

Highlighting Heroes: Paul Petrilak

Forest City Active Living Center Volunteer Meals on Wheels Delivery Driver

Paul enlisted into the US Air Force in April of 1955 because he wanted to serve his country. His sister and two older brothers also had enlisted – his sister into the Army, one brother to the Navy, and one also enlisted into the Air Force. Paul learned to become a tele-communications operator, along with 20 other students, which he used to work on top secret crypto-analysis, becoming a Sergeant.

Paul's training took him first from NEPA to Samson Air base in NY, then to Illinois, then on to Wyoming. As he and his siblings were stationed in various places throughout their careers, Paul remembered it was hard to get together; however, while stationed in Wyoming, he and his brother – who was stationed in Colorado – would visit each other while on leave. Then Paul was sent abroad, where he stayed first for a year in Naples, Italy, then another year was spent in Casa Blanco in Morocco. Of the two, Paul vividly remembers the views from the base in Naples, as it was situated atop a mountain overlooking the Mediterranean Ocean.

Paul was the first of his siblings to return home. Paul laughs, saying his mother was very happy to have one of her children back. His sister was in Germany, and he applied for Correction Officer position in 1959, as it was close to home and he still wanted to help. He stayed there for 26 ½ years. Paul still remembers some of the people's stories that he talked to while he worked there. Paul feels that so many of the young people he saw in prison may not have been there if they had learned something else to do, as he had while in the military.

Today, Paul is willing to talk to local youths who are considering enlisting. He can remember it was hard when first left home – not so much from PA, but when went abroad, it was hard. Paul feels there are better supports for returning veterans now than years ago, care that may be needed, and respect from the community. Paul values the education opportunity he received while in basic training, the experience during active service, and the knowledge that he was there for his country. After retiring, Paul participated in local community events to bolster spirits and keep the area going. Nearly 10 years ago, Paul responded to an advertisement in the local paper regarding needing a volunteer Meals on Wheels driver for the Forest City area, and has been delivering meals ever since.

Thank you Paul, for you and your family's service, and to other veterans in the community!