

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with

VALDOR W. JOHN

Infantry, Prisoner of War, Army, Korean War
Army, Vietnam War

2004

OH
1002

OH
1002

John, Valdor W., (1931-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 62 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Valdor W. John, an Oneida Indian native to Oneida, Wisconsin, discusses his career service in the Army, including his capture after the fall of Taejon during the Korean War and his time as a prisoner of war. John touches on getting his parents' permission to enlist, basic training at Fort Knox (Kentucky), and occupation duty in Japan. He recalls being hustled in to get shots one day, hearing from the barber that they were going to Korea, and being told that the opposition was weak and under-equipped. He details encountering the North Koreans, being severely outnumbered, and falling back. John states, "That was our life for the next three or four weeks: just dig in, retreat, and run and try to survive." He details being told by Major General William F. Dean to hold Taejon (South Korea) at all costs, having little support, witnessing a captured tank attack an aid station, taking out a cluster of tanks with bazookas, and seeing the 24th Infantry Division dwindle in numbers. John describes desperate efforts to break out of the city with every man for himself, being wounded in the leg and hip, and seeing the slaughter of troops. After falling into a rice paddy, he talks about lying still until dark and hiding in the weeds from North Korean troops who were killing all wounded Americans. He speaks of finding another wounded soldier, making their way into the hills, and running across General Dean and his staff but not being able to keep up with them. From the hill, he portrays watching the North Koreans shoot and bayonet all the American wounded and throw them in a mass grave. John talks about making his way into the Korean countryside, being discovered by South Korean sympathizers, getting hit in the legs with shrapnel from a grenade launcher, and being captured and brought back to Taejon. Put in a Taejon jail, he discusses daily sessions of interrogation, death threats, and communist propaganda. John speaks of being marched to Seoul (South Korea), getting spotted on the road by Navy planes, having the guards become scared and surrender to the prisoners, and other prisoners decided there was too much danger from the rear guard to make a break for freedom. He reports marching day and night for months and states if a prisoner couldn't keep up he was killed. John details being packed into a train with many other POWs, stopping in a tunnel, and being taken to a field with a small group of prisoners. He portrays the group being fired upon, getting shot and bayoneted but successfully playing dead, listening to other groups of prisoners get executed, and crawling into the woods with another survivor. After passing out for a time, he relates hearing spoken English and being found by General Allen's taskforce. John reports that only twenty-two survivors were found. He describes being evacuated to Brook Army Medical Center (Texas) via Japan. He states he had broken both legs, his left arm, and some ribs, suffered other wounds, gone from 227 pounds to ninety-one pounds, and pulled through dysentery, a coma, and double pneumonia. John portrays being deposited at a train station in Texas and states the American public was not really aware of the war in Korea. He details the celebrations in honor of his homecoming in Milwaukee (Wisconsin) and explains he was made an honorary Chief Warrior of the Consolidated Tribes of North American Indians. He reflects on public opinion about the Korean War and the capabilities

of the South Korean army. After his recovery, he discusses being assigned to a Military Police unit and then to various missile units in the Army Reserve. John talks about training with a tank unit at Fort Bliss (Texas), insisting that he be allowed to serve overseas, and completing two and a half tours of duty in Vietnam. He contrasts the combat tactics and equipment of the Korean and Vietnam Wars and touches on fighting in the Tet Offensive. John highlights the helpfulness of attending group therapy sessions for post-traumatic stress disorder and states that talking about his experiences with other veterans has reduced his problems with nightmares.

Biographical Sketch:

John (b.1931) served twenty-six years in the Army, including service in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He was taken prisoner of war by the North Koreans in Taejon (South Korea) and survived the Korean Death March. He also served in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. After his service, he worked as a hospital administrator for the Department of Veterans Affairs. John married, raised four children, and settled in his hometown of Oneida (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

Cite as: Valdor John, Interview, conducted May 6, 2004 at Oneida, Wisconsin by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Korean War Stories, for Wisconsin Public Television.

Context Note:

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin Korean War Stories." Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCKOR004 and WCKOR005.

Related Materials Note:

Photographs of this narrator's military service can be found in Wisconsin Public Television. Wisconsin Korean War Stories records (VWM Mss 1389).

OH 1002 – Valdor W. John, Oneida, POW – escaped mass execution
Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, May 6, 2004.
Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.
Transcription edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010.
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Mik: So, let's just start right at the beginning, how you first got into the military, and where you were when that happened, and who you were.

Valdor: I joined the military from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and went to Fort Knox, Kentucky for basic training. And finished my training and wanted to go overseas and I was too young so I had to come home and get my parents' permission to go and they, they signed the paper and I went to--went back and got orders and I was going to Japan. And the occupation duty there. And it was real nice, good duty, I liked it. I spent time going up and down different parts, places I loved visiting, you know, seeing the sights. And I just enjoyed the occupation duty over there, and the service.

Mik: And when was that?

Valdor: That was in 1949. I joined in 1948 in basic training.

[Camera Man Talks] [Cut]

Mik: So you were happily enjoying your duty in Japan.

Valdor: Yep. It was, everything was going smooth. And I came in one day, on the 25th of June, 1950, and, I was out somewhere in my Jeep, anyway, they stopped me at the gate and told me to go straight to this one building in the camp. I got over there and there was a bunch of people lined up and I had to get in line and we were getting shots. So, they didn't tell us what the shots were about, it was, they said we were getting shots, and they were hustling us through there, and then we were, from there we went back to another assembly area and they said, "Just pack up your belongings in the foot locker and lock 'em up." They were going to put them in the supply room. And we were just going to take our field gear and tacks, combat packs they call 'em. And that was it, and our weapons. So after all this was done we processed and, and they just--I think it was the barber, Japanese barber I had, went in there and she said, "Oh you're going to Korea." [laughs] So, that's how I found out I was going to Korea. We got on the plane and we went--landed at this, I think it was Kimpo, I'm not really sure, K-14 or something like that, an airbase there and then--we were told, you know, that there wasn't gonna be many fighting forces, the fighting force wasn't that strong, and they were farmers, they weren't armed with nothing but pitchforks, and clubs and whatever. They didn't think they were going to be any opposition.

So, we went marching up into the hills and we were digging in and I think it was the next day or something I think that we ran across, we come into some contact with North Koreans. There was quite a few of them. They saw us and, and they pulled out and moved out and went back and I thought they were gonna go back and back across the 38 parallel. We dug in anyway and the next thing we know we were--we were surrounded by them. Thousands and thousands of them. And they came down and they started attacking us and we didn't have nothing much to hold them back

with them, as far as big guns or anything like that, so we just had to retreat. And that was our life for the next three or four weeks, just dig in, retreat and run and try to survive. They--we were outnumbered and outgunned and little by little our division was coming over and we were getting heavy equipment and heavy guns, some tanks and stuff come in later on. But that didn't seem to do much good against 'em because they were, there were just too many of them. They came at us, look like ants, coming over a hill, you know, just, come down, you couldn't, you couldn't stop them and the ones that had weapons, or didn't have weapons were coming anyway, they'd take over from the ones that got shot. They'd pick up their weapons. They--was just a slaughter from the beginning time that we got there.

And then, oh, sometime in July, around the first or some part of July they told us that we were gonna go back into this--we were gonna go back in, north to this town called Taejon. And we didn't understand that, why we would be going north, Koreans were north and were occupying the area, North Koreans were. But we walked into this--into this town. And the day we walked in there, we didn't know it, but we were already--the division had already been surrounded. And 24th Infantry Division was there already, gathering all the regiments they had left. And we got there, and a day or so later we got word back from the General Dean, the commanding general, saying that we were gonna be there at Taejon, and we were gonna hold it at all costs. There would be no retreating, this is it. We were gonna fight to the last man. So, that was around, I guess, around the, fourteenth--fifteenth, something like that, in that time, July. And, there wasn't too much left of the division, that I could see, was when we were retreating we saw most of our big equipment being put on trains and hauling, moving south. They were taking it, I think Pusan was being the area that they were building up. I think that's where they were taking our heavy equipment to, head back there. So we didn't have too much left in Taejon as far as support goes, and, we fought on in there for days, and each day we'd lose more, more people, more equipment, more--and they, they kept getting closer and closer, surrounding us, and, and one day I thought we were really, we were getting support, cause early in the morning I woke up and here was a big tank, coming down the street in that town of Taejon, down one of the main streets behind our headquarters, and I saw these big English numbers on there, I think 51 or something like that. And I thought was one of our tanks. Monstrous tank. So I just, I just looked at it and the tank went by me and went around the corner, and where our aid station was there, wounded, and got there and started shooting, at all the wounded. And--I don't know how they done it, but they captured the tank, and ran out of gas I believe, but they captured that tank. And I was eating or doing something and some major come up and wanted to know if I ever fired a bazooka, and I said, "Yeah, I knew, fired a bazooka in basic." And he said, "Come with me." So, I went with him and they had this new, 3.5, I believe it was, bazooka. And they showed us how it operated, and they said that some tanks were at the north end of Taejon, at that air base out there, I forget the name of the air base. But there was tanks out there, that the Air Force spotted, and they were coming our way. They didn't know how many, ten--fifteen of them, they didn't, they weren't quite sure. So, we were sent out, I think, there was three of us, three teams, were sent out, we were

gonna protect this--road from the airport into Taejon. And, these tanks come down, and the road was high enough off the rice paddies, where only a tank could go one way, they couldn't turn around and so, when we got out there we'd fired at the first and last tank and the center tanks too, and started destroying the other ones. And they couldn't turn around, one tried, they'd fall over, in rice paddy, and so-- I remember we got, I think it was five or six prisoners, come out of there, they were burnt up pretty bad, so we, we escorted them back in there, two or three of us, and we brought them back into Taejon and turned them over to the South Koreans. And we stopped the tank, but--that tank from coming into Taejon. Blocked that whole road off, and I don't know how many we destroyed, quite a few of them, but they couldn't do any damage, couldn't go either way after we fired on them. So, that stopped them for a few days.

And then I think it was nineteenth or twentieth, the--there was nothing left of the city. Everything was, just most flattened out. And there wasn't very many of us left, so, the, General Dean said, we were gonna try to break out. Every man was gonna be for himself, to get out the best he could. So they tried, it was about, I think about one o'clock something like that, in the afternoon, two o'clock in the afternoon, wasn't too late, and they started breaking out of the city, and no matter which way we went, we were surrounded. And they were just machine-gunning everybody. Try to get under a truck or try to get under web or vehicle, you got shot out from under it and I don't know how many vehicles that I got on them and knocked off and--driver shot, or we fell off the road or something. I got run over by one of our own Jeeps [chuckle], over my leg and broke my leg. Not completely, but one of the bones in my leg. And, I got hit in the hip by small arm fire. And I kept doing that and I didn't get very far up that road, trying, the road out of Taejon, and, the last one was on a big truck, two and a half ton truck, they had about 60 of 'em on there and they reached out and grabbed my hands and went by and I pulled up on it and the same thing happened there, it was shooting. And they got the driver again, I guess, and we smashed into a building and, they were just slaughtered, all those guys on that truck were just slaughtered. I managed to fall into a rice paddy, and I saw them then, they were just picking 'em off, picking our troops off, just left and right, so I just stayed in that rice paddy along the edge there. There was big mounds there along the side of the rice paddy, and then you'd have the water in there and stuff and I'd lay there right in the corner and, and just laid there, and they were taking pot-shots at me all afternoon, they, come in close and, I guess whoever was doing that finally got tired or convinced that I was dead so he stopped shooting. And then, I laid there, I don't know, till it got dark I guess and then I heard the, these bugles coming and I looked around there, they were putting lanterns and torches and they were coming out of the hills, coming down into the--into town. And I could see them bayoneting and shooting people that were still alive and wounded. And I started crawling along this bank and I kept going till I finally got up in the--up into a little mound and there was real high grass there and weeds and I saw them coming so I just curled up inside that one bushy area and, they went around me. All of the whole, North Korean army, was up there, just happened to go around me for some reason and, they were all talking and looking for people. I don't know, that seemed like hours and, I finally

looked around, I was clear. Nobody else was around there so I started up the hill towards the mountains and, I ran across another guy and he was wounded. So, we started up the hill anyway. I had water and he didn't have any water with him. But that's the only thing we had. We lost our weapons and everything else and we started up that hill and, and here we ran across about six, a group of six, and one of 'em was General Dean and his staff and they were up there too, going through that hills and--we couldn't keep up with them so we stayed behind. And we'd, we got up in a, in a pretty high place there anyway, and I could see back the next morning, I could see what's happening in Taejon. They were still shooting and finding wounded, live wounded people and they were, they were just shooting them and bayoneting them and whatever. And looked like they were throwing them all in a massive grave or something and just covering them up. And we started up the hills, we didn't know which way we were going, just that night we could see the flashes from the artillery and it was quite a ways away from where we were. So we just started moving in that direction. And few days later, we went into a village to get something to eat. And they fed us, and we started off away from that village and we saw these civilian, Koreans, South Korean sympathizers we called 'em, and they were just going around, and they're just shooting, they weren't doing nothing, they were just shooting, making noise. And, one of them saw us, and a little while later--we ran as fast as we could go, and we hid off into another mountain. And they came up and they followed us, and, and they had one of these grenade launchers on a--on one of 'em weapons that they had, and they shot that at us and the shrapnel hit us in the legs and my buddy in the foot. And we couldn't go any further, we couldn't run.

They captured us, and I thought they were gonna kill us right there but they didn't. They took us back, and back into Taejon again, and they put us in a--in the jail. And, that time we got there, there was two other guys in there. And, by the time we ended up there was, I think there was about six or eight of us in--or ten of us, something like that, in that little jail cell. And those little characters would come in there and threaten us everyday. Ten times a day would be threatening us to kill us and he spoke pretty good English. And he'd come in there and he'd preach to us in Communism, about Communism and all this and then, then he'd turn around and end up gonna kill us and threaten us and pull a, pull back on a weapon and stick it to our heads and, aw it was just a, I was ready to give up and say shoot me, you know, and stop this crap. And one day they took us out and said we're, we're gonna go north. And they told us we're going to Seoul first and then we started our, we started our march back there. And, as we went down the a, this road at night, we'd meet up with other people, they'd have two, three other prisoners, or four whatever it was, joined us, so by the time we got to Seoul there was, there was about sixty of us. And then, at a, 7th Infantry Division, and a 3rd Marine Regiment I guess it was, landed at a, Inchon and we started getting them guys in. So, we got in Seoul, and there was, a couple hundred, and by the time we got ready to march out of Seoul, when the Inchon people were coming in, getting too close, we had, we had around, close to 400, 370--80 something like that I guess it was we started off with. And we started to march and they'd, they'd march at night, and then, we supposed to try to sleep during the daytime and during the daytime and when they'd doing the interrogating,

and I don't know why, they just kept interrogating us, the same thing over and over and over again. And, so this went on, and, one day we got caught in the open, and there was some Navy planes there that saw us, and we just stood in the road and didn't, didn't move when they came down, and they came down low enough to recognize us, and they did flips with their planes and wings 'n' stuff, and, and they'd fly over and then they came back and they started shooting in front of us, and so they turned around and marched us backwards, back south again. And, so the guards got, got scared there at one point, and they turned their weapons over to us. And they were gonna, they were gonna leave. And we said good, let 'em go, don't hurt them, just grab their weapons and go. And there was a couple guys in there got, I don't know what, what their thinking was, but they said, no, there, the rear guard would find us and kill us all. They didn't want the guards to leave us. So, they stayed and they took their weapons back, and, and turned us around and started marching us north again. Oh, I thought we were gonna be free there for a second.

So then they, then they started marching us day and night. We marched, all the way through Pyongyang, is Pyongyang the North Korean capital? And there wasn't very many, very many left. There're a lot of sick--they'd get this, dysentery, and if they couldn't keep up they just, they'd shoot them along side, you know, along the road. And stick a bayonet in them and make sure they were dead and they wouldn't let us bury them anymore. And just, I don't know how many people we'd lose a day. They just couldn't keep up and they'd just give up and rather die than keep on going. So when we ended up in Pyongyang there was, oh, I don't know, about half that many left, about half of us that started, so we--I don't know how far out of Pyongyang it was but, we saw the Airborne drop, but it was a long ways from where we were. And they put us on these condola cars [train cars] and put us in there like side like wood, we had to lay sideways. They put us in there and put us on this train and we went a little ways up into a tunnel. And the train stopped in this tunnel. They took us out and said we were gonna eat. They wanted twenty-five people. So all we, with the first group they called, and I got twenty-five people and we were gonna go eat. And they took us along the tracks and over the, into a wooded area, they sat us down at the little ditch like. And I looked around and here all of a sudden, guards come up with machine guns and on all sides of us there and just started shooting. Firing machine guns at us and--we couldn't, couldn't get out of there, we were in this little hole and just started shooting and hit, I got hit and I hit the ground. And they kept shooting, and I still believe what happened, what saved my life today was this guy next to me got shot in the leg, and his leg was right next to mine and it blew all that, all that flesh and, and blood all over my face, and so when they come to look at me, they pounded on my back and broke a few of my ribs, and they stuck a bayonet in me, just on the, on the right side a little bit. And I didn't move, and so they just walked away and thought I was dead. And they started pounding on other ones and the ones that made noise they'd shoot, and then they left. And, then I could hear, shooting again, well I guess they went back and they got the other groups and took them in different places, in the field. And I forget how many groups that they shot, and then--I understand the train, either they set on fire or the Air Force bombed it and fire, got on the fire, whatever, I don't know. So much went

on that, in that daytime that, you know, we were being strafed by our own Air Force and, and bombed and then there was that tunnel and then executed on this side and: so, I crawl outta there, out of that, out of that group and there was another one still, still alive yet when I come out of there so both of us we crawled up the little bank there, dried up river bank and we got underneath the hanging grass and, and the real thick and we got in there and we had this warm, we kept warm in there so--

Then I passed out, and I don't know, it was the next day or next morning or whatever it was, I came to and I heard voices, English, English voices hollering up in the hills. And I listened and I kept hearing it and I looked around I didn't see nobody so I crawl out of that little ditch and crawled up on top and: I saw a guy standing up on the top, top of the hill there, above the tunnel. And I started calling, calling to him in English, and he come down and the other ones came down, followed him down the hill. And one of them was this General, Allen--was the assistant division commander for the 1st Calvary Division. And he was the one looking for us, he had a, his taskforce, I believe it was, he called it, and they came out. He heard about the tunnel. So, I figured we were there about two days anyway, three days maybe. He found us. And we got back to his aide station and there was twenty-two of us alive and one of 'em got out and never got a scratch, never got wounded. And, he's still alive and healthy today [chuckle]. That, one poor guy, he, they fed us a little bowl of chicken broth and before they could get to him, he, he ate that broth up too fast, and, and he got cramps, stomach cramps and died. And they told us, don't, don't eat, just take a spoonful or whatever it was because we couldn't, we hadn't ate and hadn't had anything to eat for such a long time, that would happen. Our stomachs were shrunk up and, shock would do--would kill us. So we did, we just ate a spoonful. And then, they evacuated us to, to Pyongyang I believe it was, and then, and then from there they put us on planes and flew us back to Japan, and we stayed in Japan, getting our wounds healed up and looked at for,--I guess about a month or so I think, I don't know, I forget, and then they --

Mik: Ok, can stop right there? **[End of Tape WCKOR004]** So I think you were just back in Japan --

Valdor: Yeah, we got back in Japan and I guess we had to, put on a little weight and whatever before we could fly and, and then they sent us back to--I went back to, San Antonio, Brook Army Medical Center, in Texas. And depending on your wounds situation you went to different hospitals, I guess. And they try to send you to the one closest to your home and I thought I was coming to Great Lakes [laugh] but I ended up in San Antonio. It was surprising to me when I got there. I was in a cast cause my, both my legs were broken and my left arm and my ribs, so I was in a cast, except my right arm and, and the bus dropped us off at the, it looked like an old train station or something there in San Antonio--we were supposed to be picked up and then taken into the hospital, three hours or whatever. And I was out there, laying out there in this hot sun on this, on this deck, and finally somebody come by and asked me if I'd been in an automobile accident or something. And I told them, "No," I said, "We're waiting here to be put into a ward, we're coming back from Korea."

And they didn't know where Korea was [laugh], you know, it was just, the war had just started they hadn't heard, it was kind of a quiet deal I think. Oh, we got up on the ward and, and then they, my records was underneath me so they found them, they took em out and, and one of the nurses said, "Oh my God," she said, "These guys were coming back from the war," he said, "He's a liberated prisoner of war," so they really started shaking and giving us some attention, you know. I wanted to know, you know, when I can go home, she said, "It's gonna be a while." I couldn't tell my parents, they were calling and trying to find out where I was at, and finally told them where I was at, I didn't expect to be coming home for awhile. And--a doctor came around, saw me, and he looked and he said "Well," he said, "I can take a chance and send you home," he said but, "I don't know about your diet." He was more concerned about my diet than about my wound or anything, he said. I said, "I think I can survive my mother's cooking I guess," [laugh] no. I went home and came back to Milwaukee and everyone, there was a huge reception out there at the airport. VFW and other organizations were out there. And, and my old school. All friends and relatives. It was quite a, it was quite a deal. TV was interviewing us and, and, this friend of my father's, he was a department store owner there in Milwaukee, he, he organized a little homecoming dance, band and so forth, and, at the, at the VFW hall there. So, that was real nice, got there and that's when I got the, they presented me with the headdress for Chief Warrior, I mean, yeah, Chief Warrior it was. So I'm an honorary Chief Warrior of the Consolidated Tribes of North American Indians. I had the other places I had to go and speak at different functions they had there in Milwaukee. It was nice. And I had to go back.

Mik: Did they know what you'd been through?

Valdor: Naw--some of them did and, and then just, well, the family, maybe the family did but lot of the public really didn't realize yet that there was a war going on over there. You know on the plane, when, on the plane there we got into Milwaukee and this guy was on the plane with me and he said, "You know, you don't look well at all, you feeling alright?" And I said, "Yeah, not really," I said, "I'm a little sore." And, he didn't say anything, he didn't know, you know, that I'd been through Korea and back. The public wasn't really aware of what was going on over there. So--

Mik: What kind of shape were you in at that point? Were your legs healed?

Valdor: I was able to walk again, I found my, the tibia bone in my leg was broken, and it healed, together, I guess.

Mik: Just a second. [Pause] [Background Noise] The tibia bone in your leg was what, was broken?

Valdor: It was broken, that's the one that got, when the Jeep ran over me, and that was broken and then it healed by itself. But, they didn't have to break it over or anything. [cough] But they put the, had a cast on it anyway but they took the cast off. And they took the, had my tape off my chest for the ribs, and my arm was

mashed, the bones were just mashed, here and where I got shot in there, and the other wounds were just clean, we call it clean wounds. They weren't, nothing, broken or anything just, they heal up pretty fast. No infections or anything.

Mik: I was wondering about, you know, just before you were rescued, after you had escaped, and you were crawling, I suppose you couldn't do anything but crawl.

Valdor: No.

Mik: Were you in a lot of pain or were you just in shock and didn't really feel--

Valdor: I guess, I imagine shock. You know we--I don't know how, the other guy's name is Lucas, I don't know how, how old he was. I was nineteen. We were full of, gung-ho then, [laughs] you know. I didn't think I'd ever get captured, I thought I'd make it through, you know, some way. We were, when we left Japan, I was pretty heavy I was 227 pounds. When we weighed in at Tokyo, or not, in Japan, the hospital, I was ninety-one. That's, I lost all that weight and I just, I just got dysentery, I guess, the day or two before I got shot. And, when you get dysentery you last about three or four days, and you die. And, I got it and when I got into Japan, I went in a coma. I got double pneumonia I guess they said. I remember waking up, and this, I think they called them gray ladies then, they were volunteers, and they were wives of the military people. She was by my bed and she was praying, and I came to. And they'd put me in a private room. And when they do that in a military hospital, you're [chuckle] you're about ready to expire, you know, they don't leave you out in the ward with the rest of 'em. But I came to in that private room and she said I'd been there for a number of days. I survived that again, so, the dysentery and that double pneumonia. I was a pretty sick puppy there for a while.

Mik: How did you feel about going back?

Valdor: Ah-- it isn't--I wasn't scared, I mean, it, you know, it didn't bother me. Once they, you know, they told me I wouldn't be going back into no combat unit again. So, long as you're, you're not in the combat unit there's not much fear of, of seeing any combat or getting in any trouble or whatever. Oh, I didn't, I didn't mind.

Mik: So what was your job then?

Valdor: I went back then and I think they put me, put me in the Military Police. I went back in the Military Police Unit. And that's where I stayed until I came back again. And then I went into Reserve, Army Reserve unit, in Columbus, Ohio. Then after that I was in different other units, missile units mainly. They had the Milwaukee--Gary, Indiana defense system set up here, where they had Hercules missiles all around the whole area, Minneapolis and Milwaukee, Chicago and Indiana. And that was, that was a big thing in those days, the 60s, air defense. And then I went into smaller missile units, Chaparrals, and that was, that was an infantry type unit. And that was about it. Just between missiles and military police and advisory duty.

Mik: Then Vietnam came along.

Valdor: Well--that's-- I was on that advisory duty when Vietnam came along and I volunteered and they said no. And then somehow or another, my records got mixed up or something I end up in Texas and I was training in Texas on, on M42 tanks and we were getting ready to go to Vietnam. And I had all these, all these young troops that I was training out there in the desert. And they called me in one day, about a month before we were getting ready to go to Vietnam, they called me into, into headquarters there at, at Fort Bliss, Texas and, and they told me that, they got a telegram from Department of the Army, I couldn't go. I couldn't go to Vietnam. So, I said, "Well I, I trained with these guys, I got 'em all, got 'em all trained, we're ready, we're ready to go," and I said, "You don't have that many people left to, you know, to take my job." So they, they called, I guess, did something and they said, "Well, they said, you have to sign a waiver and, to go ahead and go." And I said, "Well I'll sign a waiver and go ahead," it was only for a year, I figured, well, year's time. When you get that feeling then I had, I think I had close to eighteen years, something like that, not long from retirement, but, you know, you get that old soldier feeling and you, you know you gotta, these little chicks under you, you know you gotta watch and protect and you don't want nothing to happen to them that happened to you and that kind of feeling. That's the way I felt. So, I talked it over with my, with my wife and family at that time. They, they just agreed with me, they, they felt that's what I wanted, that's what I had to do. I went over, and went over twice, two and a half tours going to Vietnam. And the only battle I got into over there that was really, really a big one was the Tet Offensive in '68--'69. That was, that was a tough fight there for--overnight battle. Other than that it wasn't, it wasn't nothing like Korea [laugh] you know, it was a little more of a mine, we had to watch out for mines and booby traps and that, that thing, that nature. But as far as a line and, you know, being attacked openly and all this, it, they didn't do that in Vietnam, it was, whenever they felt like coming out they'd come out, fight, and go back in their little holes and you'd never see 'em, or catch 'em even.

Mik: So there was never a big mass of people rushing at you –

Valdor: Naw, no, you never fought, there were no company fighting company or Division fighting Division, nothing like that over there.

Mik: Yeah, I was wondering, when you were talking about Korea, what was your role at that time? Were you just carrying a rifle?

Valdor: Just a rifle, yeah, that was, well, and machine guns, automatic weapons and--

Mik: Bazooka on one occasion--

Valdor: Bazooka, yeah, I got the bazooka there one time and, they, the bazookas we took over there with us, they were too small, they'd just bounce off those tanks they

wouldn't even, they wouldn't even do any, scratch 'em, you know [laugh]. They really were just too small. And then later on, I guess it was the Sherman tank that came to Korea. That was a match for Russian tanks.

Mik: So the first ones were, what were they, Pershings that were--

Valdor: I believe, I believe so. Yeah, we had the, the old World War II tanks, M42 tanks, and not very many of them.

Mik: So did that, were you able to put that all away and just not think about it, or was it always with you?

Valdor: Oh yeah, it was always with you, I don't, I don't think it ever goes away. What helped, what helped me through this stuff was the post--traumatic stress disorder, that's in the VA Fund, they came out with, and we, they'd bring you in and you'd talk as groups, with groups, and the groups, the hospital I was in was--they finally got enough in there where we'd separate from Korean groups would be talking with Korea, and Vietnam would talk with Vietnam, and World War II, World War II and, and the, I know that during World War II, lot of the, lot of the POWs were from the Army Air Force. And so they, they were separated cause they were, they had a different experience than ground troops. And then, and then they'd bring wives in, you had to bring your wife into these meetings. And because they, the wives had, had more of story than the, than the veterans did because, the veterans didn't know what, you know, what they were actually doing. Like myself, I thought it was just natural for me to be doing these things and, like waking up at night with, you know, cold sweats and, and sometimes screaming in your, your sleep, and nightmares or whatever. And, the wives, they'd seem to know, you know, what brought this on. And they could tell when something was wrong. But they didn't know what to do about it. So, PTSD training helped, you know, helped them get together and helped the husband open up to the family and the family open up to the husband and communications going and, and, and the veterans telling their stories to other veterans and, you know, and getting it out, and getting their feelings out. And there'd be a lot of crying and carrying on, you know, at first cause it hurt. It hurt to tell, you know, openly because all that stuff was buried in you for years and especially World War II people, you know, you carried that stuff and it was, it was down there deep. It's hard to get that stuff loose. But I just give nothing but praise to the program, that's what helped me, and it still helps me today, you know. I don't mind talking about it, especially to other veterans. And recommending that they talk to their families because people suffering from PTSD from Vietnam, there's a lot of them just sitting at home, you know, doing the same thing, they're, they're just hiding it, you know, keeping it in. And they say we only as sick as the secrets that we keep so, you know, that's, that's where the thing begins with, it's got to begin with you, the veteran, to get that stuff out.

Mik: And it's easier to talk to other veterans because they, they know what world you're talking about.

Valdor: Yeah, yeah, they know what you're talking about and they, they'll get to relating, you know, and they'll open up a little bit and, and the main thing is your getting that, that hurt out of there, you know, that's, oh, when I, when I started that, oh, geez, I forget how many years ago now, but I haven't had any nightmares, or I've had lots of, you still think about it, but it don't bother you like it, you know, like it used to. Cause, soon as something like that would come up you say, well, I don't want to talk about it, or I'm not, you tell yourself that, and you wouldn't say anything. You just keep that hurt in you. Yeah, just keep it in you, buried in you and you keep on pushing it down inside you and down inside you and deeper it goes the harder it gets and that's why it's hard to get out.

Mik: Were your nightmares recognizable? I mean, were they of the events?

Valdor: Yeah, they'd all be the same--they'd be the same thing. Just not much difference in variation, it was always, always that tunnel.

Mik: When you were together with the other Korea vets, they really seem to feel like they're forgotten. Like nobody paid any attention to that war.

Valdor: Well, it, you know, to me it was, you know, it was our first no-win situation, you know. They train you and they indoctrinate you in, saying, "You're gonna win, you're the best, and, you know, you're gonna do this," and then when you don't--it's disappointing. And, degrading, come home to no victory, no nothing. And I guess they just, people, in general, want to forget about it, cause even today, you know, you hear them talk about the President of the United States saying, World War II and Vietnam, they leave Korea out automatically, they don't, they don't mention it. And I don't know why, that's, I guess that's one of the reasons Korean veterans feel that, you know, they're forgotten.

Mik: Even at the time, as you say, you came back, people either weren't aware of it or you think it was cuz' they were still so close to World War II they just didn't even want to be at war?

Valdor: I imagine that had something to do with it, you know, just to, the wars were real close together. You know, we were just, just starting to rebuild Japan, occupation, it was still, Japan was still pretty well in shambles, all over. I suppose Germany was the same way and lots of countries that they went through. Then, next thing you know here's Korea busting open.

Mik: When you were at--being pushed back, did you have South Koreans with you?

Valdor: We had South Koreans, some of the time, we'd have them and, and they'd disappear [laugh] you know, they weren't, they weren't really a disciplined army or really a trained army then. Some of them, some of them would stay, you know, long as we were there, they'd stay but you never could depend on it. I know just maybe a few

occasions I remember they, they stuck and stayed with us. But you couldn't put them by themselves and say, you know, "You handle this area" and that because, they wouldn't stay they'd [chuckle] they'd be gone. Then again, I guess they, they knew we were going to be defeated. They started pulling all our, our equipment out of, away from us and taking it, sending it south and I kind of had that feeling when I saw those trains load up with all our heavy equipment, heavy guns.

Mik: Yeah, that would be a pretty good sign.

Valdor: [Laugh] Yeah.

Mik: And they were still telling you, you were going to stay, no matter what.

Valdor: Yeah, they told us we, you know, they told us we weren't gonna leave, we were to fight to the--fight to the end, the end.

Mik: And who was it that you ran into before you were captured? General Dean?

Valdor: Yeah, General Dean.

Mik: And did he get out okay?

Valdor: No, he got captured. They caught him, I guess, a few days later. And they took him to, I think it was China, I think, I don't remember, but they, they took him some place and kept him by himself. But there was two groups of us, I understand, that was on the death march, they called, that's what it was called, the Korean Death March. There was a group ahead of us, they called them the, Tiger group or something. This, this friend of mine, he was little Filipino, he was in World War II on a Koru the death march in, Bataan Death March. I didn't know it but the Bataan Death March was twenty-seven miles long and it lasted about three or four days or something like that or five days. And our march was 400 and some miles and lasted four months.

Mik: And you had a broken leg--

Valdor: And he, and he survived that, no, he didn't survive it, but he was, participated in both those death marches.

Mik: He was in, he was with you?

Valdor: Uh huh, he was in, yeah.

Mik: I didn't realize that it was that long that you were marching.

Valdor: Yeah, we marched, yeah.

Mik: And did you get fed at all?

Valdor: We'd, we'd get fed, the main dish was, like millet [cereal or grain], puffed millet I believe it was, or something like that, and then they had a little spread of something just looked like mustard, they'd spread on top of it. I don't know if it had any meat in it or not but I mean it was just, it gave some flavor to it like it was hot, hot flavor, like chili hot. We'd get that, I don't remember ever getting any rice [laugh], not real rice. And once in a while we'd get a piece of bone or something, and have to go for, for all of us, they'd boil it up in a kettle and give everybody, you got broth and if you're lucky to get, pieces of meat, that's what you got, wasn't very much. [Pause] But--we were on the move all the time and they didn't--seem like--they didn't have time to prepare anything, any food for us anywhere, just whatever they'd come up with was that millet--ball, I called 'em. And most of the people couldn't eat that. They couldn't stomach that.

Mik: I was gonna' ask you if most of the people were from your company, but you had talked about where they'd come from, some of the first names and--

Valdor: Yeah we had pilots they'd shoot down, these bomber, bomber pilot, bomber crews and we had people from that and, and Navy. We had a cross--bit of everybody in there.

Mik: Well, you think we've tortured you enough?

Valdor: [Laughs] Yeah.

Mik: I really appreciate your sharing it with us.

[End of Interview]