

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROBERT ERDMANN
Machinist's Second Mate, US Navy, Korean War

2011

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Erdmann, Robert E., (1929-). Oral History Interview, 2011.

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Abstract:

Robert E. Erdmann graduated from Evansville Wisconsin High School in 1948 after growing up on a farm in rural Evansville. In 1950, Erdmann decided to enlist and choose to serve in the US Navy, as opposed to potentially being drafted to fight in Korea and placed without input. He detailed his decision to enlist with the United States Navy as a Machinist's Second Mate and served on the USS *Wantuck* APD-125. During his time in the service, he traveled to China, Hong Kong, Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam, Alaska, and the Aleutian Islands, in addition to his time spent serving along the Korean coast. Erdmann and the USS *Wantuck* participated primarily in the invasion of Wolmi-do Island and the invasion of Inchon in late 1950. He details what his work as a machinist's second mate and his daily life on the USS *Wantuck* entailed. After two years of service in Korea, Erdmann served two more years in the Navy and eventually settled in Janesville, Wisconsin where he met his wife, Audrey. In Janesville, he worked as a banker and eventually relocated to Walworth, Wisconsin to continue his career. Since his military service, Robert has become a member of the Veterans of Foreign War's [VFW] and the American Legion. Toward the end of the interview, Erdmann reflected upon his pride in having served in the US Military and the value of military discipline in the lives of young American men and women. His personal experiences and thoughts on his military service are highlighted within this interview.

Biographical Sketch:

Robert E. Erdmann was born in 1929 and grew up in rural Evansville, Wisconsin on his family farm. Erdmann graduated from Evansville Wisconsin High School in 1948 after enjoy his time in high school with his friends. Instead of waiting to be drafted, he enlisted in the US Navy in 1950. Erdmann was not the first in his family to enlist in the military. His older brother served in the US Navy during World War Two. As a Machinist's Second Mate, Robert served on the USS *Wantuck* APD-125 for two years during the Korean War. During those two years while being based in Pusan, he experienced a typhoon on the *Wantuck*, the invasion of Wolmi-do Island, and the invasion of Inchon. The *Wantuck* served as a transport for marines and for Underwater Demolition Teams, who performed missions along the Korean coast. After two years of service in Korea, Erdmann remained in the Navy for two more years before being discharged in San Francisco in 1954. He first settled in Janesville, Wisconsin, where he met his wife, Audrey, and later moved to Walworth, Wisconsin all the while working as a banker. Post discharge, he also became a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars [the VFW] and the American Legion.

Interviewed by: Molly Graham, 2011.
Transcribed by: Joe Fitzgibbon, 2014.
Edited and Abstracted by: Kylee Sekosky, 2014.

Interview Transcript:

- Graham: All right so this is the beginning of an interview with Robert Erdmann, who served with the US Navy during the Korean War. The interview is being conducted at Robert's house at the following address: 710 Nantucket Drive in Janesville, Wisconsin, on the following date: November 10, 2011. The interviewer is me, Molly Graham. And so, Robert, let's start with some of the things you have in front of us—you brought some materials for the interview?
- Erdmann: No I just dug these out 'cause I was looking for what my—what I had had written down by one of my cohorts in—Walworth [Southeast Wisconsin] where I used to live.
- Graham: So this is an article in—
- Erdmann: *The West Geneva Lake* paper.
- Graham: And what does it say?
- Erdmann: Hmm? Do you read—have it read?
- Graham: Yeah, if you'd like to read it, you can go ahead.
- Erdmann: Well, it's kind of—
- Graham: Or you could sum it up—what was the occasion?
- Erdmann: Well, he was just doing an interview, he was in the service, and I was in the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars, a veteran's organization] with him. And he used to write articles 'cause he was a doctor there in Walworth. And he was taking these down, he picked out all of his—members gave him their life story.
- Graham: Well I think for our interview, maybe we'll start at the very beginning. Sometimes I like to have my interviewees sort of describe themselves, 'cause you have to remember this is going to be just listened to, and so you could maybe just paint a little picture of, of who you are and something like that.
- Erdmann: Well, I—how far back?
- Graham: As far back as you'd like to go.
- Erdmann: Well I started out that I graduated from Evansville Wisconsin High School [Evansville is in southern Wisconsin] in 1948. I went in the service in '48, in November. Got out of the service in 1952, but I was in the Navy for four years, and I was in on the invasion of Korea.

Graham: Tell me about your life before you enlisted.

Erdmann: Oh, well—

Graham: Maybe your family life, did you have brothers and sisters—

Erdmann: Yeah I had two brothers, and my parents and I, we lived—or they lived on a farm, of course I was there with them in that rural Evansville. I was there until I went into the service 'cause my dad had—on account of some health problems, had to leave, or quit farming, so he went to work at General Motors. I went—when I retire—graduated from high school, I went in—that's when I went into the service.

Graham: Do you remember that time period? Do you remember making that decision? What kind of steps did you take?

Erdmann: Well, not really because now they—I didn't want to be drafted, so I enlisted. And they were drafting people at that time because of the fact that there wasn't enough people enlisting.

Graham: Right.

Erdmann: A bunch of my friends, they went in the Air Force, I went in the Navy. I met a lot of guys that I used to go around with, but they didn't go in with me.

Graham: Did that allow you some more freedom in choice in where you ended up going, by enlisting instead of being drafted?

Erdmann: Oh yeah, well I can—I enlisted because I wanted to be on a ship, well I mean, I wanted to be in the Navy and go see things, so—I got in there and that's when I got—I saw quite a few different places.

Graham: Like what?

Erdmann: Oh, I went to—well, I—we operated out of San Diego. I went to China, Hong Kong, Hawaii, Philippines, Guam, Alaska, and Aleutian Islands.

Graham: This was for—before you—

Erdmann: No, this is just in my training and stuff that we had. I was on a ship that just made all these trips, but I did my job, which was a machinist's mate in the ship.

Graham: And how did you get into that?

Erdmann: I went to school at Great Lakes [Naval Station Great Lakes in Chicago, Illinois] for—when I enlisted three months I did—what do you call it? [both laugh] Can't

even think of it—well I did the training for—boot camp, that's what I was trying to think of.

Graham: Mh-mm.

Erdmann: Three months in boot camp and then I had three months of machinist's mates' school at Great Lakes. And machinist's mate is what I turned out to be on the ship, so I was in charge of an engine space and in charge of six fellas that worked for me in that engine room, so—

Graham: Could you describe, maybe a typical day, or what that job entailed? Or what that meant to someone who might not know?

Erdmann: Well, I talked—well, we started out usually in the morning by around six o'clock, went 'til about—well depending on what kind of day we had, or what kind of training we had—went anywhere from six in the morning or seven in the morning 'til six or seven at night, and it wasn't very tough because I just had to make sure that my engine was running so the ship was propelled. And these fellas helped me with it.

Graham: Backing up a little bit, what was going on in your life before you enlisted?

Erdmann: Not a lot. I was, like I mentioned to ya, I was on the—worked on the farm with my dad and mother and my brothers, but then my brother left and he went into the service. And he was in the Navy during World War II, and then when I left, my dad kinda—was—only had my younger brother left, so he got off the farm because he couldn't handle it alone, 'cause my brother, he wasn't interested in farming, but I left because of the fact that I just—it was the thing to do at the time or else get drafted, and I wasn't going to get drafted, I wanted to go where I wanted to go.

Graham: Yeah.

Erdmann: So—

Graham: What was going on in the world during this time, you know in terms of—

Erdmann: Just coming outta a recession, like we had just recently. We didn't have a lot of money. I know I used to get my brother's clothes, my older brother's clothes. We passed 'em down, I gave mine to my younger brother, and we got new clothes about once a year, and that was around the first of the year, 'cause my dad normally sold cattle or else pigs, or somethin'. But there wasn't—it wasn't very exciting. When I went to school, I was not, not the best of student.

Graham: What clued you in to enlist, like what was going on politically in the world that you thought "I should—"

Erdmann: Well, when I went in, there was really not much going on. At that time it was one of the pauses, until I got in, and then like I mentioned to you, then the war started.

Graham: Right, and what year was this?

Erdmann: Nineteen—June of 1950.

Graham: And how old were you?

Erdmann: Oh jeeppers, 1950, '29—twenty-one.

Graham: Okay. And then, what did you do to prepare to leave for training or boot camp?

Erdmann: Nothing. [Graham laughs] I just went in and they did the rest. They gave me the clothing, and my—the only thing I had to bring was my toiletries and things that I had to have.

Graham: What do you remember about the first few days of training?

Erdmann: Well, it was tough. They were on your back continually and we had to get up at five [a.m.]. Well, of course I was kinda used to that, being on the farm, but—they'd get us moving for drilling and training for, with rifles and that type of thing. I guess that was about all, except for—and then when I went to school, when I was in school, we were in training classes for three months, and that was just a regular school day, like eight in the morning 'til five at night. Except if they had special training classes.

Graham: What do you think you would have done if you didn't go into the service?

Erdmann: I believe what I was interested in was going into—General Motors, which there used to be a plant in Janesville, and that's where my dad was working and my brother went there. He left General Motors and bought himself a service station, so I went to work for him 'til I went into the service. And I guess the only thing was, being in the service, I just happened to choose that I wanted to be a banker, I guess, 'cause that's what I ended up doing and retiring after forty years.

Graham: Oh yeah? Did you do that here in Janesville?

Erdmann: Yes, I did. Well, I worked here in Janesville at the First National Bank before they sold out, and when they sold out then I went to work over at Walworth State Bank in Walworth. 'Cause First National sold out, I believe it was to Chase at the time. And then I went to work for them and I retired out of Walworth.

Graham: What was your family's reaction to you enlisting?

Erdmann: Well they just figured if I wanted to leave home, I guess, that would be a good way to do it because I'd be supervised and I figured—I guess they figured I needed all the help I could get. 'Cause I had a—I used to have a lot of fun in high school, with my friends.

Graham: Doing what?

Erdmann: Partying. [Graham laughs]

Graham: And then when—could you just kinda walk me through when it changed, when it went from training to—

Erdmann: Oh, well I think—like I mentioned to ya, the war started June of 1950, and I was in training, and like I said, we would hit different countries, but we'd just go on visitations, we didn't stay there forever, not very long. We went one time, I think it was four or five weeks in Japan when the ship I was on had to have some service done to the engines. So, I believe it was—I think it was two or three, four weeks and then we went back out to sea again and then when the war started then right away we went to Korea, just off Korea, I tied up—we were in a base at Pusan [also Busan]. And so, we tied up there and operated out of there to different jobs and then the invasion and also, I was on a ship that carried marines and UDT and—what else was it?

Graham: What's a UDT for someone who doesn't know?

Erdmann: Underwater Demolition Team.

Graham: Okay and what's that?

Erdmann: They used to take and light—we'd make raids up and down the coast in Korea, and go in different ports and blow up whatever we could or they did, we just, on the ship brought 'em to the village or city, whatever they were going to bomb. Or, work on and so, it was quite interesting experience for me.

Graham: And do you feel like your training prepared you for what you end up doing in Korea?

Erdmann: Oh, sure. 'Cause I had never—well, I hunted at home, but I never fired a pistol or anything like that until I got in service.

Graham: Had you been on a boat before?

Erdmann: Oh yeah. Yeah, I liked being on a ship.

Graham: Yeah?

Erdmann: I enjoyed that. I don't know why but I just did, it never affected me a bit.

Graham: You never got seasick?

Erdmann: No, I went through a typhoon, and I went through some awful storms but I never got sick.

Graham: Tell me about this typhoon.

Erdmann: Well, it was just off the coast of Washington, and it was coming in toward the US, but it never got all the way in, but we were out to sea, so we couldn't come into the ports when there was a storm. At least at that time I didn't feel we could, but— And then we just stayed out to sea and we rode it out. I can remember nights where they used to have to strap us in our bed with gun belts so that we wouldn't fall out, 'cause you know when that ship goes up then you feel it vibrating and it'd collapse down. But we made it through it and it only took about—I think it was two days that we were on that storm—three days maybe.

Graham: Can you talk about some of the other guys you were on the ship with, how were they handling it, what did you do for entertainment?

Erdmann: Well, there wasn't much entertaining. We were working most of the time. And then what we would do is we'd—well, they fed us good—that's one thing about being in the Navy, we always got a good meal. Except when we were at sea, that typhoon—the cooks couldn't cook too much so we couldn't eat too much either.

Graham: Probably lots of spills.

Erdmann: [Laughs] Yeah there was. 'Cause they had—the food was normally in big tanks or tubs like that, about three or four foot round.

Graham: What would it taste like?

Erdmann: Oh, it was good. They know how to cook. 'Cause those guys there must be trained pretty well too.

Graham: And then what was the name of the ship you were on?

Erdmann: I was on the USS *Wantuck* APD-125 and it was an auxiliary passenger/destroyer. It was a—oh, it was a converted destroyer escort.

Graham: And so you went from where to the shores of Korea?

Erdmann: Well I went from boot camp to San Diego where I picked up the ship. I was on the ship, we went to—I guess we went to Pusan.

Graham: Where is that?

Erdmann: That's near Korea too. And that's where we operated out of for the invasion and we picked up the troops off of troop ships, to haul into the beach, which was marines and—oh what the heck else was it—hm, I can't think now right off hand what it was.

Graham: That's okay. What were your first impressions when you made it over? Of the landscape, and the people—

Erdmann: Oh I thought the country was similar to ours in different places. The weather was similar, at times. It was cold there too in Korea and also at Pusan. The only place it was nice and warm was Hawaii and the Philippines and Guam that was warm weather.

Graham: Did you have a favorite place you went to?

Erdmann: Hawaii was a real good one.

Graham: And have you ever had the opportunity to go back to any of these places later in life?

Erdmann: Yes, I went back to Hawaii with my wife. We went back for two weeks and then we also went to—what do you call it—down on the lower part—oh, in the Keys in Florida, which we liked, that was similar weather. And then I also had a friend that owned a condo [condominium] down there so he let us use his condo while we were there. So the wife and I went there a few years, which was nice.

Graham: And did you meet your wife after the war?

Erdmann: Yes. Married—we got married in '54. I met her just after I got out of service. I don't remember where it was, but I think it was here in Janesville, 'cause she was from Janesville.

Graham: Oh yeah? We'll get to that, but let's maybe back up and—how did you correspond or communicate with your family back home?

Erdmann: By letter, not very often. I was not a very good letter-writer. Well, I wrote 'em letters occasionally, and then what we'd get thirty days off, well I didn't get thirty days leave until about two years after I was in, just before I went over to Korea. So, we didn't get a lot of time off and my folks didn't have a lot of money so they couldn't come to see me, so the only time I got to see them was when I could go home.

Graham: So could you kind of walk me through your experience in Korea, just sort of—maybe the chronology of it?

Erdmann: Well, it started off pretty—I think it was around, what time did I say? Well, I think we started in the morning around four thirty. I was an engineer on a boat and we had to have the boat ready to go to pick up these Marines and Underwater Demolition Teams. We took different ones into the beach. I think I made fifteen or twenty trips carrying troops in and then toward the end as we were coming back we'd pick up prisoners and people that were injured that we had to take to the hospital ship, *Consolation* [USS *Consolation* (AH-15)], which was a beautiful ship too, but the cause of it wasn't too good.

Graham: Did you ever have any close calls?

Erdmann: Oh yeah. But, I'm still here so [knocking noises, perhaps Erdmann knocking on wood per the saying] so I made it okay.

Graham: Yeah. What gets you through this kind of experience? What kind of mindset do you have to have?

Erdmann: Well you have to quit—not think about it, you have to just work at what you're supposed to be doin'. It's the only way, you gotta concentrate on your work. You still get frightened, don't get me wrong. I still—we still had a tough time, but we made it through, that's the important thing.

Graham: Did you have any health issues during your service? You know, any diseases or sicknesses, or—

Erdmann: No, I was very fortunate. I really didn't have any problems. Well I take that back I did have a hernia I had to have operated on after I just about got out of the service. But I don't think there was anything else. I was very fortunate.

Graham: That's good.

Erdmann: And I was fortunate while I was there, too, that I didn't have any injuries or anything.

Graham: You talked about how working on a farm prepared you for getting up early and working hard, but did you have any other life experiences that prepared you for war?

Erdmann: No, no, 'cause I worked like—like I say I worked about three months, I think, for General Motors after I got out of school, after I graduated from high school. I worked about three months for them and then that's when I went in service. Really there was no training for anything. I had training for a life 'cause my parents—we had to do pretty much everything on our own. They were there for us, but—we didn't have a lot of help.

Graham: I meant to ask, were you influenced at all by returning World War Two veterans?

Erdmann: No, not overly. Made me enthused to go when I knew my brother was in the Second World War just before me. He was still in in fact when I went in the service. No—

Graham: Where was he?

Erdmann: Oh he was all over, too. He was on a ship, and they got sunk and then he went, got tied up with the marines, and they didn't send him back to his ship. So he stayed with them 'til the end of the war. And he got out, I think he got out in '46. I think that's when he got out, yeah. Well he got home before I left, in fact. Now that I think about it.

Graham: Can you describe some of the physical and emotional challenges you encountered?

Erdmann: Well the only emotional one was—the fact that I was kind of—what do you call it, tensed up at different times, especially when we were in on the invasion that was really something. But anticipating it too makes you kind of excited, I mean to the point where, can't sleep very good sometimes. But then again, they wore us out so we got to sleep.

Graham: Yeah, now tell me about the invasion, which one are you talking about? Is this—

Erdmann: The invasion of Wolmi-do which is on the bottom part of Korea and then on the Inchon which was a big city in Korea.

Graham: And both of these were sort of pivotal moments in the history of Korean War.

Erdmann: Yes.

Graham: So for someone who hasn't learned about it yet, or someone who doesn't know, could you kind of talk about that?

Erdmann: Well we didn't get to see a lot of it, the only thing we got to see was Wolmi-do when we dropped the marines and stuff off there for—to capture the island. Then we would pick them up and take the next group to North Korea which was in by Inchon. And there they tried to get rid of some of the Japa—Chine—Koreans there. So then, I don't know how long, well I was there for a little over a year and a half in North Korea, on the ship with North Korea. And that's when, like I mentioned, after the invasion and then we'd start making raids at night further up the coast in North Korea. And we'd hit different supply depots, ammunition places, where there's a lot of ammunition and also different weapons and stuff for the troops. It was just a bouncing deal after the invasion. We just made different hits up and down the coast.

Graham: And what kind of impact was this having?

Erdmann: It was good, because I think that it made them wonder what was going to happen next. 'Cause I think that's how we happened to capture most of Korea at the time. Our troops were doing a real good job. We lost quite a few guys, but—

Graham: What was that like, the first time that happened?

Erdmann: Well it's not nice to have one of your friends or something killed, but—you learn to adjust. It isn't then something that you approve of, but it's something that you have to grin and bear. There's no way you can get around it.

Graham: Did you have any contact with some of the famous generals like MacArthur or Ridgway? [Douglas and Matthew, respectively]

Erdmann: No. I saw MacArthur once on a beach, but I never got any chance to—personal contacts or anything. I just happened to see him.

Graham: I meant to ask, what was your ultimate classification? Did you have that? A rank, or—

Erdmann: Oh yeah I had a Machinist's mate second.

Graham: Okay.

Erdmann: That's why I was in charge of that second engine room space.

Graham: And those six guys?

Erdmann: Yes.

Graham: For those who don't know, what was different about the Korean War in terms of technology or strategy?

Erdmann: Well it seemed that they didn't have any respect for life.

Graham: The North Koreans?

Erdmann: Yes, those people just seemed to present themselves, and if they got whacked off, they got killed, that was it. They didn't seem to care about anything. It was just like the Japanese, I guess, almost.

Graham: What about the South Koreans? What was sort of your reception with them?

Erdmann: Well they seemed to be more like us, more like the Americans, because they seemed to want to do most of the things that we did, and they followed our instructions—well, the ones that I dealt with, they seemed to take our instructions quite well.

Graham: And, describe maybe a dealing with them, what does that mean?

Erdmann: Well I mean if they would—if we would tell them we had to do a certain job, they would inform their troops what they had to do, and they would do it, so that we were all coordinated and could operate on one single deal.

Graham: Now among the US troops did you witness any incidents of prejudice or—either between your own troops or between the troops and the Korean troops?

Erdmann: No I don't believe so. I never saw any—I never saw any racism either. We had some experience with some after I got back to the US again.

Graham: What happened?

Erdmann: Well, at the time I think there was still some prejudice for blacks, so we had some fights and stuff out—I mean, I didn't, but some of the troops had fights in bars and stuff and out on the coast, California.

Graham: Yeah. So do you want to continue walking me through the—your Korean experience? You were talking about Inchon and moving up the coast?

Erdmann: Inchon was the place that we had the invasion after Wolmi-do, which was the island below on Korea. I wish I had a map, I could show you, but I don't. Inchon was more or less, after you got onto the main island, or the peninsula. And then we just went up and down the—went up the coast to Inchon as far as we got for the invasion and that's where they stalled for a—oh jeez I don't know how long it was before the US finally went over that—land there. But anyway, that's where the invasion halted, just past Inchon. And so that's when our troops—and then we went back to our ship, and were going back for supplies and stuff to bring over—we went to Japan and China to pick up things to take back to Korea. But then after that I don't—we didn't do anything but training again.

Graham: In what year was Inchon?

Erdmann: '50.

Graham: Okay. And so—

Erdmann: June of '50.

Graham: Right. So then you did some more trainings, and what happened after that?

Erdmann: Well, it was just continuous training, you really don't have any specific thing, except like I mentioned, we did make raids now and then up and down the coast of Korea. But those weren't every day, it was just certain things that whoever it was coordinated attacks on different places to soften their areas.

Graham: Right. And then how did things kind of wind down for you?

Erdmann: Well then we left and went to Japan and they gave us some liberty. I think I had two weeks—that we just relaxed, we went to Mount Fuji and they gave us a hotel room there which was beautiful. And we had all the food we could eat, drinks, of course too. But it was very nice, relaxation after we got through the war itself.

Graham: And then what did you do after those two weeks?

Erdmann: Well then we went right back again to hitting a different place, in other words like—oh jeepers—oh, Okinawa and Alaska. We went to Alaska after that to the Aleutian Islands which was great 'cause I went back there again after Audrey, my wife and I went up there on a visit after I got out too, 'cause I just loved Alaska.

Graham: And so how long were you in the service for?

Erdmann: Four years.

Graham: And then, kind of talk to me about the last year, and then what happened after that.

Erdmann: Well not much, the last year I—well, I mean the last few months all we did was more or less travel at sea getting back to the US from China and Japan. When we got back here we just—I don't think we—if I remember correctly I don't even think we did anything out of the base in San Diego except training. Yeah, that's about it.

Graham: And what about the Korean conflict were you aware of as you were sort of headed back home?

Erdmann: Well we just heard what was going on.

Graham: Which was?

Erdmann: Well, they were making headway up the coast, up the peninsula and so, that was what we were after, and then they sent in additional troops and different—more ships went in up there. I also had another, I see here.

Graham: What's that?

Erdmann: These are where I had some combat operations. [?? Lists Korean cities\places from 30:30-30:37] And many other nameless places in Korea we hit, but I can't even pronounce some of 'em.

Graham: Yeah I was gonna ask you, did you learn any Korean?

Erdmann: No, [both laugh] no, I didn't have time 'cause we didn't really—well, we weren't really that close to the Koreans that we had on board. And we never really had that time to sit down and talk or anything. Most of ours was whatever we had to do, we did.

Graham: Right. Now describe coming home, or finishing up service.

Erdmann: Well that was great, but—what we did was we came back from China and Japan, we came back to Hawaii, we were there I think a month, and then we came back to San Diego, and I think I was discharged from San Francisco. And then from there they just give us a train—give me a train ride back to Chicago.

Graham: That's a long train ride.

Erdmann: Yeah, it was. Yeah, they didn't fly us then. [laughs]

Graham: What do you remember about that ride home and preparing for this next chapter of your life?

Erdmann: Not much. I was more excited about getting home, because I hadn't seen my parents for about a year—well, six or eight months, almost a year. And then I was just thinking about getting discharged and I didn't know what the heck I was gonna do for a job after I got out, either so—

Graham: So then what happened?

Erdmann: Well when I got discharged at Chicago, er, San Francisco, I came back and I went to work at First National Bank in Janesville. And I worked for them for, jeez—close to twenty years, and then they went and sold out after twenty years, and then I had to find another job, so then I went to work for Walworth State Bank over in Walworth. Well, I had a bank of my own first out on the west side of Janesville—People's State Bank. That was from the first, I'm sorry that came before I got out. They had a bank on the west side at the Sunnyside Shopping Center, and that lasted 'til—let's see I went in there in '77—jeez I don't even remember how long I served out there. But anyway, that lasted only a few years because then they sold out to Chase Bank in New York. So then I had to find another job.

Graham: How did you meet your wife? What's her name?

Erdmann: Audrey. She was from Janesville and then I went to come back here to—after the war to find work, I met her at a family thing, and then what we did was—I don't know how we even got together. I don't remember any more it's been so long. She must have been wonderful though, because I know I [laughs] I sure couldn't get rid of her. [Both laugh] No, she made me what I was, she encouraged me on my job and everything else, so I think that's why I married her, too, because she was so—nice to me, and so—I don't know, told me things to do that I should be doing, instead of goofing off and playing like I did when I went in service.

Graham: Did any of your service experience sort of inform or influence the things you did later in life—you know, having a job, raising kids?

Erdmann: Well it did kinda teach me that I better take my job seriously. Because when I found out that I wasn't going to have a job when the bank sold, I had to find another one and I was very lucky I met someone from Walworth, and my wife and I moved over there. And they liked me, too so I was the vice president there at their bank and that bank is still in operation, Walworth State Bank.

Graham: Oh yeah?

Erdmann: Yeah.

Graham: Can you share any memories or anecdotes that stand out to you from your experience?

Erdmann: Boy—it's kinda tough to remember. I'm not young anymore and my memory's good, but it's short. No I'm afraid I don't, really.

Graham: Did anything surprise you about your experience that you just didn't expect, or that you weren't prepared for?

Erdmann: Well I wasn't prepared for life, the way it was in the service. Some of the things that happened I never dreamt that I would ever be involved with. Same way when I got out of service. My wife was so wonderful, I didn't know how that ever came about either. I wasn't prepared for that because I never had much time for any ladies at the time, so, I wasn't prepared for that either.

Graham: What did you tell her about your experience?

Erdmann: Well anything she asked, I told her and I told her about the fact that I was very fortunate that I was back, came back, without any injuries or anything. I thought I was very fortunate and I figured the guy upstairs must've been watching over me.

Graham: What advice would you give someone who's entering the service today?

Erdmann: Take orders. Do you what you're supposed to, and if it means doing something you don't want, do it anyhow and then complain about it later, because that's—I don't care what you say, all that discipline and everything certainly helped, as far as I'm concerned for me.

Graham: Do you wish you had gotten that piece of advice?

Erdmann: Yes, 'cause I had to learn it on my own.

Graham: How would you sort of sum up or describe the Korean War to someone who doesn't know anything about it? You know maybe a middle schooler, or—

Erdmann: Well it was a--it was a learning experience. Like I mentioned, those people seemed to have no respect for life. And I know most of our people in this country do look forward to their life ahead. And they want to try to—live the best they can. I just, I don't really know what they could say.

Graham: How would you explain sort of the reasons we got involved?

Erdmann: Well they were trying to take over some of the countries over there and I think if you'll notice all of the conflicts that we're involved with, they're always trying to do something against different people—and our country doesn't appreciate someone else trying to tell somebody else what to do in their own country. Which, I don't know whether that's could for us or not, but—it seemed to work out all right for everybody. I mean—there were some that were taken advantage of and aren't here to tell it, but I think we did a lot of good over there in those different countries. I still think we're doing good.

Graham: Why do you think the Korean War became known as the "Forgotten War" or the "Unknown War?"

Erdmann: Well I know when I came back nobody even hardly said "hi" or nothing to ya.

Graham: What's that like?

Erdmann: It's hard to take, especially after what we had to do. I mean—we're not asking for a lotta—what do you call it—benefits or anything like that, fact is we—I had a tough time even getting benefits from the VA [US Department of Veterans Affairs] until I submitted my certificate and my—well, anyway, my—jeez I can't think of the name of that. Well, anyway my discharge papers. They were very—they questioned us quite severely and they didn't really want to give us anything. And I felt we deserved some of the things—no, not all of them maybe but—I think for what we did, and same way nowadays these young fellas that put their lives up for our country, I think they deserve some type of compensation. I don't care who they are.

Graham: So are you active in any veteran groups?

Erdmann: Yes, I'm a life member in the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and I'm a life member in the American Legion, and I also belong to the—hmm—I guess that's it, those two. I think, anyway. [Long pause] Yeah.

Graham: So what's this? [Seems to be gesturing at materials referenced earlier in interview]

Erdmann: What's what?

Graham: What are these cards?

Erdmann: Well this is my American Legion card,

Graham: Mm-hm.

Erdmann: That's part of the American Legion stating that I'm a paid up for life member. This is my identification card for the Veterans Administration. Now we have a different identification card with another picture. So that's that, too. And then I have AARP [American Association of Retired Persons], but that's it.

Graham: Okay. Are you in touch with anybody you served with?

Erdmann: Yeah, I was. He passed away, though, so I don't know him anymore. He was living—he lived in—not Texas, Oklahoma—he lived in Oklahoma, and I never got down to see him or anything, so I kinda lost track of him, we never—didn't write anybody. I had a lot of fellas that I was in class with—school—that were in service but different services and we still correspond and I just had another fella in my class pass away, so it's getting less and less.

Graham: You seem to feel pretty strongly about what you did. Do you feel positively about your military experience?

Erdmann: Yes. I think that we did the right thing, and I'm glad that it came out the way it did.

Graham: Would you have done anything differently?

Erdmann: Well, there isn't much way that we can do it differently—they tell you what to do and you have to do it.

Graham: And then what were your impressions of the McCarthy hearings in 1954—what do you remember about that?

Erdmann: Not much, 'cause I really wasn't interested in what they were doing 'cause I was out of the service then, so—I'd done my part.

Graham: How do you think you're different because of your service?

Erdmann: I have a different outlook on life than I had when I went in, I can tell you that. All I was doing when I was in—out of—well not in the service yet, all we ever did was party and—go around and—I travelled whenever I could. And the buddies and I we used to have five or six of us going around—going all over. He had a car, so we were in good shape so we could move around a little, 'cause his dad owned a filling station. So—

Graham: And so, how are you different, now? Or because you went to the war?

Erdmann: Well, like I mentioned I have a different outlook on life than what I did. I feel now that my son, my son was in—my youngest son was in the service, Marines for twenty years and he enjoyed it. It's just something you learn to—it's good for you as far as discipline and I think it helps every man to grow up, in the service. And so, I think it's good for 'em. My oldest son couldn't go in 'cause he lost an eye, but—that happens too, so not everybody can go.

Graham: What would you want people to know about you or your experience that might listen to this interview?

Erdmann: Jeez—I can't really say. For what I've done, I just—I'm kinda—I'm proud of what I did. I can't really say anything different. I think that they'd enjoy it, with the—I don't know a lot of people that like to be told what to do, but I think in a way that it helps a young person. So—

Graham: And then why did you want to participate in this oral history program, why was it important to record some of your memories?

Erdmann: Well I think that if I've done anything decent, maybe it will inform someone and they can do some good to somebody too. I mean, I don't know if I am or not, but I'm trying.

Graham: You're doing a great job.

Erdmann: Well, thanks that's all I can do is just try. But I think it's good to get the information out there to the young people or young men. Well now ladies too, but back in our day it wasn't any ladies.

Graham: Right. [Erdmann laughs] Well I'm at the end of my questions; is there anything I'm missing, or things you'd like to add?

Erdmann: Gee—I don't think so. I see here that—we took on maneuvers over in Midway, but that's nothing either really bad, or big.

Graham: What does that mean?

Erdmann: Well they—we had on our ship which was small—I don't know if I got a picture of it or not, but we had small airplanes propelled, you know like a model airplane?

Graham: Mm-hm.

Erdmann: And they painted 'em bright red and orange. And then our ships would take gun practice—they'd fire our guns at them for practice. No I don't have one [referencing a picture]. I thought I had one but I don't, so—no, I don't see anything else.

Graham: Okay. Well, I'll turn this off then.

Erdmann: Okay.

Graham: Thank you so much.

Erdmann: Well I—thank you!

[End of Interview]