not it was a federal building, or what it was. They gave us our physicals, but it seemed to me it wasn't too far from walking across the bridge of the river. The facilities were really something. One way they told you how you had flat feet or not was by lifting up your foot. From the black dust that was on your foot, they could see the outlines of your feet as to whether or not you were flat-footed. That is a fact. All you did was just lift your foot up and show him the sole of your foot. He would determine whether or not you were flat-footed.

A: You got paid for your trip down there?

V: Oh yes. I was reimbursed for the trip back. I went over to whoever it was that would give me my ticket back. I had to go over and make arrangements that they would pay for my ticket back.

A: This was in Pittsburgh?

V: Yes, because I shipped down on orders; I had to come back on a separate voucher.

A: Did they feed you at all when you were there? Did they give you an allowance for that?

V: I wasn't there long enough. I was down there at eight o'clock and I was back in Youngstown at twelve o'clock.

A: How long did it take to ride, at those times, from here to Pittsburgh?

V: Not too long. I would say about an hour, an hour and a half, somewhere around there. It wasn't too long; it wasn't a long trip.

A: It ^{is} probably faster by train than it is by automobile today?

V: It was at that time because the train left . . . of course, don't forget your departure was from the heart of the city, to the heart of another city. So you did gain that time. It wasn't like an automobile where you have to go from the outskirts of the city through the city to get to where you were going in the other city.

A: Jack, I want to thank you for dropping by.

V: You are more than welcome.

A: If you think of anything else that you can add to this at any time, why just let me know and we can try to get together. Thank you again.

V: You're welcome. It was my pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW