

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Army Reserves Project

Reservist Experience

O. H. 384

RICHARD HAMAKER

Interviewed

by

David Arms

on

March 16, 1976

RICHARD HAMAKER

Richard Hamaker was born in Youngstown, Ohio, on January 18, 1935. He graduated from Struthers High School in 1953 and attended Youngstown State University. Mr. Hamaker's military career has included service in the Ohio National Guard, the Army Reserves and the Air Force Reserves. After joining the Army Reserves in 1956 as a full-time technician he was responsible for the petroleum imports and exports for the Eastern United States. He is also the area communications chief and supervisor for all communications within his headquarters detachment. Mr. Hamaker has been awarded Army Reserve medals and the U.S. Reserve Accommodation Medal.

A member of Wickliffe United Presbyterian Church, Mr. Hamaker is married to Janet Joy and has three children: Richard, Judith, and William. He has been a policeman in Austintown since 1966. Mr. Hamaker's hobbies include flying and he is also a member of the Greater Youngstown Crime Center.

Jeanne Ontko

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: RICHARD HAMAKER
INTERVIEWER: David Arms
SUBJECT: Army Reserves, National Guard, training
DATE: March 16, 1976

A: This is an interview with Mr. Richard C. Hamaker for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by David Arms at the Naval Reserve Center, 315 East LaCiede, Youngstown, Ohio, on March 16, 1976, at 2:15 p.m.

Mr. Hamaker, could we just start this interview possibly with giving me an idea of your background, where you were born and brought up, some of that.

H: I was born in the city of Youngstown. I lived on the south side of Youngstown from 1935 until 1941. In 1941 we moved to the city of Struthers where I remained until I graduated from high school; I joined the Ohio National Guard and after completing high school I spent one year at Youngstown University in the electrical engineering program. This didn't really work out too well and through the Ohio National Guard I entered active military service. I did approximately two years active duty with the United States Army and came back to the city of Youngstown. I was here just a very short time and went to work as a full-time civilian technician in 1956. I worked as full-time technician for the Ohio National Guard from 1956 to 1962. In 1962 I left the National Guard program. There was a shift in the work structure and I came over to work for the Army Reserve as a full-time civilian technician, where I've been since then. For the last ten years I've also been a police officer in the township of Austintown, immediately to the west side of Youngstown. In 1965 I had left the army program and went into the United States Air Force Reserve for a three year period and then came back, actually came back to the Army Reserves. This at the time was kind of a condition

of employment, although they've never really pushed it. So my entire background ever since leaving high school has been directly service connected.

A: Are you married?

H: Yes sir, I'm married and have three children.

A: Do you live in Youngstown?

H: Yes, I live in Austintown. My children are 16, 17, and 18.

A: You say that you were on two years active duty with the Army, that's the only active duty time?

H: Yes, sir.

A: Where were you stationed during your active duty?

H: I was stationed most of the time with the 54th Service Unit; it was a guided missile unit at Fort Bliss, Texas. I graduated from the guided missile school and then remained with the school troops at Fort Bliss. We ran firepower demonstrations and this sort of thing for all the visiting dignitaries and were involved in the maintenance end of the school program itself. When the students would louse things up something beyond belief then it was up to us to let them try to put it back together so they could do it again the next day.

A: So this is really your total active military experience?

H: Yes sir, that's correct.

A: When you came back, you said you went to work for the National Guard as a civilian technician. What kind of work did you do there, what does it mean? I have no idea what that means.

H: Well, when I went to work for the guard initially, I was qualified in electronics on radar and missiles, but there were no openings in that particular field and I went to work as an artillery repairman. I spent most of my time or I should say the first couple of years of the time with the guard working primarily with weapons, anything from a 45 automatic pistol up to a 120 millimeter anti-aircraft gun. Then, through a shift in the program, I moved strictly into the electronics field with search radars, missile guidance systems, and things of this nature. So my whole career actually, as far as the military is concerned, has been strictly with electronics in one form or another, either in weapons, communications, or whatever.

A: Now as a civilian technician, what was your responsibility?

H: When the program started in 1956 the federal government decided that because of the complexity of the equipment, the reservists couldn't maintain it on one weekend a month. So they established the area maintenance shops that were on a five day a week basis to keep this stuff up, to keep it combat ready as it were, and to manage any repairs beyond the capabilities of the reservists themselves. Then we were also required to double as instructors to teach the operation and maintenance of the equipment.

A: Now, you specifically worked on equipment; you had no other responsibilities, administrative work?

H: Well, no, I was also a member of the National Guard. I served in various positions there as platoon sergeant in a weapons platoon. I later took over the electronics section which actually had to do with the operation of the radar equipment, computers, so on and so forth. Well, I was responsible for the operation and training of the crews and just the general care and well-being of the whole show.

A: So where were you assigned as a technician in the National Guard?

H: I've been working here in the city of Youngstown. When I returned from active duty, the program was just beginning and so I moved into the full-time slot here in the city, and have remained here ever since. When the program with the guard folded up, I was able to leave one job on a Friday afternoon and walk into another one on Monday morning, simply on opposite sides of the town.

A: I see, that was kind of lucky.

H: Yes, it worked out real well, because I was kind of sweating.

A: So, as a member of the National Guard and as a technician, how does this program interrelate? Do you have the same equipment, basically, when you're doing your five day a week job as you do on the drill weekend, or what?

H: Well, yes. During the five day a week program I come in contact with all forms of equipment as used by the military services in this area. Now this covers a much wider range of equipment than what I would touch as a reservist. The type of unit that I currently belong to, we're rather limited in our capabilities as far as

communications are concerned, but on the civilian program I run across everything almost everything that's in the army inventory today at one time or another.

A: So, basically, the equipment used by the National Guard and the Army Reserves is the same equipment.

H: Right. The equipment is identical. There's absolutely no difference in the composition of the equipment, its employment or whatever. It's all the same stuff.

A: How does this relationship of the National Guard with the Army work in, let's say, appropriation of parts and things like this. Do you appropriate right from the same source of supply as the Army?

H: Well, no. The National Guard operates on a much tighter control system. It gets to be a very complex thing to try to explain it, but the Guard system is controlled strictly on a state basis. They don't get as involved in quite a complex supply arrangement as the federal government. Everything is issued, for example, with the Guard in bulk to the state of Ohio, and they in turn portion it to wherever it's needed. With the Army Reserve, we're dealing with the overall federal program and we have to compete for parts or whatever with people, literally, worldwide. The National Guard is dealing strictly on a state basis. In some respects it's a lot more efficient, but there again they are in effect a state organization as opposed to a federal organization. The only person that they really have to satisfy is the adjutant generals in their particular state whereas we have to satisfy, in effect, the Department of the Army and congress.

A: So as a member of the Army Reserve, what unit do you belong to?

H: I belong to the Head Corse & Headquarters detachment of the 475th Quartermaster Battalion. Now this is a quartermaster unit located in Farrell, Pennsylvania. As I said before, it's strictly a headquarters detachment. We are designed to take over and control the operation of up to eleven petroleum operating battalions. This would take in roughly 3,500 men. At full strength we would have the capability, literally, of taking over and controlling petroleum imports or exports from the eastern half of the United States.

A: What is your position with the battalion?

H: I'm the area communications chief.

A: Excuse me, the headquarters.

H: I'm the area communications chief and, as such, I have the responsibility first for the actual operation of all communications within the headquarters detachment itself. I also have the secondary responsibility of, you might say, a supervisory position for all the attached units. In other words, I have to go out to check their procedures to make sure that they are operating within the accepted framework to attempt to find them any answers to any of their problems they may be having, to oversee their general training, and just sort of ride herd on the whole show with regards to communication.

A: I see. Now, you drill in Farrell, Pennsylvania, is that correct?

H: Yes sir, that's correct.

A: I see. How long have you held this position here?

H: I've been with the group since February of 1968. Prior to that I was with the Quartermaster Unit here in the state of Ohio. I had gone as far as I could go as far as rank and so on and so forth, and I found an opening in Farrell which, although it's a little more inconvenient to get there, was a much wider range of possibilities, an increase in rank and just a much better arrangement all the way around.

A: How does the rank system work in the Army Reserve? Do you only get promoted to a certain rank if there's a vacancy, or how does this work?

H: Well . . .

A: How do you make advancements?

H: Well, we'll deal with my section, for example. I have eleven people in my section which includes, of course, myself. Each slot in this section has a certain prescribed maximum rank that the man in that particular slot can hold. My second in command is theoretically limited to a grade of sergeant E5 because of his job, his responsibilities, and so forth. Here, about three years ago, the Department of the Army came out with a merit-promotion system. Under this system, these provisions, I've managed to get this one particular individual promoted to a grade of E6, which is one in excess of his slot. I also have another man who has been promoted one step above the T.O. and E. in grade. This is done, initially, on my recommendation to my superior officer. This was done primarily to increase a little of the incentive to remain as a career reservist, because right now the program has a real problem.

The general feeling of the country, as a whole, they're down on the military. For whatever reason, everybody has a lot of high sounding ideas, but my personal feelings, the national purpose, or patriotism, or whatever you want to call it is at a very, very low point for most people. They just don't give a hoot, and so the government has been trying to retain some people who have the potential of being career reservists by additional promotions even though they are above what the grade structure calls for. They are trying to reward them for doing a decent job and maintaining a little contact with the program.

A: No test is really required for advancement or anything like that?

H: Yes. There are certain requirements you must meet first before you can even be considered for promotion. Now, we don't have a promotional program that compares, for example, with the Navy or with the Air Force or whatever, but a man must first of all be evaluated by his immediate superior as to his efficiency, enthusiasm, ability to work without supervision, and so on. He also must, every four years, take what's referred to as an MOS or a Military Occupational Specialty test. In this test, he must maintain a grade of at least one hundred to qualify for promotion. This grade isn't necessarily required to remain in the program as such, but if he wants to be promoted, he must have a good evaluation report from his superior, plus the minimum grade of one hundred on his MOS test. The MOS test works strictly with his technical ability. The enlisted evaluation report of his superior deals with his overall performance.

A: I see. Okay. You're saying that if there isn't a vacancy per se for this individual, he can't be promoted?

H: Right, this is true. Even though he may have all of the qualifications, he is stopped until such time as he can find a position to move into. I, myself, am currently studying for the rank of sergeant major, which would be E9, one above my current grade. Even though I will be able to satisfy all of the requirements, I still cannot be promoted until such time as a vacancy exists in our particular unit.

A: Now, what happens if you and somebody else, let's say, are both qualified and one vacancy comes up? How do they determine who gets it?

H: Well, there is no hard and fast rule on this. Assuming that all things are equal on MOS tests, EER's and so on, it becomes a matter of discretion of the unit commander.

A: Kind of a political thing?

H: Yes sir, in some cases it is.

A: In your experience, have you seen this turn into a political situation?

H: Oh, definitely. I've seen this many times. Fortunately, I've never been involved in this sort of thing myself. I've been very lucky. But I have seen it in quite a number of cases where the man on the inside gets the job when he's not always the best qualified for the particular position. You could get involved in the specifics, but I don't think that's the point of this whole thing. But it definitely does enter into the program and in some cases very, very unfairly.

A: In your experience in the Army Reserve would you say the program has changed in the recent years?

H: Yes sir, I would definitely say that the program has gone downhill, particularly since 1965. At that time Secretary of Defense, McNamara was in office. He, for some reason or another, saw fit to do away with a large number of combat units within the Army Reserve. The unit that I was in at the time was an infantry division, the single battalion of an infantry division. I had people in the unit at that time who had been there five or six years and had completed their military obligations, but had enough spirit and interest to be potential career people. In 1965 they decided--the defense posture of the country--we don't need you people anymore, zip. There was a cutoff. Everybody was sort of thrown into limbo and just left to go their own way, and since then the training program, with respect to the Army Reserve, has steadily gone downhill.

They've been pushed into more of a support role, which of course is needed, but for our type of training is one of the most difficult forms of training to conduct. For example, a quartermaster petroleum company's primary job is to service petroleum needs of a unit. On a training weekend how do you do it? Where do you go to pump gasoline to deliver "bolt" oil? It can't be done. So you're required to try to keep these people interested through movies, lectures, and whatever, and this only goes so far and then you're fighting boredom as well as a lack of a real meaningful training program.

A: Would you consider these facts as probably the biggest problem the Army Reserve has today?

H: I personally would; the lack of realistic training for most of the units in the Army Reserve, realistic

training is almost nonexistent today. The National Guard has maintained, primarily, combat units which give them an altogether different shot at the training program. But the Army Reserve as such in their support roles, it's just a really bad deal.

- A: The elimination of the combat units from the Army Reserve had the biggest effect on them?
- H: Yes sir, that's my personal feelings on it. I've been with the program 24 years. When McNamara made his cut and the emphasis in the reserve program was towards support units, service support, the overall level of training, enthusiasm, or whatever has gone downhill tremendously. Strengthwise we have suffered quite a bit when they did away with the draft. Of course, this I don't feel was a bad deal either because during the time of the draft we had a lot of people coming in enlisting in the reserves to avoid the regular Army and this hurt the general quality of the people we were getting. Today the people that come in and join the reserve programs are there through a desire to belong. And so the quality of the personnel themselves has actually increased. It's simply the fact that now we don't have anything for them to do.
- A: Would you say what makes the average Army Reservist join the Army Reserve today?
- H: Well, that's kind of a hard one.
- A: I mean just in your personal experience what's the driving motivation? Is it the money, the patriotism, or the ad on TV where you see the girl?
- H: I think in a lot of cases the younger people that join the program are looking at it initially as a chance to get away from home for awhile, to see a little bit of the country that they would normally otherwise never see by virtue of being shifted to various training areas, so on and so forth. Most of them who remain in the program get sort of wrapped up in it. Again, you might say it is a patriotism type of thing. They really begin to enjoy what they're doing and as the years go on, let's face it, money becomes a factor that after you reach the grade of E5 for an enlisted man and get six or eight years service it definitely becomes a paying proposition. In a lot of cases we have people who come in from the outlying areas in Pennsylvania over in the Farrell, New Castle area. The money that they reserve at the Army, or earn through the Army Reserve Program is a very important part of their economic program. They need it to live on. This isn't true, of course, with everybody, but in a large percentage of cases without that money they'd be hurting.

A: You've been involved with the reserves or the Army for 24 years. Why did you originally join up?

H: Well, I joined during the Korean War time. There was a group of us that all ran around together in high school. Of course, the Korean War was still going on. Even though at that particular time we were still in high school, it was definitely the thing to do and--I don't know just exactly the word I want to use--the feeling of national pride was considerably higher at that time I feel than it is today. As I say, it was definitely the thing to do. We were about to get out of high school, the country was in trouble, and this definitely seemed the way to go, to just try to do what we could as individuals.

A: I realize that in your job at the present time you are required to be in the reserves. Is that correct?

H: No sir, it's not, not in my particular case. Some of these jobs do exist that way, but when the program started they had such a tough time finding people who could qualify and could do the work that would also belong to the reserves, that that particular requirement was dropped from my job category.

A: I see.

H: With some of the other cases they didn't have a bit of trouble, but in the electronics field at that particular time there was a shortage of people so they dropped it and it has just never been reinstated in my particular category.

A: So you are not, per se, required to hold a maintenance job in the Army?

H: No sir.

A: Why in this particular area? Why do you work for the Army as a civilian and then . . .

H: Well, to be perfectly frank, it's all I've ever done, is work for the federal government, and particularly today the job field being what it is, it's the best job, best job going. The pay is good. The working conditions are good, not that they're perfect, but they are definitely better than anything in civilian industry and again it's related to the type of work, type of existence which I personally enjoy. That is, you know, in connection with the military.

A: Why do you stay in the Army Reserves then if it's not required for your job?

- H: Well again, it's something I enjoy. I, of course, could retire. I could have retired four years ago as far as the reserve end of it is concerned, but I basically find the job very satisfying, the work, the association with the personnel. Again let's face it, there is additional money involved because of my pay grade. There's an opportunity to travel which I wouldn't otherwise have. So the whole thing just fits together. For me I personally consider it a natural program.
- A: Is there a strong relationship between the noncommissioned officers? Do they become extra close friends or anything like that?
- H: I would say that they do in the upper grades, but not the junior noncom's. For the most part they are serving their time and will be getting out at the first possible opportunity. But when you find one of these younger fellows who fits the program, so to speak, he somehow seems to attach himself to a group of the older people and ultimately works in and becomes a member of the group and becomes one of these as I refer to, career reservists. Although, this individual is few and far between. The younger fellows tend to stick to themselves. They don't want anything to do with us old-timers, you know, the old "brown shoe" Army so to speak. Let's face it, our life styles are different. They want to come into drill with long hair and refuse to, well not necessarily refuse, but they fight conforming to the program with regard to physical appearance and this sort of thing. They feel that they're being held down when they can't have beards and long hair and go out and raise cane all night long.
- A: Do you participate in any social events with any of your fellow reservists?
- H: Yes sir, I have up until the last couple of years. We don't have a very active social program as such. There are probably only three or four cases during the year when we would get together on a unit basis, a Christmas party, the Army birthday, things of this nature. But the last couple of years, because of my secondary employment, I've had to stay away from that sort of thing. It's just a case of, you know, you do what you have to do and the social side of it kind of gets pushed back in the background.
- A: I see. Now you mentioned that you were married and had children. How does your family feel about your relationship with the reservists?
- H: Well, that's all they've ever known. I was a member of the reserves, had returned from active duty when I met my wife. She, fortunately, became a member of the

program, so to speak. She has always been behind it. She doesn't always agree with it, but she has always gone along with my needs one hundred percent. If I have additional work which has to be done at home, typing and things of this nature, she has always been very willing to pitch in, do typing, filing, research work, anything that I would ask her to do to supplement my necessary requirements. She has gone along with it one hundred percent and, of course, the kids have never known anything else and they don't really pay much attention one way or another. They're not particularly oriented towards the military. My oldest boy, as a matter of fact, is going down to take an interview tomorrow with the naval recruiter.

A: You'll forgive him for that?

H: Well, let's face it, he also is looking at it from the standpoint of which service can offer him the most for the time he's required to put in. This isn't brought about by his intense desire to join the Navy to save the world or anything of this nature. But I feel he is taking a very realistic look at his betterment. He's going to graduate from high school this fall. He has a long time to go ahead of him, I hope, and he's looking for some way to prepare himself to have things a little bit better than I did.

A: Let's say you could do it all over again, would you do it all over again?

H: Yes sir, no question, no question at all.

A: Would you do any of it differently?

H: Oh yes, there are changes I would make, but the basic program I've been involved in I'd say I find it very satisfying psychologically. It has now become very satisfying from a financial standpoint. When the program first started in 1956, things were a little slim, but like everything else, if you hang in long enough, it does have its rewards.

A: How do you feel about your two week vacation you get with those guys?

H: Well, that's kind of a sore point because of the fact that we do not have that much meaningful work to do during this two week period and in a lot of cases it becomes an exercise in boredom. We have good people, well-qualified people; they're willing to work, but the government, Department of the Army, really hasn't given us anything to do in the last few years.

A: I see.

H: They require us to go and to be there.

A: Do you notice a great deterioration of this in the last couple of years?

H: I would say so, yes, simply because of the fact that we have no real solid mission to perform during our active duty time?

A: Where have you gone the last couple of years?

H: Well, we've been to Fort Pickett, Virginia, for three years. Last year we were at Crainy Island, Norfolk Naval Yard. This coming summer we're going to Fort Drum, New York. Now the program this particular year looks to be the best since 1971. We're going to get involved more with the type of work we should be doing as opposed to what we've gone through the last two or three years, so I think this particular year there should be a definite improvement between the program.

A: But is this two weeks an important part of your reserve training?

H: Well, for our particular organization, yes. It's extremely important, because at home station we are severely limited to what we can do from a practical standpoint, whether it's communications, petroleum distribution, or whatever, and without a chance to actually get at it seven days a week there people for the most part would have absolutely no practical experience. That sitting on the drill floor of an Army Reserve Center, you can only build a pipeline so long. So without the two week training program in the summer, things would really be in bad shape. I, personally, wouldn't mind seeing it go to a month. Of course, this would run into quite a bit of conflict with civilian employers.

A: Is there anything I might have overlooked or forgot to bring up that you might want to add?

H: No sir, not that I can think of right off the bat. Like I say, the people in the program for the most part are good people; they're willing to work. But I feel there should be a definite reorganization with regard to the training program, not just for the Army Reserves. I spent a three year tour with the Air Force Reserve and I saw somewhat the same thing there although certainly not to the degree we're going through right now. I was in a troop carrier unit. They have a considerably more flexible training program than the Army does and they worked quite a bit in direct support of the Army and have

a much better program because of flexibility. The Army organization, the only time that we can work is when we go as a unit. There are no provisions for a man to go as an individual. If you could go as an individual, say pick your own time during the year and fit right into your counterpart in an active army unit, it might be a tremendous increase in program too. But dealing strictly with taking groups of 150 to 200 men at one time and sending them to one place . . . There's a little bit of a drawback in the current training program.

A: You said you had experience in the National Guard, Air Force, et cetera. How does the Army Reserve overall, not in just the training, compare with the other two services? Is it behind, ahead, equal to . . .

H: Well, in recent years I feel that the National Guard has gone considerably ahead of the Army Reserve. They, of course, are a state organization and as such have a lot tighter control of their people. If you have a disciplinary problem with an individual in the National Guard, you can do something about it. In the Army Reserve Program you really are limited to what you can do in terms of discipline or rewards or whatever. It's a lot more loosely run organization than the National Guard, which I feel is to its detriment. When I came into the service in the beginning of my career we had the strict discipline and so on which I personally feel is very, very important to a military organization. There's entirely too much permissiveness in the program today. The individual's rights, so to speak, are way out of proportion in my opinion.

A: How would you rate yourself or rank yourself politically, as a conservative, a liberal, middle-or-the-roader?

H: I'm afraid I'd be just a shade towards the right-wing side, I believe. I certainly wouldn't go out and join the John Birch Society or anything of that nature, but I think we could use a little more of that type of program, but certainly not to that degree, something that would bring back the national interest, a little more of this desire to . . . love of country, if you want to put it that way. People today, I think, have gotten away from that. They just don't seem to give a hoot what happens and I don't blame it, necessarily, on the young people of today. I know a lot of friends of my own tend to ridicule what's going on in the country in front of their children. They are actually giving them a bad impression. They're getting the kids started wrong. Rather than trying to teach them what's good about the country and what they should be proud of, they continually emphasize what's wrong and make jokes about the current

political situation and so on today. How else can you expect the kid to grow up? This is what he sees his parents talking about and doing, so he naturally is going to go that way. I think if the homemaker, so to speak, would pay a little more attention to training a favorable impression on their children with the good parts of this country other than the bad, it might tend to slide things back into the old school.

A: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Hamaker.

H: I appreciate you coming.

END OF INTERVIEW