

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

U.S. Armed Forces - Army Reserve

Personal Experience

O.H. 965

LOUIS PACK

Interviewed

by

David Arms

on

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A: This is an interview with Louis E. Pack for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Army Reserves, by David Arms, on March 11, 1976, at the Naval Reserve Center, at 2:05 p.m.

Mr. Pack, could you just give me an idea of your personal background: where you were born, brought up, educated?

P: I was born in Youngstown and lived in Youngstown all of the time. I was educated in Youngstown. It was nothing spectacular. I graduated high school there and that is about it. I joined the Army in my early days during the Depression. I stayed in the Army until my retirement in 1957. About a year after that, I went and applied for a civil service job. I was a technician in a reserve program for the last fifteen years. I retired last December from the civil service.

A: Did you go to school on the South side?

P: On the West side, Chaney High School.

A: You went to Chaney High School. Did you graduate from high school?

P: Yes.

A: Did you attend any universities or have any advance schooling?

P: I did just on courses, nothing formal. I took a course in tax law and things like that. Of course, you know how that was. We were obliged to take courses and keep up our schooling because I was a warrant officer and our commanding officer required us to keep educating ourselves. We were always going to classes.

A: When did you join the Army?

P: I joined on July 2, 1934.

A: You joined in Youngstown.

P: No. I joined at Fort Monroe, Virginia.

A: Why was that?

P: It was the Depression. Nobody was working and we hardly had anything to eat. I was a musician; I played the trumpet and I saw an ad in one of the musical magazines for a trumpet player. I went there to apply. There were auditions there. I was accepted, and I enlisted right there in the Army Band at Fort Monroe.

A: So you actually joined the Army Band.

P: Yes, that is how I got into the service.

A: Did you go through any regular boot training?

P: Yes. I mean, first I was a soldier, then I was a musician. When I joined the Army, for a long time, about six months, they had what we call recruit training, before you go into the ranks. It was a long, drawn out thing before I could get into my real battalion. It was not a battalion. It was a battery. It was a close artillery over there.

A: As part of the Army band, did you play at different functions?

P: The normal military band rehearsed every day. Then played the Winter Parade, and all the formal Guardsmans' Parade. It was daily; we had a daily chore. Music for the troops was a daily thing. For instance, we played during the drill period in the morning. Then we had a concert twice a week, mostly Wednesday and Sunday nights. We had a full concert at the bandstand. It was a very formal thing in those days; the Army band was a big thing. Now I think it is a little less. We were very busy, busy all the time. Then we played for all functions. You know they had boxing tournaments, football games, local baseball games and everything. We were right there all of the time for all of these functions.

A: Basically, you were a musician throughout your whole Army career?

P: No. I did start that way, but unfortunately I could not finish because the war came. The war came along in about 1938 or 1939, when things start to go a little bit and they started to decentralize these small armies of various small men. They started to use it to spread them out so what happened there was that I was immediately taken out of the band and sent to Fort Eustice near there to organize a band of my own. They were bringing in a lot of new recruits there and conscription and, while they were coming in, they needed a band. So as the boys came in, I was interviewing and made up a band from what was coming in. Then we played for all the drills and all the ceremonies there after I got the band organized. Very shortly after that, when the war really began to hit, we started to get hot and heavy in Europe and war was declared or after Pearl Harbor, then they started to break this thing up too. The bands were broken up very drastically; they found less use for the bands, and they were breaking them up and putting them in ranks. I was a master sergeant. They put me in and I went into the unit. That is when I left the band. That was about 1942 or something like that.

A: What was your job after you left the band? First of all, what was your rate?

P: My rate was a Master Sergeant. I was a Tech Sergeant: we never even heard of a Master

Sergeant. There was one but we never knew there was no such thing actually in the ranks, but there was one on the TOE (Table Organization of Equipment). I know there was. During the war, they started to appoint these people. This was a rank that they had never used, so then they put them in there. So I went from tech to master then I went into the administrative field, because I had some experience in administration and supply even with the band because I did all the administration. Then I went into that full-time. I fooled around in the company for a while and then I went into the battalion, which was a sergeant major job. I went full-time in that. Then I applied for a warrant officer in that same field. I was appointed that and that was the way I wound up with various grades of warrant officing.

A: So you became a warrant officer. Do you remember the year?

P: I became a Warrant Officer after the war. That is when they were letting them apply for appointments. It was someplace in the 1940's; right after the war, when I was over here in Pittsburgh. I came back after the war with high points. I came back early because I had a lot of points because I was in the service way before the war and they gave you points based on who came back first. Rather than being redeployed to Japan from Europe during the war, I was brought to the United States. I was going to go back but then the war ended when I was on the ship coming over here. Then I was assigned to Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh. There I reorganized . . . during the war they broke up the ROTC program. Then we started a new ROTC program post war . . . I stayed there as a sergeant major and a warrant officer administrative assistant until 1951. Then I went overseas. I came back after my three year tour and went to West Virginia as Administrative Warrant Officer into the military district of West Virginia. That is where I really started my reserve programs. That was reserve headquarters and there as a regular, I was the assistant to the chief of the military district of West Virginia. That is when each state had their own reserve headquarters and were organizing reserves. I was there until I retired from the Army in 1957.

A: You said you were overseas in World War II, is that correct?

P: Yes.

A: Where were you stationed then?

P: Most of the time I was with the infantry and most of the time we were going . . . I went from the coast all the way out into the end. We went in on D-Day on Omaha Beach, and went to the end of the war.

A: What unit were you with then?

P: I was with the 9th division most of the time. Then I went back with the 83rd division. I

was hurt and came back in with a reinforcement company. So I had several units.

A: Even though you were and administrative MOS (Military Occupationally Skilled), did they put you out on the front line?

P: Oh, yes.

A: You carried a rifle also?

P: Yes, with the infantry, as a matter of fact.

A: You said you were injured?

P: Yes, I was injured. I was hospitalized for a long time. I recovered and came back and went back into the ranks again. That is how I changed units. I went in as a replacement and was reassigned.

A: You spent quite awhile in the hospital. Was that in Europe?

P: No, I was in about six weeks or a month.

A: You were in a hospital?

P: Yes.

A: Was it a regular VAC hospital?

P: No, I was not a veteran. That is the reason that I lost my unit. The hospital was a unit there and I would have come back, but I was evacuated and then I got back.

A: Do you remember where the hospital was?

P: Yes. In Winchester, England.

A: How was your free time spent at the hospital? Was that an enjoyable period, or was it rather stark and dreary, or what?

P: It was not too bad. I found it enjoyable to me so much because I came out of an infantry unit; I was blessed. I was in the fox hole in mud and dirt from your head to your feet. Although I was wounded and hurt, it did not matter. I thought it was the best thing in the world. I would have done anything not to go back, but it just so happened that I came back as a replacement. I was hurt in the head, a shot wound. It did not take much, just an operation and a little healing. It was not bad, but some of it is left in there.

A: When you were assigned to this unit, were a lot of guys injured?

P: I will tell you, the hospitals were loaded. Yes, many in my units, especially my units. For a long time, I was the first sergeant of the units there. In my unit we had big casualties at times, at certain times. At times when we got hit hard, we had casualties, especially around Metz and places like that and the Battle of the Bulge. I was in that. We got hit. We got clobbered. I did not even know my people in the unit. For a long time, I never saw them. They would come in on paper, from duty to death almost in the same page, you know. It was like that. You got hit and before you could even do anything, they were gone.

A: When you were evacuated, were you removed by air or railroad?

P: Truck. First by truck, and then ambulance.

A: Did they fly you to England or did you go on the ship? How did you get to England?

P: I was flown.

A: You said you came back after the war by ship. Was that the more common way? Did you get over there by ship?

P: Yes.

A: You went back and forth by ship?

P: Yes.

A: Regular troop transport?

P: Regular convoy going back. Of course, that was during the thick of the war. I do not know how many ships, quite a few, big convoys.

A: After World War II, you came home and then you became a warrant officer?

P: Yes.

A: Why did you apply for the warrant officer?

P: I wanted advancement. I had the opportunity. They had an announcement that we could apply, and they were meeting these people. There was a program at that time where you could apply for warrants or commission. Commissions at that time were opened to the veterans of the war. They had to have a rank and they had to have been in the conflict. I

do not understand because, during that time, they were having a great surplus of people. Right after the war, most of the commissioned officers were reserve officers. There were so many that wanted to go home that they left the place in droves. Then we had a period after the war where we had a rough time over there, organizing units that were not there, like for instance, the ROTC. They had an ROTC before the war, but during the war they broke them up and put them all into ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program), these programs they had. During the war, they sent them to colleges where they trained them and made officers out of them. They booted the whole reserve program, ROTC program, out. Then there was nothing. So I started with a little circular and I started a whole program. I was one of the original people there who started a whole program with it. That is how it started. New, right after the war.

A: From scratch.

P: From scratch, yes. And we had various programs there, and they were really working on the veterans. A lot of the military people went into college.

A: Because of the GI Bill.

P: Yes. And we were after them and we were bringing those into the ROTC program. We gave them the same credit for the first two-year basic course, because they had military service during the war. They gave first two years of credit, and all they did was take an advance course. That program was pretty good for them too, because they got money. That was what we did; we organized the ROTC. Everything was on these people; they were hitting these veterans in many, many ways. They were even giving a break to the GI's who remained, who were in during the war. They got a lifetime warrant, but of course, you had to apply for it and you had to be eligible, but you did not have to take tests and all of that.

A: You got your warrant commission at the time. Then you say you went overseas for three years, in 1951?

P: Yes.

A: Where did you go then?

P: In Austria.

A: So, actually, you did not participate in the Korean conflict or anything?

P: No, I went to Austria. I went to an artillery battalion there. I did personnel work there for three years. Then I came back and was assigned to the military district in West Virginia as an administrative assistant, which was the assistant adjutant. Then I did some

personnel work. I filled in for the personnel officer when he was gone.

A: Then you retired from there. How did you get your civil service job?

P: When I retired, I was here in Youngstown and a friend of mine was assigned here. He was a GI. We were having a beer one time and I was doing real estate. He told me there was opening there. So, I walked in and they appointed me. I had the experience. I thought maybe I would have to do something to get it, but it seemed like they really wanted me bad at that time and it was not hard at all to get assigned.

A: Did you have to take a test or anything?

P: Yes.

A: Was this in 1957?

P: No.

A: It was after that?

P: This was 1960.

A: So you had been out about three years?

P: Yes.

A: You took a job for the army reserve as a civilian unit?

P: As an army reserve technician.

A: It was a civil service position?

P: Yes.

A: And you went to work here at the armory on Miller Street? That building was already there?

P: Yes. When I got there, they had two buildings. They had this building and they had another one up there on Wick Avenue. They had a big, big ex-garage building. I do not know, but one of the automobile dealerships had it. It had an upstairs and downstairs and was a big building. But just about the time I got here, they closed that up and consolidated it into here. The building was about seven years old, or maybe older, than that.



- A: Were you the only civilian employee at the building at the time?
- P: No. At that time, we had about twelve civilian employees because they had different programs than they have now. They had a one man per unit who were all here and the units were scattered all over the military district in this particular area. Each technician for each unit was stationed here. They were not with the unit; they were here. Whenever they came through here to the units, it was a different set up than it is now. Now only the unit technician for the unit that is there is here. For a long time, I was here alone.
- A: When you first came here, were there about twelve civilian employees?
- P: About twelve, because they had an RASO (Regular Army Supply Organization). They also had an army supply organization here for this general area.
- A: When you say the general area, who was the reserve center's commander in Youngstown at the time?
- P: We had one commander, and I do not remember his name. He was not here; he was a colonel. In those days, when I first started, the regular army ran the reserve. All the officers were regular army officers and had enlisted right after the reserve. They were in key positions, like the colonel and that, all the way up there. Each headquarters, as a matter of fact, we had a couple here when I first came, I think they had about four or five officers working on the offices from lieutenant colonel on down to regular army officers and they ran the reserve. But after awhile, it was turned over to the reserves and it was a little bit different. All these key positions became reserve positions and that is done much differently now.
- A: Who was the commander? What was his title? In other words, the officer who was in charge here was not the area commander. Who was the area commander and was he down in Columbus?
- P: It is Columbus now. They had two types of units and had two commanders. One type was a service type for service units like engineers, quartermasters, and all those things. The other one was a combat unit. They had two commanders and this one colonel that were with the unit that I have here--of course, I was not with that unit, I was with the armored unit--had the engineers and quartermaster and a few others in the whole area of this military district. Then there was another colonel who was in Cleveland. He had the combat types of units, the armored and the artillery. They had one divisional and one non-divisional. That is what they had, and that is how they were broken up at that time for a long time until they turned it over to the troops.
- A: Who ran the actual building? Who was in charge of the building?

P: A regular army officer was in charge of the building.

A: Who did he report to? Where did he get his money from to operate?

P: He got it from the military district headquarters.

A: Where was that?

P: That was in Columbus, Ohio.

A: Because the state of Ohio was a military district?

P: That is right. Each state has their own military district.

A: That is not true today?

P: Now, it is entirely different. They go by armies now.

A: So the money came down from Columbus to operate. You mentioned that there were two types of units attached. There were service companies and combat.

P: division in numbers is what they called it. This was the home for the 100th division. There was a division here at that time. There was also non-divisional units, and they were like engineers.

A: So, when you came here to work back in 1960, about how many people drilled that center?

P: About six or seven company-sized units, from one hundred and twenty to almost one hundred and seventy or two hundred men.

A: So you would say about a total of eight hundred or nine hundred people?

P: Yes. We had it fixed where there was a different unit drilling nearly every night of the week. We never had a weekend. You know before we did not have those little weekends like they do now. It was all evening drills.

A: You came once a night every week?

P: Yes.

A: When did they go to the weekend concept?

P: They never had weekends.

A: They never had weekends when you worked up there?

P: They did later when they came to the reserve. But I am talking about the old times when we never had it.

A: This is when the active Army ran it?

P: Yes.

A: You worked strictly evenings. That is an awful lot of people for that small building.

P: Yes, it was. It was very crowded. One unit had the whole building. But we had it at that time with all these cages and everything. They had one little cage, they were lucky to have another one for supplies, and that is about it. That was all the space the units had. The reserves in general of the center were so that another unit could use the same office. They shared space on a different night. We were fortunate enough to be able to break it up where we would lock it up. We would lock things from each other because they would interfere with your stuff and it made for a hell of a situation. They were very poorly organized. The organization was just nil until later. We had a pretty good general who came into the military district, Colonel General Lolly; I will never forget him. He came in and started cleaning house and really made something out of it while I was there. He was a great man. He just could not see any of that stuff. It slowly came.

A: So when did the actual active army get out of the army reserves picture?

P: I remember very clearly when they established ARCOMS, the Army Reserve Commands. That is when the reserves took over; that is when they started to phase out. At first, they came down a lot and then finally it was all told. That was in 1967 or 1968.

A: Then the reserve center came under the ARCOM commander in Columbus?

P: That is how they did it, but it was broke up in a way where it was not by states anymore. Everything went flat; everyone went by armies and sections, and they cut it all up. So when the ARCOM broke up, we went under Pittsburgh for a while. For a long time they separated the army. Then they drew a line. The Ohio and Pennsylvania, they drew the line, and here is the army. So we went back to the 5th Army. Then we had to put this over into the 83rd ARCOM, which is in Columbus.

A: So that is how it ended up at Columbus, which it is at the present time?

P: Yes.

A: With this disestablishment and the change in the ARCOM, you said all of the technical positions that were there, the twelve people, left except yourself, is that correct?

P: Yes, even earlier before that they started to leave. They had reorganizations, of course, and made different units move quite a few units out of the center, so they left. They broke up the infantry. Do you remember "Mac the Ax"?

A: MacNamara!

P: When he came in he started axing out everything. He cut out all the army common units. All that was left was support. He cut them all out, so what happened was that there was only one unit here, the engineers remained.

A: And that is the one that is still there?

P: Yes. And now they are reorganizing that now; they are making a quartermaster unit out of it. They reorganized so everybody had to go. They either lost their jobs or they were transferred to units where they were needed. That is when I remained here all alone until a man named Christmas came over. He was working there but he took a leave of absence for a couple of years--he was retired--to go on active duty. Then he came back and got his job back. Both of us were with the unit there for a while until he retired from here too, like I did. We were the old-timers around.

A: With just the service company left up here, how many people does that approximately leave at the center?

P: They brought a special forces until there now.

A: Oh, there is a special forces unit there.

P: A lot of men. We were here alone, but then they brought a special forces unit in.

A: It was back in the late 1960's, right when just the engineering company was there.

P: Yes.

A: They left just the engineering company?

P: Yes. Then the special forces unit was brought in here from another area.

A: When you retired, did anyone replace you?

P: Yes.

A: So that left one civil service technician to take care of the administrative paperwork, is that it?

P: No, they brought two people in. There were two officers but I was alone there because they would not hire anybody else, even though there was a vacancy. That is mostly the reason why I retired: it got too heavy and I just could not cut it. I was hurt badly in the war. I had a head injury and it bothered me, so I retired. Now they do have two people in there. They brought one in from West Virginia and they hired another one, a commanding officer. As a matter of fact, they hired him as a civilian; they gave him a dual position.

A: Who was that?

P: The commander of that engineer unit.

A: Do you know the gentleman's name?

P: Hudson.

A: So he worked there full-time as a civil servant?

P: Yes, he was a civil servant and also a reservist.

A: In your experience here, I am sure you have seen quite a few officers come and go. Can you recall any of the officers who are still fairly prominent here in Youngstown?

P: That have gone?

A: Well, they can still be attached.

P: The rank now is very low. It is all company sized, but before we had the--lieutenants here, we had old-timers who were--full colonels. There are a lot of them in Youngstown who wound up full colonels here and they are still around. Of course, they have retired. They had their years; they had to go. But there are quite a few of them. There is Colonel Ress who was very good; he was a full colonel, Colonel McKenrick, Colonel Garman, who is over here with the school now. I had the job of organizing the school. We had a school here for a while.

A: That was an officer's school?

P: We had a regular reserve school that we set up here in 1970. I organized that too and I left at 348 and then organized the school. Then they moved over here when they did the line here. General Dixon wanted that school. It was his school, but when they drew the

line he would lose the school because he was in this other ARCOM. So he moved the school into Farrell in order to keep it. That is when I left the school and went back with the engineers.

A: Overall, was this considered a good center, one of the best, or just average?

P: We were considered a good center. I think we were. This was what I thought; I do not know what the heck they thought about it. You could never tell. We were considered one of the better centers. One thing was for sure: everybody praised this building. It was a very, very good facility building, better than most facilities because the reserve program, as it grew, a lot of their facilities were in garages, and barns, and various places, rented too, until they came to something like this. We were way ahead of them there, but they were coming up pretty quick.

A: From my experience, I know the reserve has had quite a few community related projects. Did this reserve also participate in similar programs?

P: Since the ARCOMS came into effect, believe it or not, we were encouraged. As a matter of fact, our headquarters always encouraged us to take active part in civil affairs. It all depended on what the unit was capable of doing; for instance, we were an engineer unit. We could do grading, leveling, and digging. We had the heavy equipment and we were called upon much. As a matter of fact, more than we could do. They had to be organizations, churches. We built bridges, dug ravines, leveled roads and stuff like that. All the reserve units were encouraged to do so, but many did not have much that they could do. But we were the type that we could, so we had a lot of activity in that area. They still do.

A: How about parades. Did they always participate in the parades in Youngstown?

P: Yes, they did on Veteran's Day. We would have a little unit. But recently they do not do too much. Some of our officers would participate, would be in a car or something, but the unit as a marching unit did not do too much. They used to do an awful lot. They used to have units there that were in every parade. Later it became a voluntary basis and how many hands they could get. They got a unit down there on some Saturday morning. Unless you get a good group, a nice sizable group, it does not look good, so they were discouraged. They did not do much of that recently, although they did have good exhibits on the various days.

A: How about the garage up on Indianola, the maintenance facility? Does that have anything to do with the Army Reserve Center at all?

P: Not with the Army Reserve Center, but with the Army Reserve, yes.

- A: What does it have to do with the army reserve?
- P: It just so happens to be located in this area. They are part of the ARCOM headquarters. That is their garage. They service units within a radius.
- A: They take care of all their vehicles?
- P: Maintenance and major repairs.
- A: Do any of those people working over there, do you know any, are they members of the reserve unit?
- P: Yes. All of them. That later became a requirement. To get a job like that, it became a requirement to become a member of the service or you could not get the job. The reason that I and a few others that retired were not required to be a member of the unit was because we were hired before this regulation came, and they just let us stay on. Now and from now on, it is a requirement to be a member of the reserve, not necessarily this particular reserve, but a reserve unit.
- A: Had some of the fellows been up there quite awhile, too?
- P: Most of them had been there quite awhile. I think there were two new ones there.
- A: And they basically participate over here in this reserve center?
- P: Yes. There were more. There were quite a few here at one time, but then they decentralized. They took some people and they opened up a new shop in New Castle or someplace and quite a few of them left, of course they left, the unit.
- A: Is there anything that you would like to add? I have run out of questions here.
- P: No.
- A: Do you still play your trumpet at all?
- P: No. My son plays and sometimes I play with him. But no, I am a little too old for that. I mess around once in awhile. That is how I started my army career. (Laughter) That is what got me a military man. Coincidentally, I got caught during the war. The war broke out and I was frozen. After the war, I found myself with rank and quite a bit of service and I said, "This is silly to throw this way so I'll just finish it out." I was only going to stay for twenty years, but then I went for twenty-three years and stayed on it.

End of Interview