

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN S. MARITA
Engineer, Army, Korean War.

2002

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Marita, John Samuel, (1929-). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 65 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 65 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

John S. Marita, a High Bridge, Wisconsin native, discusses his Korean War service as a member of Company A, 13th Engineering Combat Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. Drafted into the Army while in college, Marita talks about basic training at Fort Jackson (South Carolina) and the racism he witnessed there. He speaks of stopping in Cuba and Columbia to pick up additional troops, passing through the Panama Canal, and leaving behind some comrades in Hawaii when they didn't get back to the ship in time. Marita addresses being shipped by train to central Korea and reflects on men from his training unit who were killed. He discusses his work laying mines and constructing bridges and helicopter landing pads. Marita touches upon the dangers of military construction, including almost being fired upon by friendly troops, learning not to lay his rifle aside in the field, and some close calls with washed-out bridges. He describes the "seesaw battle" with the Chinese along the 38th parallel, rebuilding bunkers at "Pork Chop Hill," the accuracy of Chinese mortar rounds, and getting careless near the end of his time on the front lines. He comments on R&R in Japan, smoking while in Korea, the close friendships formed between soldiers, and the Chinese's use of mines. Marita tells of working with Korean Augmentation Troops to the United States Army and giving away his rosary beads during combat. He details seeing a man in his unit find marijuana growing on the side of the road. Marita touches upon being put in the inactive Reserves, his homecoming, his parents' attitude towards his service, and calling home from Tokyo. He addresses the gambling that went on in his unit and hearing about hemorrhagic fever and small pox in Korea. Marita speaks of completing his schooling on the GI Bill, his career in teaching, and his activities with the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Ozaukee County Military Historians Club. He comments on easily readapting to civilian life except for speeding while driving.

Biographical Sketch:

Marita (b.1929) served with the Army during the Korean War and participated fighting along the 38th parallel. After the war, he earned a Master's degree in mathematics education from Colorado State College, taught in Mosinee and Monona Grove (Wisconsin), and eventually settled in Thiensville (Wisconsin), where he worked for twenty-seven years at Homestead High School.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002
Transcribed by Michael Kerins, 2010
Checked and corrected by Calvin John Pike, 2011
Corrections typed in by Angelica Engel, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Interview Transcript:

Jim: I assume everything is working. Now, we're talking to—gotta get your name just right—John Marita.

John: Right.

Jim: Did I say that right?

John: That's right, yeah.

Jim: Okay. John Marita. Now hold it, hold it [laughs] [adjusts recording equipment, tape briefly cuts out]. Talking to John Marita, and the date is 20 June, 2002. Where were you born, sir?

John: I was born on a farm in High Bridge, Wisconsin, way up north in Ashland County.

Jim: I was gonna say, "Where the hell is that?" [John laughs]. Ashland County?

John: Yeah, Ashland County.

Jim: Is that east or west north?

John: It's in the central part. Right straight up north.

Jim: Near Ashland then?

John: Yeah. About twenty miles south of Ashland, on a farm there, and right where the Lake Superior lowland becomes rolling sand and then rocks. And about the twenty miles from the farm up to Ashland is all red clay. The old bed of Lake Agassiz, they told us, anyway.

Jim: [Laughs]. That's good!

John: Yeah.

Jim: And you were there. Then, on Pearl Harbor day, what were you doing?

John: Pearl Harbor day, I was a student in high school or grade school—I've forgotten exactly—but I remember that Sunday when President Roosevelt got on the radio and told us all about the treachery at Pearl Harbor. [Unintelligible, both talking]. Yeah, for a young school kid, I guess that really sparked my interest in history. I've been interested in history pretty

much—I went to college at a—well, first I went to a country grade school. I don't if you're interested in that. One room—

Jim: [unintelligible, both talking] different is always interesting.

John: One room country school, and we didn't have students in every grade, but I always told my students, "I'm a retired teacher." And I always told my students that I went through the first eight grades eight times. Because when you're sitting [Jim laughs] in a one room school, you go through—

Jim: Getting the lessons over and over!

John: Yes, you get it over and over. So I had to be successful in that. Then I went to Mellen High School. There were only twenty-seven in our graduating class, and a few of them left early to go into just the tail end of World War II. And then I went to Northland College at Ashland. And I got deferred to graduate from the college.

Jim: What were you taking? Just your L&S [Letters and Science] stuff?

John: Mathematics. I was a divisional major in science, and a minor in history and English. And I wanted to be a teacher, so my buddy came down to Milwaukee to Allis-Chalmers and got deferred, but my draft board deferred me until I graduated and I had a job teaching in Chester, Montana.

Jim: Chester, Montana? I've never heard of it.

John: Yeah, out in the wheat field. Oh, my god. It would have been a disaster, I think. But the draft board said, "No dice. You don't get deferred. You're drafted." So, in August of—I think that was in '51—in August I was drafted and went down to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and trained in the infantry.

Jim: You became a rifleman?

John: Yeah, and for sixteen weeks out in bivouac, you know. And oh! Some experiences for a greenhorn country kid from northern Wisconsin.

Jim: Yeah, but you're used to being outdoors, John!

John: Oh, yes. Well, that part I could handle real well. I was thinking more or less of racism and oh my!

Jim: Oh, yeah. I'm sure that was a shock to you.

- John: Oh, it was!
- Jim: A young boy, you couldn't even believe it.
- John: Harry Truman had integrated the armed forces, so when we were in the units at Fort Jackson, we had white and black. It didn't matter. But as soon as we were off base, oh my gosh! It was very evident.
- Jim: Back to the old days.
- John: Oh, yes. Very evident.
- Jim: I did part of my training in New Orleans, so I know all about that.
- John: Oh, you know then. Yeah, I had a good friend in basic—of course, everybody in basic is your friend. I went in with a group, mostly college graduates, and we were drafted and we had an old First Sergeant, Platoon Sergeant, in our training. A pretty heavy-set guy by the name of Jennings and he just rode the daylights out of us because we were a bunch of college kids. And he told us to sit down, you know, right in the thistles and the whatnot between the barracks in South Carolina. And, well, you know how we sat down? We just crossed our legs and eased down. And he just shouted and we stood up. And then he said, "Sit down. I wanna see the earth shake!" And boy, we just dropped down, and to make a long story short, he had tears in his eyes when he said, "Goodbye," to us. He wanted to go overseas with us. But most of us got sent to Korea.
- Jim: Tell me, do you have your outfit listed here?
- John: Yeah.
- Jim: With the 113th Engineer Combat Battalion?
- John: Yeah. The 13th, not the 113th. Did I put a one there? Should be 13th.
- Jim: No, no. 13th, right. Of the 17th Infantry Regiment?
- John: Of the 7th Infantry Division, yeah.
- Jim: Okay. Of the 7th Infantry Division, right.
- John: Well, let's see. I trained for rifleman, but when we went overseas then we went by way of Brooklyn Naval Yard, and then we stopped in Puerto Rico in San Juan. We couldn't get off the boat in San Juan, but we picked up Puerto Ricans to help in the Puerto Rican contingent in Korea.

- Jim: Oh, did you take a battalion of them along?
- John: Oh, yeah, and then we went to Colombia, Cartagena. Oh, the most beautiful harbor I've ever seen in my—not that I've seen that many, but—it was just in Colombia, and picked up replacements for the Colombian Battalion because they were part of the U.N. [United Nations]. And in there, we had cigarettes and chocolates and coins and whatnot, and we threw them down over the side of the boat, and the kids came out and they would just go down in clear water. They would just sail down like fish way down to get that. Unbelievable—
- Jim: It was fun to watch that, I bet.
- John: We couldn't get off there, either. Then we went through the [Panama] Canal, and it was Ash Wednesday when we went through the Canal. And we got into the lake—Gatun Lake—and we got pulled aside because a Norwegian freighter had gotten criss-crossed, and they had to bring a tug from each end and pull it straight. And then, one of the most beautiful sights in the world. I saw I don't know how many freighters and ships going through with all the flags of the nations flying. Unbelievable. And then, we were allowed to go, finally, and we got through. And we sailed to Hawaii and we got off in Honolulu because the captain of our troop ship, the *William F. Halsey*, if I remember right, said, "Everybody who is not on duty gets shore leave. The only requirement is be back here at five o'clock." So we could either pick a bus to take us downtown Honolulu, or to Waikiki. And my buddy and I decided we would go downtown. So we went downtown and we found a bar, and of course we were enjoying looking at the girls. And that was about all it was, but we just enjoyed it. And to make a long story short, some of our buddies—we got back on time, but some of our buddies didn't—real close buddies, who—
- Jim: In your company?
- John: Yeah, from our group that was going over that we had trained with. And they must have been enjoying things too much, because, as we pulled up the gangplank and were backing out, they came whistling down in a taxi and we could see them just a little bit down there. And we, of course, you know, bunch of dumb country kids, we yelled to stop the boat, but there was no way in Hades they were gonna do that [Jim laughs]. Well, to make a long story short, some of those guys—at least two, I believe—were dead before we got to Korea. They were flown over, and were replacements like we all would be for on line. And we kept in touch—our training unit, we made an agreement to keep in touch through our mothers. And so when we got over there a couple weeks later, we found out two of them at least—so that was kind of—

- Jim: Sad?
- John: Aw, then we got to Yokohama, Japan, and then got onto a Japanese trawler and went across to Pusan [renamed to Busan] in Korea.
- Jim: Tell me about your reactions to entering Pusan. You know, you smelled it before you saw it? That's what I noticed.
- John: Oh, definitely yes, yes. Well, on our Japanese trawler we just had rice mats to sleep side by side because it took that long to go. And the toilet was just a hole in the room. And then we got to Pusan, and we got sent by train into Chuncheon, which is pretty much in the central part of the Peninsula and close to the thirtieth parallel. Things were settling kind of in as we got there. And then we got to the replacement depot, and I always told my students this. I was put in the engineers, only because I was a mathematics major. All of my buddies that I had trained with were in the infantry and a couple more were killed quickly on line because of shelling and whatnot, but I was the only one put in the engineers. That was Company A of the 13th. We were in support of the 17th Infantry Regiment.
- Jim: What was your MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] then? What did they change it to?
- John: Bridge construction, I believe.
- Jim: Bridge construction?
- John: Yeah, bridge construction, because we mostly dealt with mines, looking for mines. The infantry would like to have us come out frequently and look for mines, or we would set mines or build bridges and roads. That was our main function. The other part we did a lot of was cutting out a little airfield, probably not too much bigger than a circle about like this room here, maybe a little larger, for a helicopter to land and take out the wounded. We did a lot of that.
- Jim: Behind your lines by about five miles or so?
- John: Yeah. Or closer. We would be making a landing pad which would be the first line to get the wounded back.
- Jim: So they would carry him to that point on stretchers then?
- John: Right, we'd have stretchers.
- Jim: What'd you level that with? What equipment did you have? Bulldozer?

- John: Bulldozer. Mm-hm. We had a bulldozer, yeah.
- Jim: Didn't take long then?
- John: No, no. But they didn't have bull—like now you see a bulldozer on road construction. They got a good cab and everything. Well, they just had makeshift cabs that the guys welded together out there. And a couple times—once in particular, I remember, and I can't remember exactly the part of the line we were on—but one of our guys who was a cowboy for sure [Jim laughs], he thought he'd take that and, you know, Korea is so eroded anyway.
- Jim: [unintelligible] tipped over.
- John: And, oh! It just went right down the hill, rolled it over, but he had the cab, so he was alright. But then, of course, the orders from captain, "Get that thing back!" So, the next night we were out and we went out in front of the infantry and I was with my squad. I was a squad leader. And we were to kind of protect, while they pulled, the bulldozer back with another dozer. And of course, the Chinese start putting flares in, and I just remember yelling at my men to freeze, and we just froze with our rifles or whatever in any position and then got down. And we were, oh, I suppose maybe a couple of good city blocks ahead of our infantry line. And they were already trained for the final line of fire with the machine guns. And they were just ready to fire at us because you know how nervous guys get. And luckily, one of the lieutenants back told them, "Cut it out because they're our guys." And we were coming back then, otherwise we'd've been all eliminated right there. But it was eerie with the flares coming down, and then, and you know the road.
- Jim: Oh boy. A scary moment.
- John: Oh yes, oh yes. When I first got to Korea, my first duty was to help lay mines. We were laying antitank mines, and I don't even know if the enemy ever had any tanks in Korea.
- Jim: Like claymore mines?
- John: Pardon?
- Jim: Claymore mines?
- John: The big—
- Jim: The antitank?

John: Antitank, yeah we—

Jim: Claymore, is that the name of them?

John: I don't know. I don't know. It could be. But they—we had them, and the infantry wanted us to—Korea, the river valleys are very eroded. And then there's only a trickle of water and then it's very flat. But when the rains come, then the whole thing washes. But the infantry was afraid there would be tanks coming. So that was our first job. It was good application of geometry because we had those mines laid in three rows, so no matter how they circled through, one of the tracks would get blown up. Well, we were laying mines, and just being fresh from the States, we stacked our rifles like we did on, you know, training, in bivouac.

Jim: Bivouac?

John: Oh, god [sighs].

Jim: Jesus.

John: And the Chinese saw us out there and our truck driver—we had a three quarter ton truck with, you know, two sets of seats there, and they put a direct hit on the truck, and the driver in the truck just went kapoie.

Jim: Yeah, the artillery or a mortar?

John: With a mortar, with a mortar.

Jim: Good shootin'.

John: So we just dove anywhere and we got back. But we could've all been court martialed because we left our rifles, but one of the older sergeants went back and got them for us. So, oh, Lord! But that was my first introduction into efforts in training. We were building a bridge once, which was over quite a wide spot. The river was quite wide. It looked very shallow, though. And, you know, it was a terrific waste of lumber. They brought all that good timber from Oregon and Washington. Twelve by twelves, and ten by tens, and we were building a bridge out of that. And we were building one end of the bridge, and the water was washing out the other 'cause we had a three day rain, and the lieutenant just, finally—we kept telling him he'd better get us off, and we had just about five seconds before the whole thing went down, he pulled us off. Oh, jeez. That was a disaster.

Jim: [unintelligible]

- John: Oh, my gosh. Once or twice, we put a pontoon bridge across a, you know, a flowing body of water. But then twenty-four hours later, it's nothing but, you know, just a dry valley again almost, because the wall of water would go. We lost a—not our unit, but the infantry that we were in support of—lost a couple of trucks and a couple of men because they were with their M1s and their full packs on in the truck and they were going. And the wall of water came and just tore that truck and just washed 'em away.
- Jim: So it was either feast or famine about that water, you know, too much or too little.
- John: Yeah, oh my gosh. Too much or too little, yeah. That's true. And, I think, somewhere in the notes I put down—I don't know whether it was the campaign or not, but we did a lot at Old Papa-san, which was the highest point in Korea, close to the 38th parallel in Jane Russell Ridge. They were together there, and we were in the foothills mainly, and this was kind of a seesaw battle. Our units would go out at night to make sure there wasn't anything, and then the Chinese would throw mortars at us, and I ended up there. The last big push was in Pork Chop Hill, and one of the colonels wrote a book about that, and I had it, but I lost it some—
- Jim: There was a movie about that, too.
- John: Yes, that's right. I guess there is a movie. And on Pork Chop, we went out because the Chinese would blast the devil out of it, and we would be asked to go out and build up the bunkers again—fill sandbags and just put 'em up there and crawl on our bellies because the infantry were losing so many men. And they actually drafted some of the engineers into the infantry to fill in because there weren't enough coming from—
- Jim: You take it and lose it and take it and lose it. That's your job, isn't it?
- John: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah. I always told my high school students a story. On Pork Chop, we went out to do that and then the Chinese zeroed in with mortars. And they could put a mortar in your hind pocket.
- Jim: You're the third guy I've talked to who said that they were very good with mortars. Better than any of us.
- John: Oh, they were, oh boy. Oh yes, oh yes. They made it count, you know. So we got in a halftrack, and, you know, the driver of the halftrack can drive like hell and get us back. And the lieutenant told us to get in, and we got back. And as I came around the point, and we were to unload quickly, jump out. And I remember jumping out and falling on a hand with a class ring that was chipped. Because the halftrack had gone over the end—

we'd had no time to put the bodies aside other than that. And I always wondered what that young man was supposed to accomplish, you know, in life. But that was Pork Chop. My platoon sergeant was very protective of me at the end. I guess I was getting careless and he knew that, you know. In Korea, we went there forever like it's the Second World War. We would be rotated after so many months, or so much time on line. And I was getting close to rotation, and he wanted to be sure that I would rotate home, so he kind of watched me. I was getting a little, I suppose, careless or whatever. You know, I suppose there's a psychological evaluation for that. But we did go on a what we called a skoshi [sukoshi, Japanese for small] R&R [Rest and Recuperation].

Jim: Small R&R?

John: Small R&R. Big R&R sent you to Japan, and I was there long enough to go on one of those, too, with my first sergeant. And that's the first time I ever drank a martini was because he was privy to that.

Jim: That's a hard drink to start on [laughs].

John: Yeah, I'll tell you. Oh my gosh. Yes, especially for a greenhorn country kid, I'll tell you.

Jim: I know. Bad choice.

John: Yeah. Well, we had just gotten there late in the afternoon or whatever. We got a hotel room; we wanted to be off the base. Well, I think they thought that we were kinda weird. I think they may have thought we were kinda gay, too. But he and I, just that first night, roomed together.

Jim: Where was this, in what city?

John: This was in Kokura. Kokura.

Jim: Kamakura?

John: Yeah. Kokura, Japan. Not "Amakura," just Kokura.

Jim: Okay, I don't know that one.

John: No. Oh, okay. Well, at least that's what they told us that's where we were, I dunno [Jim laughs]. And so, about halfway through the night, he woke up and gol darn it, he let the biggest lingo of swearing out I ever—with the Japanese on the street, the windows were open because it was very warm. They had a long pole, and they were tryin' to get, you

know—we hung our trousers on the hook on the wall. And they were tryin' to get those trousers out with the—

Jim: They were trying to steal them!

John: Oh my god, he broke that stick and they went runnin' down the street. Well, that's the only night we stayed together, 'cause then we separated and whatever. I went back to the base and I think he found himself a mama-san of some sort. But after five days, he was back, and we went back to base and we never talked anymore about it, but oh lord! On the second big R&R, we went to Tokyo. At Tokyo, we went to the Dai-ichi building that Parliament left, and where MacArthur held forth, and we saw the Emperor's grounds, and we think we got a glimpse of the Emperor going. And it was just amazing, 'cause it was about five o'clock that he would go through, and the whole square, which is huge, about as big as the Capitol Grounds, the total amount, just filled in a matter of seconds with people. But we were taller than the Japanese and of course we got swung around in every which way, but you know. But it was an experience. And we went to the department store, and packed up a lot of stuff—my buddy and I.

Jim: You went to the PX [Post Exchange] in that big—

John: Yeah. I sent a smoking jacket to my father, and a set of silver—or china, rather—to my mother, and a lacquer salad set to my mother and my sister. And we, you know, we pile it up and then we say, "How much?" "Oh, no, that's too much." Well, then they'd come down. I don't know if it was the PX, but it was—

Jim: It wouldn't be at the PX. They didn't bargain there.

John: No, this was the—

Jim: On the street?

John: Yeah, on the street. In the building, though. We were on the third floor. And my goodness, and I thought, you know, "We'll pay for this and it'll never get home," but it all got delivered to High Bridge, Wisconsin. In fact, I think the tag that I made out to my mother at High Bridge, Wisconsin, is down here someplace. I gave it to them last year.

Jim: Oh, really? That's nice.

John: But that was it. The skoshi R&R was just back of the lines to a water point and two tents. And we could listen to the radio and we could play cards, and there was beer and I don't remember if there was any hard

liquor or not. There must have been, but beer was my choice in those days. And I remember being in the tent, and one young man who must have been eighteen or nineteen—and he was—just had that horrible stare in him of, you know, he'd gone through hell. And he just sat on the edge of the bed and just shook. And there was no way I could carry a conversation, and it really was an experience in that. And then finally we got through, and we got sent back to the good old USA, and not to be a pompous "A," but my buddy and I, he was from Milwaukee. I didn't know before; we just met on the boat. We sailed into San Francisco harbor, and we said after breakfast that we could hear—the fog was way down, but you could hear, sailing under Golden Gate Bridge, you could hear the traffic. Oh, my. It was so strange.

Jim: [Unintelligible]

John: Yeah. Oh, my gosh. We lit up a cigarette, and that was the last cigarette I smoked.

Jim: Oh, good.

John: Of course, I hadn't smoked at all in my life. But when we were on line and the Chinese were breaking through, and we all got pushed into the infantry to hold the line and hold the hill. I was a platoon sergeant and I was so nervous and shook up. Finally, one of my men came and had a cigarette lit and he said, "Here, Sarge, smoke it," and so I did. But I never smoked it, I just puffed it. And I suppose I puffed from the time then 'til I sailed under the Golden Gate one carton of Pall Malls, and that was it. But, my buddy and I—

Jim: You never really got hooked, then.

John: Yeah, that's right. And my buddy, well, we made that pact that we were not going to smoke again. Well, by evening meal he was smoking again [both laugh]. But I won't forget him, and I keep thinking—because I live in Mequon, you know—I should look him up. I tried once, but I couldn't find the name. Maybe he moved away. Andy Correro was his name. A slight Italian fellow and he was a baker if I remember right. And I just never—you know, you lose track. I always told my kids—Mary and I have six children—and I told my kids and my students that I taught all those years. You know, I was closer to some of those guys that I trained with—and I'm sure you know the same thing and heard it many times—than I am to my own brothers and sister. And, you know, we're a very close family.

Jim: Yeah, it's a different situation.

- John: Yeah, you share something that is just unbelievable.
- Jim: I still keep in contact with several people aboard our ship.
- John: Yeah? Oh, sure. Oh, yes.
- Jim: Did your training for what the engineers had to do—was it adequate? Or did you just sort of learn on the job?
- John: We just kind of learned on the job. I think—
- Jim: You didn't really have any engineer training in a formal way, so—
- John: No, we just learned from the people that were in charge of us, and then as we got older and more experienced in the units, why, then, we took over the role.
- Jim: Did you deal with explosives?
- John: Yeah, yeah. Not a lot, but yeah, we usually would have one or two in the company who would be trained in that. And we would defer to them to set the charges for the most part. Because we had a healthy respect for that.
- Jim: Oh, you bet.
- John: The Chinese would put anti-personnel mines, but they were made out of boxes with just nails pounded, you know? So there was hardly any metal, and the picric acid that they used, and there would be just enough of a charge to send the mine before it exploded about stomach-level, waist-level. And because they knew that if they could get somebody hit, but don't kill 'em, that that would take one or two more guys out. And that's the way they treated this. And beside, it was more economical then. And we used—I suppose we would say that we used more explosives than we should've at times when we were mainly trying to cut a road. It wasn't really rock, it was what we always called decomposed granite. You could almost shovel it or pick it real good, but once in a while it would be a little harder and you'd have to explode it and set a charge off. The Koreans had older men. I don't know what age one would say—maybe fifty to sixty-five or something like that—that were in what they called KATUSA [Korean Augmentation Troops to the United States Army] personnel, and they would be assigned to us to help in the roads, especially in the construction and lugging—
- Jim: Were they in the Service, in the Korean Army? Or were—

John: They weren't in the Korean Army, they were in like a—it reminded me of like a WPA [Works Progress Administration] Corps that we had.

Jim: They were civilians that were just—

John: Yeah, but they were organized and they were controlled by an officer of sorts, and they would follow what—you know. And some of our people were very mean to them and about them and would, I suppose, in a sense, blame them for their being there. They would treat them, call them as gooks. And their language with them would be the same as they would say of the Chinese.

Jim: And that wasn't really fair.

[End of Tape One, Side One]

John: No, no it wasn't—but if you got one of them, they were very astute judges of personality. You would be with them. They might be with us for a couple weeks at a time before we'd move to another group, and they would go or stay until the new group came in or something. But there would be two or three that you would get to know real well, and, gosh, I've got a couple of mementos at home yet. One is a cup that was fashioned out of the brass end of a casing—shell casing—with the terrific scrolling done by the Koreans.

Jim: By one of the guys?

John: By one of the guys, yes, mm-hmm, that did that, and a couple of a—I have a little vase that's that way; it must have been a shell too. And my wife still uses it for flowers. Just two flowers can go in it, that's all. And a couple utensils, and I think I gave those to my kids. Being a Catholic, I had a rosary that I kept with me. And when we were on Pork Chop, I was out there all alone with a group of these, and we were supposed to be building up the sandbags around that. And the Chinese start throwing shells, and the one was very interested in what—and he wanted that, so I took it off, and I always think, to this day, I think he would've yanked it off of me if I hadn't given it to him [Jim laughs], you know? You do some of those things, you know, and they remain with you.

Jim: Was he appreciative when you gave it to him?

John: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, yes, yes, and treated it very respectfully. I don't know if he thought there was some hocus-pocus to it, or what. [Jim laughs]. But I wasn't saying the rosary a lot, but I would have it and I went up at the moment.

Jim: [unintelligible].

John: Yeah, and he must have, you know? And he observed the season. I was supposed to be a platoon sergeant—I mean a platoon leader—which would've been a first lieutenant, and we would've been—we should've been three of us commissioned on the field. But there was a freeze in promotions at that time with Harry Truman's Secretary of Defense. What was her name? The lady. Oh, whatever. So we were acting, the three of us, as that, but we never got the promotion, you know.

Jim: This is in—by this time, you're well into the winter, weren't you?

John: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, and almost in toward the springtime in that.

Jim: That was about in '52?

John: Yeah. I guess I was gonna talk about what I always told my students, my first experience with drugs. Being a greenhorn country kid, growing up in northern Wisconsin, I didn't know drugs from shmugs. And when we got there—well, I'd knew drugs. Edgar Allen Poe was a druggie. I knew that from literature, but that was about it. But when we got there—then we had a couple replacements, and I was the platoon leader then, and this one young man was transferred in. And we went up one of the trails, and I think we were looking to check out what the Chinese were doing in one of these burned out villages. There were some apricot trees—they had to be apricots, they weren't budding or anything yet; it was still the wintertime—and what the houses had been there had been burned down. But the Koreans always had, you know, those flues underneath where the smoke and the fire went, so that it'd keep them warm when they were laying on the floor. That was the way they were. And there were some bodies there, and we took our body bags and we went up there, and I guess basically to try to find out when we sent the bodies back 'cause we couldn't tell whether or not they were Americans or Koreans. They thought they might be Americans that were killed on the way when the Chinese overran everything. Anyway, to make a long story short, we got into this little draw where this little village had been, and all of a sudden this young man that just came to us leaps off of the three quarter ton truck that we were. Ya know, we had our Army fatigue jackets that are tied at the bottom with a string. And he starts just—you know, the weeds were about yay high, about shoulder high—and he starts just grabbing weeds and leaves and—because they were all dried, and they'd been killed by frost you know and all dried, and stuffing them in. And he looked like Santa Claus when they were finally done, and finally one of my men said, "Sarge," or "Platoon leader." I don't know what he called me, "J," I guess. "Don't you know what that is?" And I said, "No." And he said, "Well, it's marijuana. It's all marijuana." And, well, to make a long story

short, that guy got stoned and I couldn't rouse him; he was laying up against the cab [Jim laughs]. Well, the next day he was gone. Because, you know—

Jim: They sent him down.

John: Yeah. Somewhere. But that was my experience with—

Jim: How long were you there, in Korea?

John: I got there Easter Sunday.

Jim: Of '51?

John: In '51. No, not '51, '52. Easter Sunday of '52 because I went in the Service in August of '51.

Jim: Right, in '52.

John: So '52, and then I left. Oh, it must have been about—I got back home, I think, two days before Memorial Day in '53.

Jim: Just a little bit over a year, then?

John: Yeah, mm-hmm, yeah, just a little over a year. Since my drafting was for two years, I wanted to get transferred to Fort Devens, Massachusetts, and I wanted to see that part of the country, but Uncle Sam said, "No." [He] sent me to Fort Carson, Colorado and sent me home from there, into the Reserves.

Jim: That was then?

John: That was then, yeah.

Jim: You didn't have to stay on active duty then?

John: No.

Jim: For your two years?

John: No. They sent us—as long as we had served over there, they sent us home and processed us through Fort Carson and then we were sent home and left—

Jim: Oh, out of the Service?

- John: Out of the Service. Well, we were still in the Reserves, but no requirement or anything. Just putting in our name.
- Jim: Inactive?
- John: Yeah. Mm-hmm, right. Inactive.
- Jim: Inactive. I'm surprised. Most of the people I've—in the Navy, that I was involved in, has a two year hitch.
- John: And that meant two years.
- Jim: Yeah, well I was in Korea a year, and then I came back and was at Great Lakes [Naval Station] for a year before I got out.
- John: Oh, oh! No, they left us—they gave us our three hundred dollars discharging or whatever it was [Jim laughs], and sent us home. And, that was it, yeah.
- Jim: Were your folks glad to see you when you got home?
- John: Oh my gosh, yes!
- Jim: That's nice.
- John: Yeah, yeah. That's my—
- Jim: Had you been writing them on a regular basis, or not?
- John: Oh, yeah.
- Jim: You were getting mail on a regular basis, and—
- John: Pretty much. Every once in a while it would pile up, but—
- Jim: Red Cross packages?
- John: Mm, not very often. My mother would send us—
- Jim: Cookies?
- John: Yeah, a lot.
- Jim: [unintelligible]

- John: Right. All crumbs and you'd eat handfuls. Yeah, you'd eat handfuls. We didn't get too many of those, I don't think—when I went into the Service—when I went to Korea, after I got through training, I said goodbye to my dad, and that's the first time, I think, I ever hugged my dad, 'cause we just didn't do that in our family. I've corrected that in our family now, but at that—I don't think he expected—my uncle told me this afterward—he ever expected to see me again. And then—
- Jim: Had he been in the First World War?
- John: No. He had been in between the First and the Second, yeah.
- Jim: He hadn't. I was wondering what gave him that attitude.
- John: Yeah, I don't know. I think just we'd lost some of the men in the community—in the farm community and all—a few of them had been killed, and I suppose my dad was a little bit of a fatalist in that regards.
- Jim: That's pessimistic.
- John: Yeah, yeah.
- Jim: Probably [he] had been feeling badly. Protective mechanism.
- John: Yeah. I think so, but—you know, I think that's a big part of it. And when I got to Korea—I mean Tokyo—for the R&R, they—
- Jim: Oh, you had a chance to call home?
- John: Yes, I had a chance! And I called home.
- Jim: You did? Five dollars a minute, I remember that.
- John: Yeah, yeah. It was great. But, I think, my parents got misunderstood where I was—they thought I was in the States already on my way home [Jim laughs]. And the next letter I got from my parents were [from] my mother. Because my dad wrote very seldom, but always a word was included in my mother's letter.
- Jim: Sure. Yeah, my father never wrote me.
- John: Yeah. My dad did write a couple times. I guess my mother just insisted that he write once in a while, but it was evident that, boy, they expected I was [laughs]—and it was just such a shock when I finally wrote and told them I was still in Korea [Jim laughs]. And not even in Japan, you know.

But that was—well, I was in Japan, but I mean I was still going back to Korea.

Jim: Those phone calls were not much because you had to either talk or listen but you couldn't do both, though.

John: Yeah, that's right.

Jim: So, it was obvious somebody had to monitor everything.

John: Yeah, that's right.

Jim: It wasn't worth at all the money you paid to do it.

John: No, no, it wasn't, no, but it was an activity that we enjoyed.

Jim: Oh, yeah! You look forward to it.

John: Another little, just, anecdote about things. When I was platoon sergeant, you know, I had no respect, I suppose, for Army money. And I should've been sending it all home instead of—but I had a wad of it there. And one of the kids from Texas—I'll never forget him. Gonzalez was his name—and he just—I think he would've killed me one night, because he was in a big gambling game, and I never gambled. And he was in a big gambling game, and he needed money. And he came and woke me up, and I said, "Oh, get out of here."

Jim: He wanted to borrow your bucks?

John: Yeah. But he, well, borrowed, but it never was paid back.

Jim: Sure.

John: So that was one experience. But I think he would've killed me that night if, you know, in the heat of the moment—

Jim: [unintelligible, both talking]

John: Yeah, because that was what drove him. Early on—just to make a little connection with Madison, Wisconsin—Wisconsin was doing quite well. Those couple of football games they had there way back then. And there was this kid from Pennsylvania—I can't think of his name. But he was a big kid. And he must've been hot into gambling, racing, and whatnot. Anyway, he wanted to bet on the games. Well, I bet him that Wisconsin was gonna win. And I don't know what I bet him. It couldn't have been

more than twenty dollars. Well, my god, Wisconsin won. He wouldn't bet with me again, and thank god, because I think I'd've lost my shirt, but—

Jim: [unintelligible]

John: [both laugh] It was just the funniest thing. And I told my high school kids that one time I said, you know, that I said, "Am I sure glad that I didn't keep up because I probably would've gotten addicted, and that was [unintelligible]." But, you know, those are little funny things that happen that you just—oh, yeah.

Jim: Alright. Now, after you got out of the Service, did you use your GI Bill?

John: Yes, I did. I used my GI Bill to—I had already graduated from Northland with a bachelor of philosophy degree, which is like a B.A., but only that I didn't take a foreign language. And, I got out there, I said, Memorial Day—or got home Memorial Day—in '53. And then I wanted to—I helped out on the farm that summer. And then got a job teaching in Mosinee, Wisconsin.

Jim: A high school?

John: A high school. Mathematics. And then I and my buddy, Jim Benning, who had also been in the Service, we went to Colorado State College on the GI Bill. And I got a Master of Arts in mathematics education there. And then I went to Cornell University on a Shell fellowship—Shell Oil fellowship.

Jim: I don't know about those.

John: Shell Oil Company had—after the Russians, I think—had gotten going with Sputnik and that. They—I think that was it—anyway, they sponsored fifty scholarships at Cornell University and fifty at Stanford University. The east of the Mississippi went over here, so my buddy from Nicolet High School, Al Larson, of happy memory, he and I went to Cornell.

Jim: How was that experience? That's a pretty campus. I've seen the campus.

John: Oh, yes. Oh, it's just elegant, and we had such a good time that summer. We were both married and our wives were at home, so that was kind of disappointing.

Jim: Yeah, you couldn't take her along?

John: No, there was no accommodations. They weren't nearly as accommodating in those days as they would be today.

- Jim: Well, you know, it's full of GIs too, so they didn't [unintelligible]
- John: No, that's right, IBM headquarters in upstate New York. Oh my god! The first program I ever did on a computer was done at the IBM plant there. And my gosh, it was to solve, you know, a system of equations. "X" plus "Y" equals... you know? And we wrote that program, and honestly, it had to be as big as this room with those, you know, vacuum tubes and all that. And it was just enough room to walk around and then one path through, but that was a marvelous thing. But, that was my first experience in that. And then we went to—well, we went to a number of plays. Doctor Phillip Johnson was in charge and he was just a jewel. It was fantastic. And then I went to a number of NSF [National Science Foundation] grants too. National Science. I had a couple at Marquette and a couple at Iowa State. I taught geology. I'm a mathematics teacher, but I taught geology at Nicolet for my friend who wanted to go. And so I signed up for a geology institute and got picked at Iowa State, but we didn't go to Iowa State. We went out to the Camp Philmont Boy Scout Ranch.
- Jim: Oh. [unintelligible].
- John: Oh yes. I always said, next to my marriage, that was the most fantastic experience of my life. Being out there for that five weeks—four weeks, because I was low on the totem pole of science education—four weeks, we learned geology, and the fifth week we taught it to scout troops coming in. I was up on top of the high ridge all alone for two hours waiting for a troop. Then we'd do a little panning for gold down the lane. Then down—
- Jim: Oh, that's nice!
- John: Oh my gosh, yes! It was tremendous.
- Jim: Where was your wife at this time?
- John: She was home with the kids and she has never let me forget that.
- Jim: [unintelligible] [laughs].
- John: Oh, yes. Well, it was a good thing she didn't come along, because she could have— **[Tape cuts out for twenty seconds]**
- John: And we almost did, but there was trailer houses and there was nothing but sand around. And the kids woulda had a ball, but she would've been stark raving mad. And then, Philmont was closed down for a whole week that time because they thought hemorrhagic fever was—or bubonic plague—

was spreading. A scout from Michigan died on the trail and they couldn't trace it. And finally I think they really judged it to be hemorrhagic fever.

Jim: I was gonna say, [unintelligible] bubonic plague.

John: Yeah, no, but that's what they threatened us with, and we could not leave the Scout Ranch or anything. My first introduction to hemorrhagic fever was in Korea. When we were back of the line, we had some pretty solid bunkers built into the hillsides, and our motor pool—we had a young man; I believe he was from Missouri—just a crackerjack of a mechanic. And he died under a truck and we found out later it was hemorrhagic fever. That was one of the first times that we even heard of such a thing. But the rodents that lived in our bunkers and that, and so we had to vacate those bunkers and they—I think they fumigated them all.

Jim: Sprayed 'em with [unintelligible]. Sure, 'cause there's fleas on those rats.

John: Yeah, right. That was it. So, but that was our introduction into that.

Jim: Yeah, we saw a couple of those cases aboard our ship. You had to isolate them, and, you know.

John: That and small pox, which everybody thought was gone. A lot of guys, the vaccines never worked on them anymore, and we had a lot of cases of that. Not a tremendous number, but several cases of small pox, and a couple of those died too.

Jim: Well, you would appreciate this. On our way back from Korea, we were out of Hawaii—or I think we were not into Hawaii yet—and one of our guys got seriously ill. And, anyway, they hooked him and hoisted [him] in a basket, and a helicopter came from Hawaii and yanked that up and carted him away. I still have a mental picture of that guy in that basket. We were thinking, "Oh my god, the basket's gonna—or the cable will break, and he'll—floop!" You know, and it was just such a, you know—you're sitting there and you just see such a thing, and oh my! Such an experience. So, you worked in the school, in the education department, until you retired?

John: Yeah. We started in Mosinee then, in '53, the fall of '53, and taught there for five years. That's where I met my wife. She was a Latin teacher, and she left after-- three years, was it? And went down here to Monona Grove to help Doctor Schwan, or Mr. Schwan, start Monona Grove High School. It was brand new. Then we were married in the fifth year, and I was teaching in Mosinee. And then one of the gals on the board, bless her heart, she couldn't see why teachers should get any more money than her husband—not to discourage his work. He was just on the roller mill, just a

line of the mill man. She couldn't think why we needed any more. If they could live in Mosinee, we teachers should be able to too. Well, that was when we were thinking of getting married, and I thought, "Oh my gosh." So, the end of that year we were married. Then we left and I went down to Monona Grove. There happened to be an opening. I knew about it. I knew Mr. Schwan. And at the Wisconsin employment bureau, there was a grand old lady called Ms. Morrissey who headed the teacher placement bureau, and she knew every school job in the state and around Illinois. And she gave us a whole handful. I think I had five contracts by the end of that day. And then she told me that Monona Grove was looking for a math teacher because Mr. Desart, who I knew then, just left. So we came back that evening and stopped and talked to Ed Schwan and Paul Lector. A couple days, whatnot, I ended up at Monona Grove and our four boys were born there. And then I went to Homestead in Mequon-Thiensville and our two daughters were born there. And I taught there for twenty-seven years and now I've been retired twelve years and I still substitute. I love it. I love the kids.

Jim: Oh, do you? That's the nice thing. You don't have to do subbing.

John: Oh, it is, it is. It's like, kind of like what you're doing. But I don't like to get that call so early in the morning anymore. My wife doesn't either. So when it's prearranged—

Jim: Sure!

John: But it averages maybe not quite once a week that I'm subbing and sometimes just a couple hours and sometimes it's the full day. Then I taught for MATC too, the Milwaukee Area Technical College. I was a counselor, and, you know, you fill in wherever you can. And I taught mathematics and then I ran the evening center in Brown Deer [Wisconsin]. And then my wife didn't like me gone that time so I left that too. And that's pretty much what, you know, what I do.

Jim: What's your birth date again?

John: January 25, '29. One twenty-five twenty-nine.

Jim: And did you keep in contact with—what people do you keep in contact with after the war?

John: After the war? I lost track of everybody now, but I did keep in track with Velere Nelson from Forest City, Iowa, and we visited back and forth each other. And, uh—and, uh—and I guess—

Jim: What about the sergeant who introduced you to martinis?

- John: Well, I don't know where—the last I checked with him, he was getting married, and I believe settling in Ohio. Offstrop was his name. And I can still see him there, you know. He was all business, and he was a little old, but he was getting married. That's the last I remember.
- Jim: So you've lost contact then?
- John: Yeah, pretty much.
- Jim: No reunions?
- John: No.
- Jim: That Division or the Regiment have?
- John: They've had one that I know of and I didn't get to go to that one. And I haven't seen any other. I'm in the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] now that I retired, and I keep checking on that and seeing. No, I haven't been to any reunions, but if I ever find the 13th is going to have a reunion, or the 7th Infantry, I'm going, that's for sure. I told my wife that.
- Jim: I would think they'd have a newsletter going around. Most divisions do.
- John: I think they do, but—
- Jim: You're not on the mailing list.
- John: No, I'm not.
- Jim: If you ever wanna get on there, that's an easy thing to find out. You just call here, and the people will—
- John: Oh, okay. I'll do that.
- Jim: —find at least an address if not a telephone number, 'cause all those divisions have [both talking, unintelligible].
- John: Yeah, because I've got a couple of good buddies in the VFW. They go every year, and a couple that are just at church, they go—one of them, he was one of the sailors—I forgot now. In fact, he replaced me this morning at church to set up for the morning.
- Jim: [unintelligible].

John: They might be able to, sure. In fact, I'm going to the state convention next Friday. That'll be a good point to look out.

Jim: If you look around, you'll find someone who will tell you how to go about doing this.

John: How to go about—

Jim: Right, exactly.

John: To do a little bragging, I was named quartermaster of the year, one of them, for the state of Wisconsin VFW, and, well, I'm given an award and a pin and a free supper or whatever up at Oshkosh. I and the Commander are going. He's getting a white hat. They won't give me a white hat, but, well, whatever. [Jim laughs]. So I keep in touch. We have a military historians' club in Ozaukee County. It's just a bunch of us getting together, whoever. They had one I wanted to go and see—but we had a family gathering and I couldn't go—was "We Were Soldiers Once." If you've heard of that movie and that book, I read the book *We Were Soldiers Once...and Young*. And it was with a couple of those pilots that were there, and they were speaking on their experience in that Da Nang valley operation.

Jim: You know all about that.

John: Oh my gosh! And I would've given anything. And then we had one lady from Altoona, out of Eau Claire. She's a history teacher, and she taught to her students, a couple years back, about the German prisoners of war camps that were in Wisconsin. And so she wrote this book, *Stalag Wisconsin*, and she came and was lecturing.

Jim: I heard about this one.

John: And we had two of the Germans that were prisoners in the various parts of Wisconsin, and oh my! The stories they told. And they had to go back to Germany. One ended up as a doctor in Illinois and he came up. And the other one, I think ended up in Hartford or somewhere. Anyways, they told us their stories of when they were prisoners here. And, oh, it was just so—one of our grandsons in Minneapolis had First Communion two weeks ago and so I didn't get back on Monday, but they had one of the crew members of the Enola Gay speaking. Oh, I forgot to tell the commander to make a tape if he could, if they would. And, you know, I would be able to at least hear that. So that's been a pretty good thing for us. And then we have a—maybe you know about this—there's a project. The one young lady, Laurie Artiss [Laurie Arendt], is making a history of the veterans in Ozaukee County. And she's gotten interviews, and high

school students to—a high school student interviewed me, anyway—and they write up a little essay about you, and now they're supposed to be publishing that, and we're supposed to get a copy of it. I don't know. I don't know what status that is in. But I think the Grafton State Bank or something gave a grant and somebody else, and our veterans' post gave a little donation so that this could be carried out. So, we'll see.

Jim: Buy my book. I've got a lot of guys from Milwaukee in it.

John: Yeah? Oh! What is your book?

Jim: *Wisconsin at War*.

John: *Wisconsin at War*? Ooh, I'll have to write that down [paper tearing].

Jim: It came out two weeks ago.

John: Oh yeah?

Jim: Yeah. Yeah, they have them downstairs and they have them in most bookstores around here. I don't know if there's anything in Milwaukee yet. Wisconsin Trails published.

John: Wisconsin Trails published it?

Jim: Yeah.

John: Oh, yeah. I've heard of them.

Jim: Yeah, they make the calendars that we all get. With the pretty pictures.

[End of Tape 1, Side Two]

John: Yes. Okay.

Jim: You can see the book when you go downstairs.

John: Okay.

Jim: Your experience was about what you expected in the career? Or different?

John: I would say I had really no expectations, even after the training, of what it would be like. I think I looked at it like an opportunity to learn, and I had no problem. I always told my students that I had no problem fighting in Korea. I basically am a pacifist. I don't like war and I don't like killing.

But when—if you and your buddy, and somebody’s trying to kill you or your buddy—

Jim: [unintelligible]

John: It’s like the moral’s more clear, and I had no problem. To me, it was sensible for me to be fighting in Korea rather than on Main Street, Ashland, Wisconsin. I put it in those simple, simple terms, and it just—

Jim: Worked out?

John: It worked out. It didn’t give me any great moral problem of any kind or whatever.

Jim: No more nightmares when you got home or anything.

John: No, no. I think the only aftereffect that I could remember, really, is I got home on Memorial Day, and then I start teaching Labor Day that same year. And the first couple months of teaching—maybe the first four months—I had no problem. I’d teach all day. But I would get—at the end of the day, I’d get in my car and on Highway 153, west out of Mosinee—it’s just about a straight shot all the way to the little village of Stratford and I’d go like a bat outta Hell. And I just—I had a new car, you know, but it was just something inside me. And finally, and I’d get a beer and a hamburger at the hotel in Stratford. Most of the time I’d go alone. I wouldn’t have anybody with me. And finally, some day when I was there, after about three months and whatever, this State Trooper pulled in. He gets into the seat next to me at the bar or at the counter where I was eating my hamburger and my beer, and he just looked over and then said, “Listen buddy.” He said, “I’ve been watching you.” He said, “And if you do that again, you will hear from me,” and that was all and I never—

Jim: You will hear from me?

John: Yeah.

Jim: That’s an unusual way of police officers. He thought you were speeding, in other words then.

John: Oh, yeah. Well, I was and he knew. But he must’ve known that I was a little flaky upstairs from the war or something, but, anyway.

Jim: He took pity on you!

John: Yeah. He was just so understanding.

- Jim: Oh, that was nice.
- John: Yeah, and I never, you know, and that's all. And that's all it took.
- Jim: You never saw him again?
- John: Never saw him again.
- Jim: I'll be damned. I'll be damned.
- John: Yeah. Never saw him again. And he knew that, you know, because there was a little village of Halder up there and there was the Saint Patrick's Church, and I know, in that churchyard, that's where he was. You know, I'd see him from time to time up there, but I know that that's, you know, that's—oh, god. But that would be, I think, the only really—I guess I was a little nervous, too, from the experiences of the Service and that, because I had a bad case of—the ends of my fingers, the end of my first year of teaching—might've been the nerves of teaching too. I don't know. But they were little blisters, but then I got rid of that after a summer at Colorado State and didn't have them anymore.
- Jim: [You] had the sun treatment. You were closer to the sun there.
- John: Yeah, closer to the sun, that's right. Yeah. So, no, I don't think I had any, you know, that were major repercussions of that.
- Jim: Good. Alright. Any more questions I can ask you? Did I miss anything?
- John: No, I think—
- Jim: We covered it?
- John: Yeah, I think pretty good.
- Jim: It seemed that way.
- John: Yeah. If you're satisfied, I'm happy, yeah.
- Jim: I'm happy. If you haven't missed anything, it sounds good to me. Alright. Super.
- John: Okay. Alright.

[End of Interview]