

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Kermit Wayne Bell

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VRV-A-L-2015-037

Kermit Bell, a West Point graduate, an Artillery officer and veteran of the Vietnam War, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Aug 27, 2015 Location: Batchtown, Calhoun County, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Pete Harbison, ALPM History Fair Coordinator

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:09 / 1.15 hrs.

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on December 9, 2015.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Kermit Wayne Bell, *Veterans Remember*, VRV-A-L-2015-037

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Kermit Wayne Bell was born on March 20, 1928 and grew up in Calhoun County, Illinois, graduating from Hardin Calhoun High School in 1946. He was drafted but was allowed to enlist after finishing school. Bell entered the Army Air Force on June 6, 1946 and was assigned to the 1934th Engineer Aviation Company. He was selected for a nomination to a Regular Army competitive appointment and successfully competed for entry to the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York in 1948. Upon graduation from West Point in 1952, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Artillery and assigned to duty at the Hanford Atomic Plant in Washington. In 1953-1954 Lieutenant Bell was with the 30th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion, 29th Artillery Group, part of 8th Army based at Kunsan Air Base, South Korea.

Following his tour in South Korea, he was stationed at Castle Air Force Base in California. He then attended the Artillery Advance Course at Ft Sill, Oklahoma and following that, was assigned to 7th Artillery, 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. He then returned to the Artillery School at Ft. Sill Artillery School to teach Nuclear Weapons Employment for three years. While at Ft. Sill he completed the Senior Officers Nuclear Weapons Course at Sandia Base, New Mexico. His next assignment was to the Fulda Gap, on the border with East Germany, where he served with 14th Armored Cavalry. Following this, he was assigned to Fifth Corps in Frankfurt, Germany as a Staff Officer, where among his normal duties, he helped coordinate President Kennedy's visit to Germany in June, 1963.

From 1964 to 1967 Bell was in charge of the Senior ROTC program at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City. Bell served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968. He was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division Artillery at Phu Loi, north of Saigon, serving as deputy base commander. He received Four Bronze Stars for merit, and one Bronze Star for valor for directing fire responding to an incoming rocket attack. He also piloted a helicopter, without permission or a license, to scout enemy locations. He crashed the chopper after locating the enemy positions. The Vietnamese Army recognized his valor, and luckily for Bell, the U.S. Army decided to overlook the incident and not take disciplinary action. After Vietnam, Bell was assigned as an advisor to the National Guard in Memphis, Tennessee. This was shortly after Martin Luther King's assassination; concern about the potential for racial strife was the reason he was assigned to Memphis. He retired from the military in December, 1971 and entered optometry school. He practiced in Tennessee before returning to Calhoun County where he practiced until he retired. He was an active member of the community as a member of the local Lions club. He participated in helping to build helicopter landing pads for medical emergencies in Calhoun County and the only swimming pool in Calhoun County. In addition, he helped build a large community exercise center and restored a pair of tennis courts for public use.

Subject Headings/Key Words: United States Military Academy at West Point; South Korea following Korean War; Kunsan Air Force Base, South Korea; service in West

Germany during the Cold War; Fulda Gap, Germany; 14th Armored Cavalry Regiment; service in South Vietnam in 1967-68; Phu Loi, South Vietnam; Ft. Sill Oklahoma; U.S. Army Artillery

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