

ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

JOHN DURKAY

An interview conducted on

May 20, 2015

Interviewer: Jessica Fulgham

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

“War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present”

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of John Durkay are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on May 20, 2015

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FULGHAM: So, what's your full name?

DURKAY: My full name is John Anthony Durkay.

FULGHAM: And how do you spell that?

DURKAY: D-U-R-K-A-Y.

FULGHAM: And where were you born and when?

DURKAY: I was born and raised in Lilly, Pennsylvania. I was born May 28th, 1940, so I am an old fart. [Laughs]

FULGHAM: [Laughs] So you are not native to West Texas . . . when did you move here?

DURKAY: No, I was not native to West Texas, I moved here after . . . I resided here since I retired from the Army.

FULGHAM: And that was 19 . . . ?

DURKAY: I retired September, 1980.

FULGHAM: Alright, then let's see. When and where did you join the armed forces?

DURKAY: I joined in September of 1958. I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky for training and stayed there for an extra 8 weeks training as a wheeled vehicle mechanic.

FULGHAM: For a wheeled . . .

DURKAY: Mechanic.

FULGHAM: Mechanic?

DURKAY: Yeah, trucks.

FULGHAM: Oh, okay and then?

DURKAY: Then in February of 1959 they sent this 18-year-old GI to Munich, Germany, the beer capital of the world. They shouldn't have done that!

FULGHAM: [Laughs] How long did you stay there?

DURKAY: I was in Munich for five . . . I think, five months because another place was short a mechanic, so I was the last one in and so I was the first one out.

FULGHAM: Oh, wow!

DURKAY: However, only part in Munich that I did notice is driving from there to Dachau and, if you remember any history, Dachau was a concentration camp. At the time, we had a military post there, right where they had the camp that I used to drive down there and pick up spare parts and we had a dispensary there, because I was stationed with the medical company as their mechanic, so I would go down there and stop, see the boys. And one of the things I do remember in hindsight 40/40 cause when you're young at 18-years-old you don't do . . .

FULGHAM: Mhmm . . .

DURKAY: You don't do things but they say, "Come over here. We want to show you something." And we went behind a bunch of brush and bushes. And that was the ovens where they were burning the Jewish people. They were in a concentration camp.

FULGHAM: And you saw that at 18-years-old?

DURKAY: I saw that at 18-years-old. They showed me where to dump the ashes and all. And I went back in 1990, I guess. There is a museum there now. And when I walked through there, I said it's completely different than when I drove in. I told my wife . . . I said, "This used to be a real concern." I says, "I remember that stream that ran along there and it was still there." So, it was quite interesting that you know when you're older.

FULGHAM: Yeah!

DURKAY: That you don't think about it then. Then after that, after those five months they send me to a place called Wurzburg, Germany.

FULGHAM: How do you spell that?

DURKAY: W-u-r-z-b-u-r-g.

FULGHAM: Okay! And what did you do there?

DURKAY: I just . . . mechanic.

FULGHAM: Just a mechanic? Yeah!

DURKAY: Drove ambulance when they needed somebody.

FULGHAM: Oh, okay!

DURKAY: I drove officers to outlining dispensaries that we had, because I got stationed with the hospital there, so they kept me in the medical field being a mechanic.

FULGHAM: Is that what you wanted to do? Did you wanna kind of wanna be in that field?

DURKAY: Well, I wanted to be a mechanic

FULGHAM: But not much with the medical. . .

DURKAY: But when you do that, you don't know where you're going to get assigned . . .

FULGHAM: Oh, okay, and I'm gonna guess that was with the Army.

DURKAY: Yes, this . . . I was Army for 22 years

FULGHAM: You have seen a lot.

DURKAY: I did. And Wurzburg is where I met my wife.

FULGHAM: So, is she a German . . .

DURKAY: No, she was a senior in high school. American high school, and after that tour I got out and stayed out a year and decided to go back.

FULGHAM: Did you do anything during that year? Travel, or just hang out?

DURKAY: No. I went and traveled here and there to look for a job.

FULGHAM: Oh, okay . . .

DURKAY: And at the time the economy wasn't doing well.

FULGHAM: And then what did you do when you went back?

DURKAY: When I went back . . . I asked to go to helicopter mechanic school . . . They sent me to military police school.

FULGHAM: That's the polar . . .

DURKAY: That's maybe someone looking out for me. But I went to Fort Gordon for training, and the three things that happened during that training were: one, I was interviewed by a colonel. Ten of us from Washington, D.C., who asked us if we were interested in going to D.C. for an assignment. Pennsylvania, D.C., 180 miles, yeah, I'm ready. I was 180 from home so that would've been close. And then I was interviewed by a captain from what was then the Army Security Agency, Intel. And he interviewed almost the same ten guys. And then the third thing that happened, and this is during an eight-week period . . . Third thing was that the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred. So, as I was going to classes to learn to be a cop. I was missing instructors every week. Cause they were the NCOs had been in there longer, so they were getting deployed to go to Cuba. So, but that's . . . Kennedy, kind of, I guess took care of that crisis. But anyway, the captain got the priority, he got ten of us, and we went to Berlin. But what was irritating to me is, I told him I said, "You don't have priority, the colonel outranks you." Well, I

found out that we were going to be interviewed to go to the guard up at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

FULGHAM: That's why. . . that was the initial interview?

DURKAY: That was the initial interview.

FULGHAM: Oh, my gosh. That is so cool! Well, not cool but an honor . . .

DURKAY: It was different, yeah. Yes, it would've been. But now when I thought back about it, I said we were all the same height, the same weight, and that's the way it is. So, that was good. So, anyway, I ended up . . . I went to Berlin, and I was supposed to be a security guard there, but since the captain got his way, I didn't sign papers, but I went there anyways. So, without signing the papers, I had to sit there and wait for a security clearance. And so, at the time, you know, that's when they put up the Berlin Wall, if you're familiar with it. So, there we were, surrounded by Russians and East German commies for three years.

FULGHAM: What was that?

DURKAY: That was the only way in and out was a . . . What they called "duty train." So, you took the train out of Berlin to Frankfurt, Germany, and then you could go anywhere you wanted from there. But that was an all-night trip.

FULGHAM: So, it took you almost all day? Just to get out of there?

DURKAY: Well, you left in the evening.

FULGHAM: Oh, okay.

DURKAY: You left in evening and went all night. So, they were sleepers so that was good.

FULGHAM: And then so after you left Berlin? How long?

DURKAY: I was there for three years and . . . And, well, I was there when John Kennedy got killed. He was assassinated. Because I remembered being in a . . . Went over to the club after work for a beer and somebody walked in, in fact, my friend, my roommate he was a guy that went in with me—same town, so. And he said the president's been shot. I said, "Sit down. Have a beer." And finally, people come in and said, "We're sorry but the president of the United States has been shot." And they closed the club down and that's the first time that I ever saw a bunch of GIs leave their beers and walk out without saying a word. And then . . . Kennedy had been in Berlin and so the people there loved him. And we decided to go down to a local bar, what they called the "Gusthouse." It was near there. As we walked down, there were candles already lit in windows, which a lot of people don't know.

FULGHAM: No, they do not teach that. So, that is cool to know that.

DURKAY: Then I got to work there as a generator specialist under rubble pile, which is what they called it, Teufelsberg. And I am not going to go spell it, but it was the rubble from all the buildings and all the destruction from the bombings of Berlin. And they built this, just kept piling up till they made a little hill out of it, and that's when the Army decided we'll just put a site up there, and that's what they did. So, then I decided I worked out in the cold. Ran generators. I didn't want to do this, I wanted to do what the guys, secret, top secret clearances were doing. So, I reenlisted in the Army and I went to Monterey, California to become a Czechoslovak linguist.

FULGHAM: And that was in the Army? Still the Army?

DURKAY: Still in the Army. No, nothing's going to change from the Army. I stayed in the Army. And then after, oh, I guess it was nine months of training, I stopped here at Goodfellow to go to an Intel course. It's to learn your job. And then after several months of that, I got assigned to Germany again. That's my third trip, I think.

FULGHAM: To Germany?

DURKAY: Yeah. Well, there was Munich, Wurzburg, then there's Berlin so . . .

FULGHAM: And did you go back to Berlin or was it a different . . .

DURKAY: No, I didn't. I went to a place called Mount Schneeberg . . . Schneeberg is S-c-h-n-e-e-b-e-r-g and, if you're familiar with any German, "Schnee" is "snow," so we called it "Mount Snow." I went there in March of 1967 and then, sometime in May, I found out we had a perimeter fence around there. It was seven feet tall, so that means, when I got there the snow was still seven feet tall. It hid the fence.

FULGHAM: That's cold!

DURKAY: And the Germans also had a site up there. But, thanks to them, they had this big plow we called it the "Schnee Esser," the "Snow Eater."

FULGHAM: Ahhh . . .

DURKAY: So, it would blow the snow out. And the plow was about six-feet high, big heavy thing. And it had twin blades on the front. And so, the mountain . . . Going up there in the winter is like going down a bobsled or something, because, you know that thing cut it square, so if you're going up there in slide you're not going down over no hill or nothing. You're gonna embed your car in the bank, which I did once. So, that was a good tour. Then one of the things in 1968 was the Czechoslovakia invasion by the Russians. And that was the night I went to work at 11:30 at night and I got home the next afternoon at 3:00. And then they called me and wanted me to come back to work at 8:00. What they did is they split . . . We had four shifts, one would be off, three would be working, so you'd be working a day shift, a swing shift, which was probably 4:00 to midnight, and then midnight to 8:00.

FULGHAM: And was this for your linguistics or for Intel?

DURKAY: Yeah, it was for my linguistics, yeah.

FULGHAM: And so how long did you stay there after?

DURKAY: Another three years. Well, I could take family, so while I was in Berlin, I flew back home and got married, then she came over. So, if you're married, it's three-year tour . . . So, for a while, anyway. So, the first tour, when I was single, was two-and-a-half years, because I stayed until I got out. Berlin was three, Schoenberg was three. We lived . . . I lived about fifteen kilometers from the site, and that's because there was a tank unit there. They had government housing, so we lived in government housing . . . Quite a few of us that worked up there lived there. So, which was good. Tankers were alright. They didn't bother us. Of course, they didn't know what we were doing either, ya know, spooky guys up on top of the mountain . . . But I guess after the invasion, things settled down.

It was just snow in the winter and heat in the summer, I guess. You're on top of a mountain, in fact. I didn't know the Germans had that tower up there for about two weeks because, from the bottom, you look up there and it's a cloud. Well, when you go up there and say, "Is this place always foggy like this?" Lo and behold I found out what it was. But it never hit you at first, because before my wife got there and my son . . . It was in June or sometime. And I used to have to drive down that 15 kilometers if I wanted to go down to church on that military base. So, I pulled in there one day, on a Sunday morning, and people are staring at me, and then I realized I had about three inches of snow on top my car. Of course, down there they had spring, you know, and I was sitting out on that mountain, and it had snowed like the dickens that night. So, that was a good . . . But anyways, that was a good tour of duty, spending three years on a mountain top.

FULGHAM: Can't say many people have done that. [Laughs]

DURKAY: Nope. Then, from there, I was reassigned to Goodfellow as an instructor.

FULGHAM: Ah.

DURKAY: That was in 1970.

FULGHAM: And you taught . . . linguistics?

DURKAY: I taught the Intel portion . . . Intel portion for the Czechoslovak linguists, those who came from Monterey, like I did. And then I trained them to go do the job.

FULGHAM: Okay.

DURKAY: Which I won't get into.

FULGHAM: And then after you did that?

DURKAY: So, I did. Let's see. I don't remember . . . Two-and-a-half years I spent here as an instructor. And then I always said that I'm probably the only Army guy who ever flew off of Goodfellow.

FULGHAM: Oh, cause it is an Air Force base right?

DURKAY: Yeah, the Air Force base, but there is no flying out there. They had small like cubs and all, and myself and another Air Force sergeant were supposed to go back to Fort Meade, Maryland to visit National Security Agency and get updates for training. And so, I said, "I will pick him up." He says, "No, just meet me on the base." I go, "Huh?" It was a Sunday. And they put me in this little plane and we flew right off there. It's when they had a big flight line and all.

FULGHAM: Oh, wow!

DURKAY: So, it's a few years . . . I don't know if you've ever been out there . . . at the base.

FULGHAM: I went to like, where you can go grocery shopping . . . the commissary. I've been there.

DURKAY: Well, that commissary used to be a part of that flight line a long time.

FULGHAM: Oh, really?

DURKAY: Yeah, all of that never existed.

FULGHAM: Hmm.

DURKAY: All where the commissary is, at the left there you saw the chapel . . . maybe theater. Well, that road used to be the main road in and out of the base.

FULGHAM: Oh, really? I guess I wouldn't have seen that.

DURKAY: And then where the new gates are, that used to be a part of the flight line up there. I remember that because I used to go to the ball field and start there and run past there and go out to the perimeter and turn around the big pole out there because it was a mile-and-a-half. I would do a three-mile run at lunchtime. And then I would come back and go, "Where the hell the flight line go?" So, all those buildings never existed over there. All those dorms you see on the right side? None of those were over there. Back where the chapel . . . where you saw the chapel down there the parking lot . . . The chapel used to be the headquarters until a few years ago they built the new one down the road. So, everything has really changed, I mean, I come back, and San Angelo even changed. When I came here in '66, that's when Central won state. Football. But you could go down to where the ball fields are, on Knickerbocker, and the bowling alley . . . anything beyond that wasn't there. I thought it took forever getting to the airport. Now, you got out there.

FULGHAM: And there's buildings everywhere!

DURKAY: Yep. Bryant didn't exist.

FULGHAM: It didn't? Wow. That's where nearly every business is now.

DURKAY: I know it!

FULGHAM: Let's see . . . We're just kind of jumping around. I guess the big question that would relate back to class is, what did you think of the conflict going on in Vietnam? While you were, I know you were not in Vietnam . . .

DURKAY: I wasn't in Vietnam but, you know, it was always on your mind.

FULGHAM: Mmhmm.

DURKAY: That you didn't know if you were going or not! And then I got my specialty. Of course, being a Czechoslovak linguistic, we monitored . . . So, you're going to be in Germany. Ahh, I guess if I would've gotten promoted early, I may have gone. I had a friend. He left with the grade that I had up there. He went to Monterey to help teach, then he got promoted, then boom, he went to Vietnam. They said, "We don't need your linguistics skills. We need a supervisor that knows operations." So that . . . that . . . I guess that was a part of it. You never know if you were going to Vietnam or not.

FULGHAM: That's scary.

DURKAY: I think the worst part of thinking about that situation is the way all the ways the GIs were treated like crap, ya know, spit on and all. I said, "If anyone spits on me, there's gonna be a fight. I may lose it but there was gonna be a fight."

FULGHAM: Yeah.

DURKAY: That's why I still get upset over these protests about the flag and all. You know it was all those people that put their time in, and sacrificed their lives, so they could do crazy things like that. I'm not getting on that bandwagon. Anyways that was always . . .

FULGHAM: Always in the back of your mind?

DURKAY: Yeah, I left here in 1972, and went back to school in Monterey to study intermediate language, additional training, and when that was over . . .

FULGHAM: That is a lot of school!

DURKAY: . . . I went back to Germany

FULGHAM: Oh, my gosh, back to Berlin?

DURKAY: No, back to a place called Augsburg.

FULGHAM: Oh.

DURKAY: There was what you would call a field station. Field Station Augsburg was a part of the Army Security Agency.

FULGHAM: And then 3 years there?

DURKAY: Yep . . . Nope, four years.

FULGHAM: Four years?

DURKAY: I extended and stayed another year and most of that was just working and supervising, training people, and those border sights we talked about Mount Schneeberg and those places. While I was there . . . I can't remember if it was '76 or when . . . Anyways, they remoted and so they built towers on different mountains and, instead of the people being assigned on the top of that mountain, they were assigned back to where we were 150 miles away, and we kept the equipment up there, and so they could control the equipment from down where they were. And by line of sight those signals bounced off these antennas they put up and came right down to there. And they did it for four sites that I know of, in different places.

FULGHAM: But what was it for? Like were they just saying people were there? Communications?

DURKAY: Well we were taking and gathering intelligence.

FULGHAM: Gathering intelligence . . . okay . . .

DURKAY: Yeah, but you didn't need . . . They only had like four people assigned up there and they were maintenance people. So, if you said, "Hey I got a problem here," they would go up there and check the equipment.

FULGHAM: Oh, okay. I guess a good segue question to that would be, we talk about technology and like, the advancements in military technology. So, from the time you started as a mechanic, to the end of your term . . . Yeah . . . Do you see a lot of change?

DURKAY: Well, you know, yes, I did. One of the stories in fact I was thinking about it today . . . When I was in Berlin, I was taking a correspondent's course. It was a computer course. I was learning how to wire computers and all. You know, and then you come now and say, "wired computers?" Well, we never had these big monsters. We got these little things and we got chips that make us go, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about." So, when I wanna know something, I get my grandson to show me something. So, yes, technology there from that time till now has drastically changed . . . drastically. I mean, you know, equipment we had would fill up this room, and you can put it here on this thing now.

FULGHAM: That's very true.

DURKAY: That's like rotary phones.

FULGHAM: Oh, yeah, I had one of those as like a toy when I was . . . at my grandpa's house.

DURKAY: Oh, yeah. I had one!

FULGHAM: Let's see . . . So, I guess we were talking ranks earlier . . . If you had gotten promoted a little bit earlier, you would have probably been sent . . . What ranks did you hold?

DURKAY: I held enlisted rank. I retired as a sergeant first class, which was E7, and E7 would apply any service when you would do it that way. Because they go E1, 2, 3, 4, 5, up the line.

FULGHAM: Hmmm. That's for an interesting place.

DURKAY: Yup, well Augsburg, that was my last tour overseas with the military, and then I came back to Goodfellow. Well . . . no. I left Augsburg. I went to National Security Agency for one year and then left there and came back to Goodfellow as an instructor again.

FULGHAM: And then did you keep your Czechoslovakia linguistics at the National Security Agency?

DURKAY: Well, I came here with the same thing . . . teaching the same thing as I did the first time.

FULGHAM: Oh, okay.

DURKAY: Then I . . . I developed a new course while I was here for advanced training because they put a new system in before I left Augsburg. It had a name but I don't remember. Actually it was a computerized transcription system. In other words, you didn't have to tape anything you just [mimics typing noises].

FULGHAM: Just type it all up? Yeahhh.

DURKAY: Type it all up.

FULGHAM: Yeah!

DURKAY: And send it. So, I developed a course for when the students went through the initial course. Then I took some of them or part of them, and gave them additional training, and showed them how to use that computerized system. Of course, they're with the Air Force. I would have to tell them I need this. And they sent me a thing that was about five-feet high and about two-feet wide, and I don't know what the hell it was. It was a computer and it was hooked up to monitors that each desk would . . . The students would have to learn or work, and I would think, "Holy

mackerel.” But now, they could have done that on the phone. So, yes there’s been a lot of changes.

FULGHAM: Mhmm, any changes in the military, you think?

DURKAY: Ohhh, my god. I don’t wanna talk about that! (laughs).

FULGHAM: Well, I guess the bigger question would be, from the time you joined during the Cold War, to the time you left . . . Or I guess towards the end of the Cold War.

DURKAY: Well, there are always changes. Yeah, there were always changes. The military had to change, you know, equipment changed, personnel, different regs, and now, I dunno if I could survive this new army or not. There’s a lot of things that are good, a lot of things I disagree with. I’m not in charge anymore.

FULGHAM: Do you go back to Goodfellow?

DURKAY: I live right outside of Goodfellow. So, I’m up there. I go up there. I still go to the daily mass up there at 11:30 and we go up there and worship on Sundays. So, uh, we do shopping there. We go to the commissary, cause it’s convenient, it’s close.

FULGHAM: Instead of going all the way to H. E. B., which is a far drive?

DURKAY: Eh, my wife still goes to H. E. B.

FULGHAM: Oh really? It’s good.

DURKAY: Well, H. E. B. is good but I can’t stand the parking lot. She wants to get a new car. I said, "I’d cry if I get you a new car. You’d come home with dings in it the first day!"

FULGHAM: How about the ones with the cameras on it? That’s the one I got my grandpa.

DURKAY: Mine’s got the back camera.

FULGHAM: I guess, so your family went with you . . . So, your service did affect that?

DURKAY: Yes, I have two sons born overseas. Oldest was born in Berlin. And then my youngest was born Nuremberg. That’s why we were at Mount Schoenberg. Nuremberg was the closest hospital and that was 100 miles away. Or a hundred clicks away. I don’t know. They called me at work, and they told me that she’s going to Nuremberg and by the time I got down to the bottom of that mountain, they were gone. Eighty miles an hour on the Autobahn and they never caught them. So, that guy didn’t wanna deliver along the way, I guess. Neither here nor there.

FULGHAM: Did you face any challenges when you decided to leave the military? Like in your life?

DURKAY: Not really.

FULGHAM: Just kind of hopped back in there?

DURKAY: Well, I guess the biggest challenge leaving was, I was going to be up for a promotion. But if I took the promotion, I was going back to Germany. Well, I had a senior in high school, a sophomore in high school, and the youngest was eighth . . . eighth grade, I guess. And, they're determined, they're not going.

FULGHAM: Oh!

DURKAY: So, you know, did I wanna go over and spend two years alone just to get the promotion? No, I don't think so.

FULGHAM: And so was that the kind of . . .?

DURKAY: Yeah, I decided that's it. I got 22 years, that's enough. So, I got out, and . . . What did I do? Oh! I got out at the September 30th of 1980. So, it's September 5th or whatever, I started the fall semester.

FULGHAM: September 5th?

DURKAY: I don't know when it was, beginning of September.

FULGHAM: Okay.

DURKAY: Or whenever. So, you know, I was taking classes on the base. They were teaching night classes up there, which was good. Because I was still on active duty for the first thirty days. That's why I could only take so many hours.

FULGHAM: Okay, yeah.

DURKAY: And then I did that through the fall semester. And there was another guy, retired, and he was doing the same thing, but he was working at Schertz. So, he'd go, "Come on down there and apply." And he just kept saying it. I said, "Don't bother me." Well, just to shut him up, I went down put an application in. He says, "Yeah, we do need a part time employee down here." I says, "Okay, part time is good." I worked 45 hours the first week. So, I went back in. He says, "What's your definition of part time?" But that was . . . and so I continued. So, at the time I could come in here at 7 o'clock and take a class, and I could come back at noon and take a class, and then I could come up in the evening and take a class. So, it took me from '81 to '85 to get my degree because I had to cut back. You're working 45 hours a week, taking 12 or 15 hours. It's just . . . It got out of hand.

FULGHAM: And you were saying you graduated with your B.B.A.?

DURKAY: Yes.

FULGHAM: Did you go and get your master's or anything?

DURKAY: No, I went back to work. Worked for the post office for a while and then in 1987, I went out and worked for the National Security Agency. Hired on as a Czechoslovak linguist. That was April of 1987. In August of 1988, I went back to Germany.

FULGHAM: Again?! And any certain part of Germany?

DURKAY: Augsburg again.

FULGHAM: And, what did you do there?

DURKAY: Mainly I guess training. Helping out the linguists over there, getting them training, seeing what we could do to make their lives better. Any support that they ever needed, we would supply that. We went through that. I don't know what else happened, when I was over there. Something, but I don't remember it all.

FULGHAM: Yeah, I'm gonna guess three years? Yeah? So then . . .

DURKAY: That one was three years. Then after that tour, I went . . . In fact, that's in . . . during that tour is when I . . . oh! While I was there, the Berlin Wall came down. So, I saw it go up, I saw it come down.

FULGHAM: I was going to ask a question about that.

DURKAY: Not literally seeing it but I got parts of it.

FULGHAM: Oh, you do?

DURKAY: Yeah, a couple stones. Authentic. I got a lot of pictures and stuff. Oh, I went back up there. After it came down and we could drive . . . And another couple and us drove up. Difference between night and day going through East Germany to get to West Germany. Berlin. Those people were still . . . I don't know what you would say. It's like being the poor folks or something, you know? Because, they flooded into West Germany when that wall came down. And everything happened. But we went over there and you could see why . . . Roads were dilapidated, buildings . . . We went in to get a beer. The women wanted a Coke and we sat there. And finally the guy says something. You know, in Germany, "Can we get a beer?" And she goes, "Oh yes, yes." Well, those people were poor enough, they didn't have the money to just sit around and drink beer and all. So they were used to people coming in, sitting down, and just wasting time. But I liked it. It was good. I got to see the wall come down, and then the other part that I enjoy is I got to spend six weeks at the U.S. embassy in Prague. And one of the guys was . . . Oh, what was he going . . . I think he came back to the U.S. to go to course, for . . . I don't know what kind. But he was gonna be gone six weeks to eight weeks so. "You wanna go?" I said, "Sure."

FULGHAM: Can't turn that down.

DURKAY: No, but I got . . . I walked over the city, I enjoyed it. There's a lot of places that I went that I read about, and studied, while I was in Monterey, and talked about different things, so as I walked through there, I said, "This is amazing." So, it was a lot of fun.

FULGHAM: Sounds like you did a lot of really cool stuff.

DURKAY: Well, there's probably more. I don't remember it all. Tom and I would get talking sometimes, then I start remembering. Or I just tell him about stuff. He says, "That's what you wanna talk about?" They don't wanna know that. I don't want them to know I did that.

FULGHAM: That's one of the questions! Anything you'd like to share about your service that's not asked? Any cool stories . . . Vivid memories is the question.

DURKAY: Well, most of those memories I explained by seeing Dachau, all that travelling through. Well, it was good that . . . The thing about getting stationed in Germany is that you got a long weekend, three-day weekend, you can just get in the car and go. You can be in Italy, you can be in France. Ah, my wife went to . . . Where did she go . . . Holland. Her and a bunch of women, on the bus and away they went to Holland. The tulips and everything like that. So, the rest of us men, we just babysat for, I don't know how long, almost a week.

FULGHAM: That's awesome. I guess what we could end it on is, do you have any advice for young women or men that are wanting to enter the military?

DURKAY: Do it.

FULGHAM: Do it?

DURKAY: I think it's a great experience. It's a learning experience and, personally, I think everybody coming out of high school should go in and do at least two years. A lot of them will grow up.

FULGHAM: Yeah.

DURKAY: And it doesn't take long cause I've seen it happen. A very good friend of mine, he passed away a couple years ago but, while I was over in Germany, on weekends they have what they call the Volksmarches, these walks that you could sign up for, cause I found a tag that says I already walked 5,000 kilometers. We'd walk twenty kilometers on a Saturday and then go out Sunday and do twenty more. But as we travelled around doing that . . . I lost my train of thought there. Why did I get on Volksmarches? But it's an experience.

FULGHAM: How about growing up in the military?

DURKAY: My kids grew up in the military and they loved it.

FULGHAM: Yes.

DURKAY: And they were so happy that not a lot of them got to go to Germany. Not a lot of them got to see the place that they did. So, you know, that was good. The biggest thing I'd guess about being in the military or being a part of military family is, you have to make it what it is. You can't just, "Why did they do this?" Or "I don't wanna do this." I've seen wives come over there and be gone six months because they didn't know what to do with themselves. Get out and go downtown. Get out and go downtown. I don't understand those people. Don't worry about it. You'll be able to communicate. It's the same thing, talking about speaking English here in this country. We don't have to. Well, I guarantee you go to Germany, they're not gonna speak English to you just to appease you. But, I went to Germany, Czechoslovakia, I was down in Italy, they'll speak English to you. Because they wanna practice their English. Whereas the Americans are not the same. They stumble and they don't wanna try and they don't wanna learn. But the Europeans, they're just happy. "How do you say this? How do you say this? Is this correct?" I got to tell them all, we got a screwy language.

FULGHAM: Very true!

DURKAY: It is! How many words can you take? Sound the same but they may have different meanings. But I liked it. I liked it. If I had to do it again at the time when I was young, I'd do it. I don't know about now. There's just too many changes and I think . . . I don't know if there's the same bonding is there. But the time that I spent, those years I spent, and the people that I met until four years ago, you know, until five years ago, a group of twenty some of us, used to do a cruise every two years. And we were all associated with each other one time or another in the military. And stationed together. And we still keep in contact, most of them. So, but, the old cruise people, some of them have died off, others just lost interest in it. So the last one, my wife and I went to Alaska on one for our fiftieth. That was the last one we were on.

FULGHAM: Aww.

DURKAY: So, no gang would try and get who's left of the gang together and do something. I don't think it's gonna be cruise, but we wanna meet somewhere and have a good bash.

FULGHAM: Yeah. Well, awesome. Thank you.

DURKAY: You're quite welcome.