

Name: Paul Shakstad
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- 1) What branch and unit were you in? *Coast Guard, 1965-1969 (2 years active, 2 years Reserves)*
- 2) What was your highest rank? *Quartermaster, E-5.*
- 3) Are you still enlisted as a reservist or National Guard? *No.*
- 4) Why did you join the service? *Liked boats, rescued by Coast Guard when boat broke down and was impressed enough to start thinking about joining them. Thought about the Navy, but liked smaller boats. Enlisted six months before received draft notice from the Army.*
- 5) What did you like the most about being in? *Training regimen, which was pretty intense (second only to Marine training). Gave me a lot of opportunities because they're not as big as the Navy. We were a lifeline to people in trouble out on the ocean. They're a good service, they help a lot of folks by doing things like billy-goating up a mountain with a reconnaissance beacon to replace batteries, stuff like that.*
- 6) What did you like the least? *Occasional problems with bad officers who were caught up in their own self-importance.*
- 7) What moment most defined your military experience? *Visiting Adak in the Aleutian Islands during the Cold War. Back in the mid-60's the area was pretty much in the middle of nowhere, but then we rounded a corner and got a view of this bay which was full of spy ships, destroyers, and subs. P-3 Orions were on the air base, which had a full Marine and Navy garrison, I mean it looked like something out of a James Bond movie. Being 18 or 19 years old and having watched John Wayne war movies growing up, it was fascinating being in the middle of all this. Planes were taking off every few minutes, ships and subs were coming and going, it was very, very active. We also followed a Russian trawler for a few days. Here's this beat up, rusty old ship that's just loaded with 20-30 antennae. One night it pulled away from us doing over 30 knots!*
- 8) What made you choose firefighting as a career? *Talked to a retired fireman when I was running a charter boat. It was so difficult to get into the fire department at that time (the line for the written exam was clear around the block and I came within seconds of just giving up when I saw that), but I took the test and came in number 310 on a list of 3,000 applicants. Didn't have a rating in helicopters at that time, but my GI Bill paid for lessons later on.*
- 9) What do you like the most about firefighting? *I liked being on trucks and ambulances, but was intrigued with helicopters, so when I got my rotocraft rating it was just something I wanted to do. Won two Medals of Valor and an Order of Merit for flying hazardous missions. They tell me the third Medal of Valor is only awarded posthumously.*
- 10) What do you like least about firefighting? *The political side that affects what you do and how you do it. Trying to do things without thinking them through, like buying equipment that doesn't fit the bill.*