

NAME: Emil Saloom

AGE: 88 years old

RESIDENCE: Canfield, Ohio

SERVICE BRANCH: United States Army

MILITARY HONORS: Corporal

OCCUPATION: Advertising Agency Owner

FAMILY: Wife - Doris Saloom

***Ni Hua Ah?***

That's Chinese Mandarin for "How are you?"

The average American doesn't likely know the English translation of that Chinese phrase, but Emil Saloom does - and for good reason.

"I was second in my class and there were about 90 of us," said the 88-year-old U.S. Army veteran, recalling the first days of his three-year stint as an intelligence agent in the armed services," he said.

He joined the service in the fall of 1952 on a whim with a buddy.

They were looking for direction and it was in the midst of the Korean War. "It seemed like the thing to do at the time," he said with a smile.

The Farrell, PA native, born April 12, 1933, grew up in Brookfield and attended its school system through his high school graduation in 1951 before heading to Westminster College to study journalism.

But, drawn to a military calling, he and a buddy answered the dutiful call; a decision he's never regretted.

It was fall of 1952 and was also still relatively early in America's cold war with Russia.

So, the duo enlisted and off to basic training at Camp Breckenridge in Kentucky he went.

After basic training, he was sent to Fort Devan in Massachusetts and was given an aptitude test that revealed his penchant for language and cryptography.

He opted for the former, even though the other specialty would've sent him to Boston, a city he was dying to visit.

But, after giving it much consideration ...and with some serious pressure from his Mom to switch to language school... that's exactly what he did.

Once his basic training was completed in total, he received orders to study Russian in California. So out west he headed.

Only to discover his assignment had been altered from studying Russian to learning ... Chinese Mandarin.

"It didn't necessarily make sense to me but you do what you're told in the Army," Emil laughed. And did he ever do it --- extremely well.

No doubt because his instructor was vigilant about drilling Mandarin into the class every day from 8AM to 4PM (with a brief break for lunch daily) for exactly 12 months.

"The only day the teacher spoke English was on the first day -- to tell us we wouldn't hear it again for a year!" he recalled.

Upon completing the course, he and five others were sent to the Army Security Agency, and was later assigned to the National Security Agency, to begin intelligence work decoding messages.

At the apex of his career, Emil could communicate in Chinese Mandarin as easily and fluently as he spoke was in his native English.

After two impressive years with the ASA/NASA, he was offered a civilian job as a linguist but opted, instead, to come back to the hometown, family and friends he'd been missing for so long.

He took a job with a friend working at Haber's Furniture store on East Federal Street in Youngstown's downtown. It was 1965 and that move wound up being a fortuitous for both his career and personal life.

Because in July of 1966 he decided to follow his creative passions and open his own agency, Saloom Advertising.

It was the very year he met and had drinks with the former Doris Mraovich at the suggestion of a mutual friend.

"She had a date with another guy that same night but broke it for me," he laughed.

For her part, Doris gently protested. "Well, that's not exactly how it happened," she said with a chuckle.

Regardless, it led to a 55-year marriage that has seen many happy decades of travel, hard work, and one extremely successful business.

But, after many years of making other companies look fabulous by helping them brand and expand their businesses, Emil retired in 1997.

He and Doris now enjoy quiet relaxing days at their home in Canfield, where he often recalls his days in the service. "I really enjoyed learning Chinese because it came so easy to me," he smiled.

"Even if I didn't use it much after leaving the Army in September of 1965," he said.

But it certainly does come in handy when he and Doris get a hankering for their favorite take out dinner.

"I can actually order in completely fluent Chinese," he said with a laugh.