

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
RICHARD HEIMERL
Construction and Demolition Engineer, Army, Korean War

Heimerl, Richard, (1950-). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 50 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 videorecording (ca. 50 min.); ½ inch, color.

Abstract

Richard Heimerl, a Milwaukee native, states that he joined the Army on August 8th 1950 and was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas for orientation and then went to Fort Custer for basic training. Heimerl states that he then joined the engineers and was sent to Camp Carson, Colorado around Christmas 1950 and joined the 32nd Engineer Group, 439th Engineer Battalion, Company A as a demolition man. Richard Heimerl states that on New Years Day 1951 he was sent with his unit to Camp Stoneman, California for demolitions school. Heimerl states that he landed in Korea on February 7th 1951 in the Pusan Perimeter. Heimerl talks about how his unit was turned into construction engineers and built a bridge in Andong, before the 430th Engineers took over. He mentions how he was astounded at the number of North Korean prisoners and how large numbers of them were involved in repairing a road that had suffered damage during fighting. Heimerl recalls how on his way to Wonju how his convoy was ambushed by guerrillas and that they had to break out the machine guns to protect themselves. Heimerl talks about his duty as a mine clearer in addition to his responsibilities as a demolition man. He remembers that sometimes civilians would be killed by American mines. Heimerl recalls building bridges around Wonju and how he had become sergeant by this point, and his six man squad headed north of the 38th parallel to help repair bridges. He describes how he saw convoy after convoy of GI's hanging off of trucks to avoid a Chinese offensive, and that he and his squad had to head back to Seoul to avoid the offensive. Heimerl remembers that after arriving in Seoul, he blew up the last bridge out of Seoul and that thousands of civilians who wanted to cross the bridge were left stranded. Heimerl states that he and other elements of the 439th Engineer Battalion was involved in a major railroad bridge building project that was completed quickly between April 6th and April 17th of 1951, earning his unit a Presidential Unit Citation. Heimerl talks about how his unit earned a second Presidential Unit Citation for widening the road between Wonju and Seoul. He states that his MOS was changed from 3533 (demolition man) to a 1055 (construction foreman) so he could get a promotion. Heimerl recalls how he was assigned rock crushers to crush rocks for roads, and that Korean civilians would constantly steal the rubber belts to create shoes for themselves. Additionally, he discusses being the training sergeant for 25,000 ROK soldiers and that during the nights a large amount would go AWOL. Heimerl states that deserters that were caught had their heads shaved in order to identify them. He recalls being the longest serving engineer in the 439th Engineers due to his demolitions skills, and he was in Korea for seventeen months and twenty-two days. Heimerl talks about being assigned to start the demolitions school at Fort Leonard Wood and that he started the tradition of blowing sleepy students out of their chairs.

Biographical Sketch

Richard Heimerl was born in Milwaukee and joined the Army on August 8th 1950. After arriving in Korea on February 7th 1951 he stayed for seventeen months and twenty-two days. After returning he dabbled in mining and farming before starting a career in law enforcement that lasted 30 years and he was the police chief in Dodgeville for seventeen years.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999.
Transcribed by Katy Marty, 2008.

Interview Transcript:

McIntosh: Where were you born?

Heimerl: Milwaukee. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

McIntosh: You went into the service when?

Heimerl: August the 8th of 1950.

McIntosh: Where did they send you?

Heimerl: They sent me to Fort Riley, Kansas.

McIntosh: For basic training?

Heimerl: No for orientation and got supplies and then I was transferred to Fort Custer, Michigan.

McIntosh: For orientation? What happened there?

Heimerl: No, I was in a weapons school at Fort Custer. I was originally to go to the 101st Airborne Division because that is what I enlisted for. And they sent us up to Fort Custer. We took basic training there and we were with the anti-aircraft unit; the 120mm anti-aircraft guns. And as soon as we got through basic training, the company commander called me and the first sergeant, and the company commander got a hold of me and ask if I would consider going into the engineers rather than staying in the – or getting transferred to the 101st for my set of training. I said sure, I mean you know, I said, “Yeah, that’d be fine.” So I left sometime before Christmas in 1950 and went to Camp Carson, Colorado and joined the 439th Engineer Battalion, Company A and I was assigned as a demolition man in Company A as a private and that was, I think I spent Christmas there. And New Year’s Day, we loaded up and left for, left camp Carson to Camp Stoneman, California and arrived there on January 3rd.

McIntosh: What did you learn at demolition school, what did they teach you?

Heimerl: Nothing. I learned that before I went in the service. I worked for stone quarries and miners. My family were miners.

McIntosh: Oh, so you got by with it. [laughs]

Heimerl: [laughs] Oh yeah, you bet. I did a little fishing with dynamite when I was a kid. And we blew up stumps, my great uncle and I. So I knew--

McIntosh: You were pre-trained?

Heimerl: I was pre-trained and that's what I had down on my--when I enlisted they asked me what I'd done and I said I worked with Watson out here and done the demolition work for him, blasted quarry stone and stuff so they put me in the demolition, and I had a sergeant who was over me and we made sure we had all of our equipment and then we got. Left Jan the 22nd of 1951 for Yokohama. We were to--

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Okay.

McIntosh: Different substances or--

Heimerl: I used composition 3 dynamite

McIntosh: What is composition 3?

Heimerl: That's plastic explosive, composition C and C-4 is plastic explosives where you use debt cord.

McIntosh: Why all these different types of compositions?

Heimerl: Well, because dynamite comes in a prescribed, like a little, cigar you know, and plastic explosive comes in a #2 square block. And you can make anything in it that you want to. You can stick it on something, you can mold it anyway you want. I used shape charges for cutting bridge embutments, you know.

McIntosh: Regular-sized dynamite or what?

Heimerl: We used that mostly for drilling. And drilling, we'd blast to try to widen the roads out in Korea.

McIntosh: Catch a wire. The wiring. Touch the wire and

Heimerl: Oh yes, we

McIntosh: Did you attach it to a battery?

Heimerl: Well, we used a generator type of we kept them when we used to set them out.

McIntosh: What distance were you at?

Heimerl: It depended on how much of a hurry you were.

McIntosh: I see.

Heimerl: Sometimes we generally would cut abandoned telephone wire and use it to set our charges off. Sometimes we'd just run.

McIntosh: What would be the distance?

Heimerl: Well, it's hard for me to say. But I would say it would depend how many explosives you had. If you had, say if you had seven or eight boxes at fifty pounds a box, you'd want to be about a hundred yards away and then you want to look permanently up at the sky and you would side-step the rocks that were fallen' around ya.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: You'd look up and you know, there wouldn't be a lot of rocks, it might be one single rock that you'd have to side step without falling someplace around you.

McIntosh: Your ears?

Heimerl: They're okay. My wife doesn't think so, but [laughs]—

McIntosh: Tell me about your ears. Tell me about your clothes.

Heimerl: No, no protection at all, nothin'.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Nobody every suggested it.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: No, no, no that wasn't a problem. Even drilling the drillers they never had to use any ear protection, as far as I know they never had any ear problems.

McIntosh: Plain clothes.

Heimerl: Yes. We, I don't know, I guess I was one of the few guys that cleaned mine fields.

McIntosh: In addition.

Heimerl: In addition to my explosive work.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Well, we used debt cord and plastic explosives. Sometimes we'd blow 'em up in place if it was feasible, sometimes I'd remove 'em. And I had a ¾ ton truck that I would go out and I'd go down to the 439th engineer battalion that belonged to the 32nd engineer group and in that group 32nd division group headquarters were all the overlays and minefields in Korea and I would go back to the 32nd group and pick up those maps and then -

McIntosh: How did they find it

Heimerl: And then I could find the mines the way they were laid out.

McIntosh: Those are our mines.

Heimerl: Oh yes, the Koreans never had any mines. We were the ones that had the minefields out there. And if we wanted to cut, for example, a road through and it was in the middle of a minefield then it was my job to go out there and

McIntosh: Detonate 'em.

Heimerl: Detonate all the mines or make sure they were all accounted for.

McIntosh: You had to have a map?

Heimerl: Yes, pretty much. I--

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: I had went out there without a map and you use a mine detector. You've seen, I'm sure everybody's seen pictures of mine detectors, but there's so much shrapnel and stuff around. With the old mine detector you would be misinformed all the time but if it was an emergency case you would just get down on you hands and knees and start with a bayonet and start diggin' when the thing went off you--

McIntosh: These were all anti-personnel mines?

Heimerl: Yeah, they had some personnel mines. Yeah, they had some anti-tank mines.

McIntosh: But these were just beneath the surface.

Heimerl: Yes, they were buried about, oh, I think the mine was about four inches high and they were buried like six inches underground depending on the type, rather it was a pressure release or a trip wire, there were several different kinds.

McIntosh: Trip wire, tell me about those.

Heimerl: Well you'd set a mine and put the cap in it, tie a little wire around the fuse of the mine and when you pull on that that would pull the pin out and you had about five to eight seconds to react or you're done for.

McIntosh: [Inaudible] Anti-tank mine.

Heimerl: Well, what they did with the anti-tank mines is they would put them on top of a pressure release mine and you know, if a person standing out there, I think it takes like 400 to 800 miles per square inch, if my memory serves me correct. So a running man couldn't even set one of 'em off. So if they were in an area where they thought there was anti-tank mines they wouldn't pay [too] much attention to 'em. But what these mine layers did was they would--

McIntosh: [Laughs] They were on our side.

Heimerl: Our side yes, but they would put an anti-personnel mine underneath the antitank mine so when a guy run on the anti-tank mine, it would push down and the whole thing would go off.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Heimerl: Yes, but it never bothered the Chinese because they had so many people I don't think they'd of ever influenced them one bit.

McIntosh: They would just run the troops through. The first wave would take out the mines and the rest of them would follow them.

Heimerl: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yup. Take out the infantry or whatever happened to be there.

McIntosh: Your experience, is that the standard behavior of the Chinese?

Heimerl: Yes, yes. Absolutely.

McIntosh: They had a platoon to detonate mines.

Heimerl: Detonate mines and depots. And they never. Some of the first wave never even had guns. They never had nothin' they just--

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: They would just run. Throw it and get it over with.

McIntosh: Okay so.

Heimerl: No, obviously it wasn't their job. They would just run through them and get it over with. And then the other guys would come in by the thousands.

McIntosh: Okay, [Inaudible].

Heimerl: Well, the demolition thing and then I would get called occasionally to take a body out of a minefield. It would be like a Korean [had been] walkin' through a rice paddy for 2 or 3 months but there would be signs up that this is a minefield area. And they would walk on the edge of the rice paddies

McIntosh: Civilians.

Heimerl: Civilians. They might be walkin' there for two months and all at once, they just step in the right place and bang. Well, then they would call our outfit . I was the only guy who would go out and get 'em and the rest of the guys--

McIntosh: They assumed there would be another mine. If there was one, there would be two.

Heimerl: Yeah, yeah. So they would and even so they would, even some of the Infantry companies would call and want me to get these guys out.

McIntosh: You had a special talent there.

Heimerl: Oh yeah. oh yes. When I look back at it now, I thought I was a little nuts. But it's something I understood the process and--

McIntosh: Tell me about going to pick up one of these guys. How did that go?

Heimerl: Well, it was not a very nice job.

McIntosh: Gettin' all dirty.

Heimerl: Yeah. Gettin' out there and gettin' back was generally when I used the bayonet and crawling on my hands and knees and got out there and used the engineering tape to see where I've been. We used to take rolls of engineering tape and

McIntosh: What's engineering tape?

Heimerl: Well, it's a roll of, it's like police tape it says "Do not cross this line"

McIntosh: Wide tape?

Heimerl: Wide tape, but it was like a, I can't even remember the color of it now, it's white, I think. And I would -

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: So I'd find my way back without and I used to do that with the guys who went on night patrol if there was a mine field there. I would have to, I would take 'em out and let 'em through the minefield and then wait for 'em to come back. We'd always use that engineering tape to find our way.

McIntosh: It wasn't florescent so you could see it.

Heimerl: No, no, no it was kind of it was dark you didn't want anybody to see it because if they did they would start firing at you.

McIntosh: That's right. You didn't want to give you away.

Heimerl: So I done that on several occasions. Took guys through.

McIntosh: Used the rail system to get back.

Heimerl: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And it was, I don't know. It was interesting work. I disarmed some bombs and some rockets for different outfits.

McIntosh: What bombs, what rockets?

Heimerl: Well, this bridge that I showed you a picture of, the Chilli Chong Bridge that we replaced had two 1,500 unexploded bombs. They couldn't hit the bridge. The Air Force couldn't hit the bridge. They dropped 1,500 pound bombs and they just didn't hit the bridge. They had to send the engineers in to blow it up and when they did that they left the unexploded bombs there.

McIntosh: This is the Air Force that dropped them. Didn't explode.

Heimerl: Yeah, didn't explode.

McIntosh: [Inaudible] were they in the soil?

Heimerl: Yeah, right close to the bridge in the soil. Buried in the ground about, well, maybe -

McIntosh: With the pin sticking out.

Heimerl: Well, buried even below the pin. You couldn't tell, you could tell somethin' was down there but you couldn't tell what it was.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: So we get we got in there and started to use bulldozers and I told this bulldozer operator be awful careful because I'm sure that -

McIntosh: [Laughs] It's large.

Heimerl: Either there's bombs down there and they haven't exploded and it just happened our colonels was there the day they dug one of them out. Colonel Freemont Scott Tandy [laughs], and he was standing there and the bulldozer operator hooked this bomb, and started dragging it out of the crater it was in

McIntosh: Sure

Heimerl: No, just hooked it with the blade and started moving it out and the colonel was hollering, "Oh stop, oh stop." you know. And so we finally got it out of there and I took the war head out if then, the warhead screwed out of it and that was--

McIntosh: How?

Heimerl: Well, I didn't have the right tools, you know. I had to go down to the motor pool and get some

McIntosh: Everybody left you with a mess.

Heimerl: Well, they took the company down the road about five miles.

McIntosh: [Laughing] 5 miles, I think that's more then safe.

Heimerl: The company commander says "I'll come back and help ya." And he said "No, maybe I better stay down there with the men," so.

McIntosh: [Lnaudible]

Heimerl: So I took the, I had some other guy there, and I can't remember who it was. But these things weighed about 150 pounds you know.

McIntosh: I see. Had you ever seen one before?

Heimerl: Nope, never had seen one before.

McIntosh: Did it occur to you that you might not [Inaudible]?

Heimerl: Well, yeah I figured if I, I'd never hear the bang so--

McIntosh: Was it difficult?

Heimerl: No, it was not difficult.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: A good sized wrench, a big pipe wrench.

McIntosh: A big pipe wrench.

Heimerl: That's how I took the head out, it came out very easily.

McIntosh: It's amazing why it didn't explode [Inaudible].

Heimerl: Well, it, the secret to that is, I think they were low level bombing and the tail fin's got to traverse so many times before it arms the front of the bomb and it didn't traverse

McIntosh: Enough times.

Heimerl: Enough times to arm the bomb. And so they, I mean it wouldn't even have to take the warhead out of it. After I found that out I wouldn't even have to take the warhead out, I didn't know that at first.

McIntosh: But you didn't know that anyway and then--

Heimerl: No, but a quarter of a turn might have armed the whole thing, you know.

McIntosh: Sure.

Heimerl: But it was--

McIntosh: There was something else you said at the end

Heimerl: That was another bomb in the same place. There were two craters there, the same kind, big fifteen hundred pounder and it was--

McIntosh: 1,500 pounds?

Heimerl: Yeah, it was big; I could sit on it like a horse.

McIntosh: Dropped by a B-52 there.

Heimerl: I imagine, I don't know if there were B-52's or what they were. But they were the biggest airplane they had in Korea.

McIntosh: This one you disarmed, though. You said it weighed 150 pounds.

Heimerl: No, the warhead weighed 150 pounds.

McIntosh: The warhead weighed 150 pounds, the whole thing weighed 1,500 pounds, you couldn't wrestle that around.

Heimerl: Well, it was just layin' on the ground, got it out of the ground and dug it around.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Oh, yeah we back now and you have to read this thing I'm going to give you here because when we were cuttin' steel and stuff on the [Inaudible]. Our operation sergeant said there's a couple holes in my tent. Blast a couple more. [laughs] Yet, we got some rails and stuff off, off this bridge. The steel just goes crazy. Now that you can't see, you don't know where it's going.

McIntosh: What was the [Inaudible]?

Heimerl: Well, when we took the craters out of it, we took the whole middle of the bridge out.

McIntosh: I see.

Heimerl: What's the word I'm looking for? The towers, we took the towers out of the middle of the bridge they were so damaged that we had to use explosives, some more explosives to get 'em down on the ground.

McIntosh: Oh, I see. [Inaudible]

Heimerl: And the metal from that explosion, you don't know where metal is going to go when you blast with, the way we use dynamite or explosives.

McIntosh: Explosives. Explodes some metal?

Heimerl: Yeah, you can't really predict

McIntosh: Where the shrapnel goes.

Heimerl: You can't predict what's going to happen. I mean it might just do what you think it's going to do, or it might blow in a thousand pieces and--

McIntosh: Especially a section of steel with steel.

Heimerl: Yeah, right.

McIntosh: When you put some dynamite or whatever next to it--

Heimerl: Yeah, and set it off.

McIntosh: It explodes in a unpredictable fashion. Is that what we're saying?

Heimerl: Yeah, absolutely.

McIntosh: You get what I'm saying?

Heimerl: Yes absolutely, you don't know what's going to happen there so you have to really be -

McIntosh: In pieces or all in one pieces.

Heimerl: Yeah, it could be 10,000 pieces. You have to be very careful when you're doing metal work.

McIntosh: Tell me about the "being careful."

Heimerl: Well--

McIntosh: Other than getting the hell away from it.

Heimerl: Yeah, we got, there was a tunnel on each end of this on each end of this bridge. And we would get back in the tunnel and where I couldn't even see, you know--

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: We'd holler "Fire in the hole! Fire in the hole!" and the guys down in the company area would start hidin', you know.

McIntosh: [Laughs] Even though they were how far away?

Heimerl: Oh, they were a quarter of a mile or better. And we were still puttin' holes in their tent down there then.

McIntosh: Oh, I see.

Heimerl: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did anybody get hurt?

Heimerl: No, well, one kid lost his life but he drowned in a little stream. Just like it is over there right now. Not, from no.

McIntosh: We will get back to the bridge. So tell us what we need to know here.

Heimerl: Well--

McIntosh: What else did you do? Tell us about the minefield, did we cover it all?

Heimerl: Well, pretty much, I mean it was just a day to day thing with minefields. The most dangerous thing I ever got involved with, outside of being in some guerilla activity, was we had like four or five carloads of dynamite froze, which means everything in there freezes but the,

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: No, the most explosive part, the--it's a liquid anyhow and I can't think of the name right now. Nitroglycerin doesn't freeze. So everything else is sawdust and all the other mixtures that they put in that freezes solid but the nitro doesn't freeze.

McIntosh: This is in dynamite.

Heimerl: Dynamite, yes.

McIntosh: So what was the [Inaudible]?

Heimerl: Yeah, right from way back when I was a kid, you know or when I was a civilian and I had the guys with the bulldozers dig a hole in the ground and we covered it with timbers and then covered it with dirt and we buried I think it was four carloads of dynamite underground to thaw it out. And everyday I would take Korean laborers down in there and they turn every box over 'till the dynamite thawed out. I wanted to blow it up in place, but I thought it was so much it would move a mountain. So we decided and we carried it off in these cars and boxcars. Rail road system in Korea is not as big as our rail roads are here; they carry about a half of one of our boxcars would carry.

McIntosh: So big.

Heimerl: Yeah, so we wouldn't

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: So we didn't have what American would look like as a full sized train car. One of the other jobs I did with demolition was TNT. We were out of dynamite, we were out of explosives but we had TNT, which is a hard explosives, and I had the Koreans, we were trying to widen the mountain pass out, so I had the Koreans, I had 2,500 Korean laborers diggin' a trench up on this mountain side and every day they'd go up there and dig and every day I'd go up there and lay TNT in this ditch that they dug and then the guys behind used debt cord on it and it's an explosive, debt cord is an explosive cording that explodes--

McIntosh: That explodes it.

Heimerl: Like 2,400 feet a second or something. That explodes the TNT. Explosive TNT and then I had a bunch of follow up guys back there fillin' in the ditch and a bunch of them digging the ditch in front and I was placin' the tnt in there and when we shot that off we closed down the mountain pass for like three days and put the sun out for two hours. You couldn't see because of the black smoke. Just absolute. TNT gives off a terrible black, black smoke and you couldn't see anything for two hours around there. It was a dead, old hot summer day, it was terrible and I got in a little trouble over that because they said, you know I shouldn't of been able to shut the road down for that length of time. We did.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: [Laughs] We didn't have any dynamite and we didn't have anything else to use. So I just had to--

McIntosh: You have to stop and tell me now the difference between t n t and dynamite.

Heimerl: Well, dynamite comes in like a cigar form and it's soft and pliable you can, it's wrapped in paper, dynamite or tnt is yellow and it's hard, like a hard clay would be, and it comes in a little quarter pound blocks, or the ones I used it comes in a little quarter pound block.

McIntosh: Like the other explosives you mentioned.

Heimerl: Yeah.

McIntosh: [Inaudible] plastic.

Heimerl: Plastic stuff would come in a four pound block or a two pound block, I'm sorry.

McIntosh: A half pound block.

Heimerl: This is a half-pound block, yeah.

McIntosh: Square.

Heimerl: Square, and they, the reason that they made them that way is because if they had an abandoned tank or something or abandoned artillery you take one of those quarter pound TNT things, put a fuse on it, send it down the barrel and set it off. Have you seen those barrels where they're split like?

McIntosh: Yes.

Heimerl: Well, that's what did that, is like a quarter pound block of TNT.

McIntosh: Explosive properties compared to dynamite--

Heimerl: Dynamite, I think dynamite goes off about, around 1,000 feet a second, TNT is up around 2,000, the plastic explosives is around 2,500 hundred to 3,000 feet a second, maybe even 4,000 feet a second

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Yes, the speed of explosion.

McIntosh: And the faster the more powerful?

Heimerl: The faster, the more cutting effect, not necessarily more powerful. Dynamite, if it's placed properly, at 40%, which will move 800.

McIntosh: 40%?

Heimerl: Well, 40% nitroglycerin or 40%, there's 40% nitroglycerin, there's 50% or 60%. I've never seen anything over 60%.

McIntosh: Okay, more power though.

Heimerl: Oh, yeah. And that gets faster as it goes up, the number goes up. If use like a 40% stick and you do it properly, that'll push more dirt than a real cutting sharp blast would. I mean a real, like, a 2,400 feet a second goes

through there so fast it doesn't have time to push anything out of the way, it just cuts right through it.

McIntosh: So then when you're doing the steel and you're taking a bridge down and putting it in pieces. Which would you choose?

Heimerl: You'd use the fast stuff.

McIntosh: TNT.

Heimerl: The TNT or the plastic explosives, that'll go through. That will whack it to it pretty good.

McIntosh: The other would work but this works better.

Heimerl: Yes, yes everything would work, but this works more efficiently.

McIntosh: Did you have to be more careful with TNT versus [Inaudible].

Heimerl: No, things you had to be careful of was the caps, but even the plastic explosives you could pound it, burn it.

McIntosh: It would be safe around until you put a cap to it.

Heimerl: 'Till you put a cap to it.

McIntosh: Can you set that off any other way than with electricity? [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Yes, you use a timing piece.

McIntosh: If you hit it with a hammer, would that set it off?

Heimerl: Oh yes it would.

McIntosh: Yeah, so it would. So there's other ways.

Heimerl: There's other ways of blowing it up. You would use a timer fuse which you light with a match.

McIntosh: Oh, okay.

Heimerl: And you cut it with a--

McIntosh: The old fashioned way.

Heimerl: The old fashioned way, yes. I've done a lot of that over there. In electricity about the two ways I know, I used peuce and a half [two and a half ton] trucks for the generator to get electricity to set the explosives off or my little ten cap detonator or--

McIntosh: That sets a battery off.

Heimerl: Yeah, that a little battery thing. And then you have a battery tester, a volt meter, ohm reader--

McIntosh: Ohm reader.

Heimerl: Ohm reader, to test the resistance to find out if you've got an open line or if you've got any stray voltage or stuff like that around 'cause you didn't have to worry about that in Korea so much as you do in this country if you were doin' demolition. All in all, I kind of learned as I went along, I had a good teacher, the kid that taught me was from Iowa. And he was a, in civilian life he had a hardware store and he was pretty good at. So he was a good teacher.

McIntosh: What was your rank about this time?

Heimerl: Well, I was a, well I was a corporal and then I made sergeant and then I made tech sergeant before I got out.

McIntosh: How long were you in Korea?

Heimerl: I was in Korea seventeen months and 22 days. I was the longest serving guy in the 439th Engineers.

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: Because I was the last guy to be rotated home.

McIntosh: They kept you longer [laughs]. That was a dubious honor.

Heimerl: Yeah, because of my demolition experience.

McIntosh: Right [Inaudible].

Heimerl: And they couldn't find anybody to replace me, no.

McIntosh: I'm sure there weren't a lot of volunteers at that time.

Heimerl: While we it wasn't necessarily, you know. One of the guys. My replacement came up after I had been there about eight months or a year.

He got hurt and we were clearing a minefield to put a road through and somehow or other the mortars started coming in. I don't know, and he ran for the truck and I told him, "Don't run for the truck, because that's what they what they were after." So they hit the truck, the second shot. He was underneath it.

McIntosh: He got hurt. How far north did you get? Your outfit was moving north, at what point?

Heimerl: Well, we got north, we landed in Pusan. Let's see, we landed in Yokohama January 22nd and February the 1st we left to go to Korea. We were supposed to build in Yokohama. We were supposed build a big—I was just a private then. Our original, I guess I should say, our original job was combat engineers for the marine division.

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: We were supposed to be the combat engineers but they couldn't find transport for us from the States over there. By the time we got to Japan they made us construction engineers and they took all of our M-1's away and all of our combat gear and we were to build this supply depot in Camp Palmer, Japan, which is outside of Tokyo. Some kid by the name of Palmer, Corporal Palmer, I think--in WWII had won the Congressional Medal of Honor for something he did. And they named this when the United States took it over. And so we were there, and cold, oh man, it was cold and we were sleeping in horse stalls, and building. And this was in Japan. We hadn't done anything and they sent guys up to Tokyo to draw rations for us to Camp Drake, but before they got back we had sent other guys after 'em. "You have to get to the back company," because we were headed and getting ready for Korea. Well, then now they gave us back our gear. They gave us ammunition and we started marching six, seven or eight miles a day.

McIntosh: Gave your guns back.

Heimerl: Gave us our guns back, gave us our ammunition back, gave us combat gear back, helmets and everything. And we had to wear helmets every day. Carry our rifles and carry live ammunition and we got on--they had taken our M-1's away from us and gave us carbines when we were construction engineers. They took our carbines away and gave us back M-1's [laughs]. So when we got on the ship to go to Korea. We landed in Korea February 7, 1951 and we're still in the Pusan Perimeter. Pretty much, the guys are still pretty close to the Pusan Perimeter at that time. We're, at that time. And so we got off, and got on gondola cars.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Was it the fall before then?

McIntosh: I landed in Korea just after the Incheon Landing. The Incheon Landing was in September of '50.

Heimerl: September of '50. Well, February 8th we disembarked. We got on gondola cars. They're trucks.

McIntosh: Sure.

Heimerl: And they took us up, and I would assume it's about maybe 30 miles to an area where we debarked the trucks and started settin' up an area. We weren't allowed to set up the camp area and we broke out our machine guns.

McIntosh: Were you still associated with the Marines then?

Heimerl: No, we were there.

McIntosh: You were on the east side.

Heimerl: No, we were down, we were in that Pusan area. And they were, the artillery was firing to beat hell right there. Maybe we went farther than thirty miles.

McIntosh: Probably a little. I don't think you went directly to [Inaudible].

Heimerl: Maybe not. Well, anyhow, we were there and you know my operations sergeant we just had a reunion and he sent me this. He kind of kept a diary of what he did, our day to day operations were. And so we were in this Pusan area then we went up to Andong, which is 150 miles maybe from--so I might be wrong on that.

McIntosh: I think you were farther north.

Heimerl: Yeah, maybe I was farther north because I might of got the two mixed up. Maybe it was around Andong we were shootin'.

McIntosh: This is what I would guess but I don't know.

Heimerl: Yeah. Of course it's been 50, 47 years. Well, anyhow we got up to Andong and we were to build a - now we found out we're back to construction engineers again and we were to build, not a rail road bridge, a road bridge and that crossed one of the rivers, I don't remember what the name of it was.

McIntosh: Wood?

Heimerl: And--

McIntosh: Wooden bridge?

Heimerl: Yeah. I don't even know what the name of it was.

McIntosh: That's all right.

Heimerl: So we started that project and got some of the footings and embutments in and that's where I was crossing the bridge one day, with a bunch of other guys and it was in February, and I was bent over and something hit me in the helmet or whatever and knocked me off the bridge and there was a bunch of guys on the ice down there walkin' across. I thought, "Well, I'll just land on the ice and go across with 'em," but I didn't. Me and two of the guys went through the ice and got sucked down this river about I'd say 200 and somethin' yards and I finally came out where the water was open, it was like the shallow part, and so I started payin' attention after that happened, real close, [laughs] to what was going on.

McIntosh: What was it?

Heimerl: Yeah. I don't know whether or not it was a piece of shrapnel or what.

McIntosh: A bullet.

Heimerl: A bullet but I don't have any idea.

McIntosh: Get hit in the shoe

Heimerl: It hit my helmet.

McIntosh: Any other place else?

Heimerl: Yeah,

McIntosh: Did it go through?

Heimerl: And it knocked me off of the bridge. I was on the right hand side of the bridge and when I--

McIntosh: What kind of construction--was it a wooden bridge?

Heimerl: It was a wooden bridge, yeah. It had been destroyed

McIntosh: Where'd they get the wood?

Heimerl: They were shipping it in.

McIntosh: Oh they were.

Heimerl: They were shipping big timbers. Big timbers in. Big timbers, 12x12's, you know, 4x8's--

McIntosh: Did it take long to build up?

Heimerl: No. Well we started it and then they turned that over to--

McIntosh: Another group?

Heimerl: Another group, 430th Engineers took over and we headed up north farther. There's one thing I want to say here that I couldn't figure out. There were so many prisoners, of North Koreans, when we first got into Korea and we set up our first night in a kind of a riverbed area where there's a lot of stones and there'd been so much firing going on and so many holes in the road, it's raining, you know. Well, it wasn't raining. There were just so many holes they had these prisoners go around and pick up two rocks in this riverbed and put 'em in a sack and carry 'em and dump 'em in the holes in the road where these shell holes were or whatever they were. This line was six miles long, of prisoners.

McIntosh: How did they get there?

Heimerl: They walked six miles down to this; pick up two rocks, six miles back to the road and dump it and then six miles back to the road or down the river and pick up two more rocks and walk back to the road again. So that's twelve miles of prisoners that they were. It's incredible! I never--

McIntosh: Something must of blown.

Heimerl: Yeah. [laughs] It was absolutely amazing. So anyhow, we left Andong then and headed up towards, let's see.

McIntosh: Well, you went north.

Heimerl: We went north to Pohang (??) maybe.

McIntosh: Could be.

Heimerl: Some of the towns we went through were Mi Dong (??) and that was in the wintertime. That's the first time I had my feet frostbitten. I was riding truck, I was in the lead truck. I was Company A and we were the first truck and headquarters company had preceded us earlier and we were the next outfit out and our company commander, and first sergeant went in the jeep ahead of us. I was in the truck behind with 50 caliber machine guns and we got in some guerilla trouble so we had to break out the machine guns again.

McIntosh: Tell me about that.

Heimerl: Well, we're headed up north on this highway or this real small road and we drew some fire out of the mountains.

McIntosh: A hundred yards

Heimerl: Oh, I'd say, yeah, 200, 250. They couldn't hit anything because they didn't have--

McIntosh: Mortar fire.

Heimerl: No, no there was rifle fire.

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: They couldn't hit anything because they, you know, their guns weren't long enough. So we broke out the machine guns and set 'em up and delayed our thing for about four hours. It took us four hours to make sure that we'd cleared the area. I don't that we hit anybody up there but at least they left. We continued on and ended up in the Wonju (??) area and that's when we built a road from a little town of South Wonju (??) to Wonju (??). We built this Chilli Chong bridge there and we made a big supply base in Wonju (??) and then we left there and went north to, up north of 38th parallel someplace, just me, myself. By this time I was a sergeant and our operations sergeant and a couple of draftsmen and my demolition squad went up north to look these bridges over to see what we needed to do to start repairin' these bridges again.

McIntosh: Before you get further, you refer to your demolition squad?

Heimerl: Yeah, well, by this time I'm a squad leader because our demolition guy had rotated home.

McIntosh: So how big is your crew?

Heimerl: Just the six of us.

McIntosh: Six of you.

Heimerl: Yeah and that included the air compressor operator and –

McIntosh: He ran the drills.

Heimerl: He ran the drills and I had two guys that were drillers and I was a –

McIntosh: The truck assigned you.

Heimerl: Yeah, 6x8, 2x8 or 6x, yeah, 6x8 It had an air compressor on it.

McIntosh: Is that all your equipment?

Heimerl: All the gear on there yeah. Well, I had my explosives in a little trailer behind it.

McIntosh: You kept that separate.

Heimerl: Yeah.

McIntosh: Nothing else except explosives in it.

Heimerl: Nothing except explosive, nitro and the fuses were in another little trailer behind the jeep.

McIntosh: The jeep.

Heimerl: Yeah, and well, the jeep that the operations sergeant and I took.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Okay so we had a, it was like a foot locker, and that's what I kept all my equipment in, including my fuses I kept that separate from the dynamite. I was smart enough to do that.

McIntosh: Did you lock that?

Heimerl: No, everybody--

McIntosh: You weren't concerned about other people?

Heimerl: Pilfering that? No, because it was with me all the time. If I went into a pup tent, that was my sleepin' buddy there.

McIntosh: So, you never got very far away from that. So you really didn't have a reason to.

Heimerl: No, no.

McIntosh: That small a company.

Heimerl: No, no, never had a facility for locks on it at all.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Yeah, yeah. That's another story.

McIntosh: Yes.

Heimerl: So anyway we get up there and we're lookin' these bridges over and I said to the operations sergeant, I said "Look at all these guys going south. What the heck's goin' on here?" There was convoy after convoy of GI's hangin' on trucks and they were goin' south and he says "I don't know." And we had this little lieutenant Larson with us. He was a heck of a nice fella, and he was from Kansas, I think. And he was there by the jeep, had a radio in the jeep and never heard a word out of the radio, and so we set up a little area there so we could check out, I think there were six or seven bridges we had to look at. And--

McIntosh: You were restoring bridges at this time?

Heimerl: Yeah, right. This time it, and, the reason they had me along is because I was the guy that would if there was any metal there to be cut, I would cut the metal. It took a lot less time to blow it up then to use a acetyline torch. If we needed to cement an embutment and needed to be leveled off I'd drill holes in it and blow it off so they could start putting new concrete up, you know. So, about 4:00 in the morning or 3 the sky was lighting up like crazy. I had to get up to go to the "head," you know, so I said somethin' to the guys back in the tent. I said, "I think that's artillery fire" No, no, no. So that was about 2:00. About 4:00, here comes our first sergeant who comes in. They all knew where we were and he said, "You guys, we've got to get the hell out of here! Them Chinese got you surrounded." And I said, "Nah." He said, "Yes, they have. I just barely got through. I don't know if we can get out of here or not."

McIntosh: This is [Inaudible] with you?

Heimerl: Well there's only like six or there's six of my squad and Lieutenant Larson and the operations sergeant so there's eight of us and now there's nine of us. With the first sergeant there. So we get everything all together

and get out on the road and start south and we were north of Seoul, Korea someplace.

McIntosh: I'm sure that felt pretty unbearable.

Heimerl: Yeah, and the colonel came by and I have absolutely no idea who this guy was, but he was a colonel and he said, "What are you guys doing here?"

McIntosh: Was he alone?

Heimerl: Well, he was with his officers. So he went over and talked to our lieutenant and said, "What in the world are you guys doin' here?" He said, "Don't you know them Chinese have made a big offense again and we're 'booging'? Get out of here!" And, well, he told him we're a demolition team and he said. "Oh, demolition team." He said, "I need those guys to go to Seoul and blow up some supply depots because it looks like they're not going to stop." So right away Lieutenant Larson assigned myself and my demolition squad, except for the truck driver, the guy that ran the air compressor, and we all headed to Seoul with my little jeep and demolition equipment and we blew up tanks and bulldozers and--

McIntosh: Jeez.

Heimerl: And anything that was on the disabled line, you know.

McIntosh: Oh, that needed repair. I see.

Richard That needed repair that they couldn't move.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: So that's how I know these little quarter pounder or half pound TNT blocks, what they do. You just light one and throw it down the barrel it goes poof and it ruins the barrel.

McIntosh: That's all you did to the tanks. The big guns.

Richard Yeah, with the big gun and then we'd, some of the bulldozers we set 40 pound shape charges on. they look like an ice cream cone only they weigh forty pounds and they sit on a three legged stool and they look like an ice cream cone upside down and all the forces go down and we set them on the motor end and blew them up and well then there were ammunition dumps with--

McIntosh: What did you do with those?

Heimerl: Well, I booby trapped some of 'em. And--

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Well, I'd use some anti personnel mines in 'em, underneath 'em pressure release.

McIntosh: You had something in a belt?

Heimerl: Well, in the dump underneath a move a bomb, then set it down and take the little pin out. As soon as they moved it, it would go off.

McIntosh: Sounds good.

Heimerl: The other thing we would do was, you know, like a tripwire. Get a tripwire and just go no place so they think well, you know there were mines there but they didn't. Anyhow, eventually it all blew up. Whatever I did there, I can't remember for sure. I use a lot of pressure release. There's little caps that you can use that are pressure release caps instead of a time fuse or an electric fuse. You can screw that into a pump empty block, whatever, I can't remember what they are, maybe 2 pounds, you can screw that in there and put that down, put some weight on top of it, reach in there and pull that little carter key out. As soon as he picks that up, that goes off and I had that wired so it would set off a series of charges off. I did that in three or four different places. So if they were going to take any ammunition they were going to take it.

McIntosh: They set it off.

Heimerl: Yeah, they were going set it off so and then I, we got out of there and there's some kind of river that goes through Seoul, Korea just outside of Seoul.

McIntosh: Hmm, I don't remember

Heimerl: I blew the last bridge up out of Seoul. Civilians and army guys coming across it I just we got all.

McIntosh: Was that on a timer?

Heimerl: No, just a—**[End of Tape 1, Side A]** It would set a series of charges off and I did that three or four different places. If they were going to take any ammunition they were going to take--

McIntosh: Set it off.

Heimerl: Yeah, they were going to set it off. We got out of there and there's some kind of a river that goes through Seoul, Korea, just outside of Seoul.

McIntosh: I've never been there.

Heimerl: And I blew the last bridge up going out of Seoul. Civilians and army guys coming across it just--we just we got all the--

McIntosh: Was that on a timer?

Heimerl: No, I just, I set it off. That was the first time I thought I blew myself up because I didn't have enough extension cord to get away from it

McIntosh: It's pointless.

Heimerl: I laid flat on the ground, and set her off and it rolled me about fifty yards. Me and this Colonel, who, I still don't know his name, was still with me. He was tellen' me, you know, what he wanted done.

McIntosh: Sure. He monitored your activity.

Heimerl: He was the one who ordered me to blow the bridge up and there were thousands of people tryin' to get across.

McIntosh: Oh, you blew it before everybody--

Heimerl: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. It was civilians.

McIntosh: The guys on the other side, though?

Heimerl: Well, soldiers, I think, hopefully the soldiers were all across.

McIntosh: These were all just civilians.

Heimerl: Civilians, yeah.

McIntosh: They were fleeing from the North Koreans and the Chinese.

Heimerl: Yeah, they were just fleeing the war area is what they were trying to do, I'm sure. I look back at that and I'm not--they used to send us up on an outpost like there were so many, so many, so many refugees and they would tell you to watch for infiltrators. Well if there are 20,000 people an hour walkin' through your place.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: There's no way you can

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Yeah. Just crawl up on the hillside and let 'em go, ya know. Because there was no way and that's the way it was when they'd come across it, they stopped 'em on the other side and then I let 'em go. So anyhow, he said, "Well, thank you, you can go back and join your company," and I had no idea where they were.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: I didn't know where the heck anybody was, so we headed south and got back to Wonju (??) and they were in the same place as they'd always been. They stopped just south of the--

McIntosh: Actually, if you had gone further south then--

Heimerl: Yeah. On the way back we took out a couple of road bridges, but nothing of any consequence.

McIntosh: When did you start the major bridge building project? Was it after that?

Heimerl: Ah, yes.

McIntosh: [Inaudible] any bridges?

Heimerl: No, that was before. Yeah that was before. That one, the major bridge project, see that couple of pieces of paper I gave you there. Yeah. That major bridge project was started in April the 6th of 1951 it was started and we were done, absolutely done, with that bridge on April 17th. When you read this you won't believe what.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: [Inaudible] twenty-four hours a day and our platoon was, when I got through doin' the demolition work around there me and my platoons, or my leader when we got through doin' that then they put me on a tower. A Company, first platoon, had one tower to build and it was 117 feet high, I think.

McIntosh: You spent all this time destroying things and now you [Inaudible].

Heimerl: Now we're puttin' it back together again because we're on a big offensive.

McIntosh: Right, I understand.

Heimerl: It was the one day there they made forty-six miles. The front lines advanced forty-six miles.

McIntosh: Was this a railroad bridge?

Heimerl: It was a railroad bridge and the road was the main road coming from Pusan to Wonju (??) and then from Wonju (??) to Seoul and then we widened that road out. We got two Presidential Unit Citations.

McIntosh: I've been on that road.

Heimerl: Have ya? Two Presidential Unit Citations.

McIntosh: Good.

Heimerl: One for the bridge and one for the

McIntosh: One for the road.

Heimerl: One for the road so,

McIntosh: That is a pretty project.

Heimerl: Yeah, we--

McIntosh: Aren't you in unfamiliar territory here? Did you have experience in building with big steel here?

Heimerl: No, I never ever and I was the lead guy on the—

McIntosh: I can see that you know how to build a bridge.

Heimerl: I don't know. Our platoon Sergeant was not, he was a kid from college, and he didn't know nothin' about buildin' a bridge either. Just the old American go get 'em.

McIntosh: Did you look at plans, you looked at the plans and said--

Heimerl: Oh yeah. The officers had the plans and they'd, and they had these things numbered like one, two, three, four, that was the--

McIntosh: A big erector set.

Heimerl: Yeah, just a big erector set. And--

McIntosh: You welded these or--

Heimerl: No, no we bolted them together.

McIntosh: You bolted 'em.

Heimerl: And spud wrench, I had absolutely no idea what a spud wrench was. A spud wrench is a--

McIntosh: You tell me.

Heimerl: A spud wrench is a, it's got a--these bolts we used had three quarter nuts on 'em so the three quarter nut on one end and the other end it was like a screw driver so you could stick it in the hole and line the thing up. You put your bolt in and then you use the other end of the spud wrench to tighten the nut up with. I mean I had no idea what a spud wrench was and then when we got this thing all built, which was the easy part, we had to launch this 117 foot span. Look at the pictures there.

McIntosh: Impressive.

Heimerl: We had two D-9 bulldozers holding it back because it was on like a 6% grade or--

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: And we didn't know and they had some special rollers built in Japan and they had to take the rollers from the back as it rolled off and put them in the front. So we rolled it out over the top of that, the towers and then we jacked it down, and as we jacked it down we had, I think it was [sighs] 8 x 8 timbers up there and some 4 x 8 timbers and every time you take the weight your timbers would squeeze down four inches.

McIntosh: Jesus. You said this time it's gonna break.

Heimerl: This time everybody's going to get killed 'cause the whole damn thing is going to fall on us.

McIntosh: On everybody.

Heimerl: On everybody. So we finally got her jacked down into place and got her set and they ran the first train across it. It held up and it made seven or eight trips across it and after that it was seventeen or eighteen trains every twelve hours goin' north with supplies.

McIntosh: I'm surprised those timbers held up.

Heimerl: Oh.

McIntosh: I'm sure you decided they weren't.

Heimerl: No, I knew they were. I was--I don't know if I could survive a 125 foot fall or not but I figured I was going to get killed falling down. I figured everybody's goin' to die just falling off the bridge there. We weren't going to get shot by the North Koreans.

McIntosh: That's right. You would die an ignominious death rather than a heroic.

Heimerl: Scream all the way to the ground.

McIntosh: Right.

Heimerl: We had guys, we had the 32nd light brigade came in and put lights up. We worked twenty-four hours a day.

McIntosh: This is building in how many days, 30?

Heimerl: Yeah, less then thirty days.

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: Was the 6th to the 17th or something.

McIntosh: No wonder you got the award.

Heimerl: Yeah. We got two of them awards, I think. Well, you know by this time I'm a corporal, I suppose, you know it's, and then I made sergeant as soon as they sent the lead sergeant home and then they changed my mos I was a 3533 which is a demolition specialist. And they changed it to a 1055 which is a construction foreman so they could give me another promotion.

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: So I went down to Wonju (??) in Korea. I went back to the 32nd group headquarters and took an oral exam for officer, field grade promotion. They said, "Well, you're our choice." And I said "Well, if I can go back to the company, I'll go but I'm not going to lead no infantry guys," because I never had no training.

McIntosh: You had enough on the job training. You had no formal infantry training.

Heimerl: And they said “Oh we can’t guarantee where we’re going to send ya.” So I turned it down and the guy who took it came out a major. He went too. They did send him to the infantry. He came home as a major.

McIntosh: If you had done that you might have had a bullet through your head.

Heimerl: Yeah, right, right. Well, I was running, I always wanted to be a heavy equipment operator. I was never satisfied with being just a dull demolition guy, you know.

McIntosh: Of all things. You kept on walkin’ [Inaudible]

Heimerl: So I – kept on walkin’ yeah. So I was helping a kid one time. They called me. They suspected there were some 35 mm rockets and he was diggin’ out some dehydrated granite stone in these holes in this bank. They called down to company headquarters and they said, “Would you send one of these demolition guys up there?” So I went up and looked and I said, “Oh.” This kid was running this shovel diggin’ this dehydrated stone to widen the road out. And I said well, you know what swallows are. They are swallow nests back in there. Oh, I don’t know he said [both laugh].

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: I don’t know. So I said “Well, you teach me how to run that and I’ll take care of them things for ya.” So I was in there and there’s a cab lock on that and press your toe down and get the cab lock off. I pressed and reached over to flip the dog off the lock and somebody shot through the window where I was sitting. [laughs] Now whether it was one of our guys or--

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Was a bad guy or a good guy I don’t know, but I barreled out of there

McIntosh: I’ll bet.

Heimerl: So I never did learn how to run arcane. Well, about two more shovels full out rolls these recoilless rifle shells.

McIntosh: Now those are different, you haven’t talked about those.

Heimerl: Well, I didn’t I just [Inaudible], I backed the stuff up and blew them up in place, I just, I don’t know. I didn’t have a clue how to handle that.

McIntosh: Rockets were new to you.

Heimerl: I didn't have a clue how to handle them. But how they didn't explode when they went in there I don't know either.

McIntosh: That's what I say. They went in nose first. They should have exploded.

Heimerl: Yup but they, I don't know what happened but they didn't. And it wasn't only 1 of them there were several of them. I don't know what happened but

McIntosh: So this carried on and you went back and found your old outfit.

Heimerl: Yeah. I went back and found the old outfit.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Yeah, '51. A lot of mine work, clearing mine fields, to get the guys roads. Now I've got a different mos, I'm 1059 now, which is a construction foreman. They brought in some big, big huge rock crushers to start making crushed rock for the roads. And that was one of my projects. To set 'em up we set 'em up on the river bottoms, we couldn't keep the Koreans from cutting the belts on 'em to make shoes with.

McIntosh: Belts?

Heimerl: Well, the conveyer belts on these rock crushers.

McIntosh: They noticed that, so that--

Heimerl: They'd just cut 'em and take.

McIntosh: And make shoes?

Heimerl: Make shoes out of 'em. Take the belts off and you know, you go back in the morning. So we had to put armed guards on to make 'em stop. We had a bulldozer and--

McIntosh: Civilians had a tough time in Korea.

Heimerl: Yeah, yeah. And we put armed guards on it and we had these big eight yard pans to pick up river run and bring it over in big shovels that would pick it up, drop it through a screening effect we called a grizzly that would keep the big rocks and let the sand go through and that would roll off into the crusher and the crusher would crush 'em and we'd stockpile the rock and they'd haul the rock.

McIntosh: For road building.

Heimerl: For road building purposes. So we'd have to ran that, we run that twenty-four hours a day.

McIntosh: When you're doing road building, you'd need several trucks wouldn't you?

Heimerl: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: We had, well, we had Company A, our own company, Headquarters Company probably had half again as many trucks as we did. Company B had their own projects and they'd all come and get crushed rock from us. We would run. After we found out that we couldn't keep the Koreans from stealing the belts. I said to the company commander why don't we run it twenty-four hours a day and we'll shut down just for maintenance work. And he said, "That's a pretty good idea." And that's pretty much what we did. He thought that was a good idea so we ran that project for twenty-four hours a day, for as long as I was associated with it. Then they, I got sent to the rock army. I was detached from the 439th detachment.

McIntosh: When did that happen?

Heimerl: That was in the summer of '51.

McIntosh: The following summer?

Heimerl: Yeah, the following summer of '52 until I came home. I was assigned sometime that winter or early spring I got assigned to [Inaudible]. They took me out of my company and sent me to Headquarters Company. Headquarters Company assigned me to the rock army--

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Richard And I was training, I was the training sergeant for 25,000 ROKs [Republic of Korea Army soldiers].

McIntosh: To build roads.

Heimerl: To build roads and bridges and stuff like that. You'd go to bed at night you'd have everybody accounted for. You would wake up in the morning and half of them would be AWOL.

McIntosh: These are Army boys.

Heimerl: Yes. And they'd go get 'em and bring 'em back and they'd cut all their hair off.

McIntosh: So they could recognize them.

Heimerl: So they could recognize them again. Yeah, they would shave their heads. What a mess.

McIntosh: [laughs] Did you have an interpreter?

Heimerl: Yeah, I had two interpreters, two very good ones. Some of the languages I got so I could [Inaudible], you know.

McIntosh: You could pick that up--

Heimerl: You know we had the, we didn't have all the finesse and things we had by this time we had fuel oil in our tents, for warmth. Well, we had to buy wood from the peasants to heat these guys' places up so I was buying wood from guys that would bring it in and stack it and my job was to make sure that they if they set a thirteen foot hole, they didn't quit at eleven, or they didn't quit at nineteen and that sort of thing and make sure these kinds of officer guys that we had would--

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: understood how important it was to be exact. So I was there for a long time. Finally they sent word up that I was to come back to Headquarters Company, came back to Headquarters Company. They said, "You're on rotation." I went back to A Company and clean my duds up and--

McIntosh: Got out.

Heimerl: Got out. Went and came home to. I had a year left to serve. Come home to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Yeah, I came to Fort Leonard Wood, that's where I went.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Well, no. They called me to Headquarters Company and then I made tech sergeant then at Fort Leonard Wood [pause in tape]. Then they asked me if I wanted to go to Spain. And work out of the United States Embassy and teach the Spanish army about explosives.

McIntosh: You mean, to sign up as a regular?

Heimerl: Yeah, I had to sign the order.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Yeah, I got a year left to go and I said I didn't think I wanted to do that because my wife and I just got married. And well, then they offered me, I was on a burial detail at Fort Leonard Wood. Where we buried a lot of the returning guys from Korea and some old World War I guys and some World War II guys but, [Inaudible]. We were always on burial detail. And so we were there for I don't know, eight or ten weeks and they called me in, said that we want you to go to the Fort Sheridan Illinois as a construction foreman on redoing all the barracks up there.

McIntosh: Hmm. [Inaudible]

Heimerl: [Inaudible] So now I'm an expert. I said, "Okay. That's fine." My wife and I got off. The Army transferred us. They moved 480--

McIntosh: [Inaudible] far from home.

Heimerl: 480 pounds of our stuff to Fort Sheridan and I went in there and we got that job done. I went into the office one morning, they said, "You've got your job done, Sergeant, you're heading back to Fort Leonard Wood in the morning." That was on a Saturday morning, Friday. Monday morning got to report back to Fort Leonard Wood. She had a job by this time. [laughs] I had to go home and tell her we're going back to Fort Leonard Wood. So her dad finally came and got her and then she got a bus down to St. Louis and I picked her up in St. Louis. [Inaudible] Fort Leonard Wood got back there, they were building an air base there for Fort Leonard Wood and they needed a lot of crushed stone. So they called me in and said look we need somebody to start crushing stone around here. By the looks of things you know what to do and I said "Well, if I don't we'll find out." So we went down went down to this big rock quarry, opened it up, got the thing moving and then one of the guys from Post Headquarters, called and said, and wanted to know if I would be interested in teaching demolitions. I said, "Well, I'll do the best I can." So I started the demolition school at Fort Leonard Wood. And I taught, I don't know how many troopers went through there every week, all the basic training guys.

McIntosh: How long was the course?

Heimerl: It was like three days, just a very preliminary basic and I always ask the cadre or the guys that brought 'em in and I says "Who sleeps in class?" and they would point this guy, this guy and this guy. And I'd say "Sit 'em in this chair." and then about halfway through I'd touch a button down here, blow 'em off the chair, you know. The chair'd go "Boom!" [laughs]

McIntosh: What'd you use?

Heimerl: Oh I just use a little, it wasn't anything that any danger, Just make a lot of noise. It was a pressure release cap

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: that I could just do electronically. Just touch a button to keep 'em awake. It's unique. We were in Otman, Arizona, my wife and I went up to Otman, Arizona, and I was talkin' to this guy who was making little fancy rock designs and he said, "Boy," he said, "this gold mine is opening up. They're lookin' for demolition guys at the gold mine." He said, "You haven't got any experience in that have ya?" and I said "Oh, yes I have, I used to teach demolition in Fort Leonard Wood, he said, "Oh, you're lying." [laughs] He said, "I went through that damn school down there, for Vietnam," and I said, "Oh." He said, " You're lying to me. You're lying to me" and I said, "Do they still blow you out of chairs down there?" "Yes, they do," he said, "how'd you know that?" I said, "Well, I started that when--" he said he used to take primacord, wrap it around his neck put TNT blocks down in these holes in Vietnam and set 'em off. So it's never-ending. Everyday I run into somebody that's--

McIntosh: Those were the "rats."

Heimerl: Yeah.

McIntosh: They called them "rats."

Heimerl: Yeah.

McIntosh: [Inaudible] somethin' on your feet. That's pretty scary.

Heimerl: So anyhow, I got through that and we talked about stayin' in and 'cause I had a brother, my older half-brother, who's a twenty-some year veteran.

McIntosh: You would have had no trouble getting an OCS then.

Heimerl: No.

McIntosh: It was that easy.

Heimerl: Yeah. And I said, no we'll go home. So I went home and went to college down in Platteville and didn't finish but worked in the mines for a little while. And used my demolition stuff in the mines.

McIntosh: Was it lead.

Heimerl: Yeah, lead and zinc. And well, got over that phase of my life and went farmin' for a while and got over that phase of my life and then I went into the police department and I ended up spending thirty years as a, I'm still a deputy sheriff so going on thirty-five or thirty years now and I was the chief in Dodgeville for seventeen years.

McIntosh: Oh, really.

Heimerl: And yeah, so. And I still attend pretty near every military funeral there is in the county. Fold flags and--

McIntosh: In Dane County?

Heimerl: In Iowa County

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: We'll fold the flag and, or do something. I read the prayers.

McIntosh: Read the prayer.

Heimerl: Read the prayers or fold the flags, present the flags.

McIntosh: Have you kept in contact with any of your buddies?

Heimerl: Yes I have. We just had, my wife and I hosted our reunion last year, about three weeks ago, no two years ago.

McIntosh: Of the 439th battalion.

Heimerl: Yes, we had about 150 people show up, 120.

McIntosh: This is of the original of 1,800.

Heimerl: Yeah, about 1,800 in the battalion. But they're all – but see now this engineer battalion, this 439th engineer battalion was a reserve unit out of Kansas. My company comes from Imporia, Kansas. One company came from Wichita. They were a reserve unit and these guys were all World War II veterans, so they knew pretty much what was going on, you know. That's--

McIntosh: That helped a lot.

Heimerl: That's how people survive is you get that experience around ya.

McIntosh: I see. You can't beat that.

Heimerl: Yeah. We so now we have two years ago, three years ago we had a reunion in Albuquerque and last year we hosted it. And next year it's in Minnesota. We're goin' up to see the Governor of Minnesota. [laughs]. But we keep in contact with a lot of 'em. It's amazing that we only lost one guy.

McIntosh: It certainly is.

Heimerl: I tried, I wrote a letter to our congressmen, senator and wanted to get the name of this Karry Chon Bridge (??) changed to the [Inaudible] he was the kid that got killed there and I never heard a word from 'em.

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: So I wanted to get in touch with the Korean consulate you know, to see if they would.

McIntosh: Did you ever get a chance to shoot your carbine, or M-1?

Heimerl: Well, yes I did but I'm not sure that I was very effective. You know, I was an expert in all handguns and I got a qualified expert at--

McIntosh: Oh.

Heimerl: Fort Custer, Michigan but, I'm not --

McIntosh: After the war?

Heimerl: No, before I went to join this engineer outfit. When I took basic training I was qualified as an expert because, you know, bein' a country kid we always had and were very familiar with firearms.

McIntosh: Of course.

Heimerl: Firearms and the 50 caliber machine gun was what I really used because I was always in the point truck and the point truck had the big gun mounted on the roof while we're rolling down the road and I probably would be messier when I started if I had to really get involved with that thing. But that was a, it was, I don't know, I guess, it certainly changed my attitude because I was a young, strong kid.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: I had a chance for a scholarship to play football at the university. They were gonna draft me so I decided to enlist. I got full of beer and I enlisted.

McIntosh: Is that right?

Heimerl: This is exactly what happened.

McIntosh: So you think you made a bad choice?

Heimerl: No. It certainly changed my life.

McIntosh: Pretty good life growin' up.

Heimerl: Yes. Yes, I certainly did.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Well, no it was about time. I was an older guy. I was eighteen my whole senior year in high school.

McIntosh: I see. I didn't turn eighteen until after high school.

Heimerl: Yeah, yeah. See I was, September 16th, I was eighteen. I was a senior, school started Labor Day.

McIntosh: You were about a year older than your classmates.

Heimerl: Yeah. And I, you know, it was something I needed at that time in my life. I needed the regimentation and the experience the military had to offer.

McIntosh: Let me ask you another question. You have a son says, "I'm not sure what I want to do." Graduated from high school. "Somebody said I should join the [Inaudible]."

Heimerl: What would I tell him? I'd tell him yeah, that'd be a wonderful thing only make it the Air Force or the Navy. The Air Force preferably.

McIntosh: To pursue it as a career then?

Heimerl: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think--I really think--

McIntosh: I do too because you learn a new skill.

Heimerl: Yeah, and I think, I really think, you know, I don't know how old you are but I'll be sixty-nine this next month.

McIntosh: I'll be seventy-six next month.

Heimerl: And when I was a kid in grade school and World War II was on if we had any smart-alecky kids runnin' around the country and they got in trouble in school they weren't there in two weeks. They were gone in the Army and when they came home they were as meek and mild as anybody ever, I mean there was no more fighting and carrying on and--

McIntosh: That's good.

Heimerl: And I think today's with our "goody" society, I think we missed the boat here someplace. These military schools are--

McIntosh: Oh, I think south of Tennessee.

Heimerl: Yeah.

McIntosh: But I think above all the wrong code. It would be good if every child, a boy or a girl just required to put two years in.

Heimerl: Oh yeah, absolutely.

McIntosh: [Inaudible]

Heimerl: Anyplace where they're gonna get some regimentation

McIntosh: Right. Somebody else is going to control them.

Heimerl: Yeah. I'll leave this here with you too. You have to read this over. Now this is written by our operations sergeant. And he came home on September the 1st and then and--

[End of Interview]