

Wisconsin Public Television  
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
JULIUS W. PTASZYNSKI  
Medical Technician, Army, Korean War  
2004

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**Ptaszynski, Julius W.,** (1930- ). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 60 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

Julius W. Ptaszynski, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, discusses his service with the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's 11<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital as a medical technician during the Korean War. Ptaszynski speaks of being drafted while worked for the Woolworth Company, basic training at Fort Meade (Maryland), and medical training at Fort Sam Houston Medical Center (Texas) and Madigan Army Hospital (Washington). Shipped to Korea as an operating room medical technician, he recalls taking a slow-moving train to the semi-mobile evacuation hospital in Wonju and being put right to work. Two days after his arrival, Ptaszynski talks about a red alert due to "Bed-Check Charlie," a night-flying scout plane. He touches on the state of the casualties and types of injuries that his hospital treated and its participation in Operation Little Switch. Ptaszynski portrays work during rushes of incoming casualties. He details treating hemorrhagic fever patients and recalls the high number of infections caused by unsanitary conditions in the fields. He describes the facilities at the hospital, its equipment, including an artificial kidney machine, and the living conditions during the cold winter. During his last month and a half in Korea, Ptaszynski speaks of being assigned as assistant to the Catholic chaplain, who was evacuated to Japan after becoming ill. He comments on duty fetching a missionary from Wonju to provide last rights to dying soldiers, writing letters for patients, and holding prayer services in the chapel. He tells of a Marine from his hometown dying of his wounds and, after Ptaszynski's return home, being able to tell the Marine's parents that he'd received the last rights of the church. Ptaszynski reflects on the casualty statistics of the Korean War. He talks about revisiting Korea in 2002 and seeing a ceremony at the Korean National Cemetery. He speaks about attending 11<sup>th</sup> Evac Hospital reunions. Ptaszynski reflects on the emotional difficulty of telling amputees that their limb is gone and seeing a friend from home pass through the hospital. He portrays playing practical jokes on sleeping medics, having parties with goodies from care packages, setting up a stage so patients could see USO shows, and eating with Piper Laurie. He touches on walking guard duty every couple weeks and teasing some soldiers after their stove burned holes in their tent. Ptaszynski details the food at the hospital and celebrating Christmas. He mentions not fraternizing with commissioned officers and having trouble getting promoted due to a rank freeze. He reports on his experiences in the psych ward and with preventing frozen feet. Ptaszynski characterizes some Korean boys who had jobs on the base. He portrays being on the first troop ship to arrive in the U.S. after the cease-fire was signed and his surprise homecoming being spoiled by a radio station broadcast's alerting his parents that he was in the country. After his discharge, Ptaszynski talks about returning to his career as a store manager.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Ptaszynski (b.1930) served in the Army from 1951 to 1953. In 1959 he married Marlene Sichmiller and they raised three children. He managed a Woolworth store in Minneapolis for nineteen years, owned and managed Ben Franklin stores from 1966 to 1989, ended up in Wausau (Wisconsin), and from 1991 to 1999 managed a Boy Scouts of America Scout Shop. Ptaszynski serves on the honor guard in the VFW and the Knights of Columbus.

**Citation Note:**

Cite as: Julius W. Ptaszynski, Interview, conducted September 23, 2004 at Weston, Wisconsin and Wausau, 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 WCKOR049 and WCKOR050.

**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).

**Videotape Note:**

There are missing audio segments! The WVM copy of the interview is missing one paragraph between tapes one and two and a few words at the end of the interview. Wisconsin Public Television should have complete audio of the interview, but there was a problem during the reproduction of the tapes for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. The missing parts are italicized as a means of identifying them in this transcript and the actual tape end and start in the WVM copy is clearly noted.

Interviewed by Mik Derks, September 23, 2004

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

Transcript edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

**Transcribed Interview:**

- Mik: Who were you back in--I don't know, when did you go into the military?
- Julius: I went in in 1951, August of 1951. My name is Julius Ptaszynski, I was drafted out of Milwaukee. I worked for Woolworth Company and they were going to transfer me and they decided they wanted my draft status. So I checked with my local draft board and thirty days later I got a notice that I was going in the service. [Laughs] So I didn't have to worry about the transfer with Woolworth Company at all.
- Mik: Where did they put you in?
- Julius: I was sent to Fort Sheridan in Illinois and then I went to Fort Meade, Maryland which was a medical replacement training center. There we had eight weeks of military infantry training and then eight weeks of combat medical training. Ah--we were training as combat medics.
- Mik: Now did you volunteer for that, or did they just decide you to be a good medic?
- Julius: I often wondered how they figured it out. I did have a little experience with the boy scouts so unless they, they thought boy scouts always know first aid. I never did figure it out. I guess nobody can.
- Mik: And what was the training like?
- Julius: It was regular infantry, combat infantry training along with treatment in training of wounded. After eight weeks of that, we went to Fort Sam Houston Medical Center. And there we took a short course in preparation of wounds and procedures for operating rooms and so forth. Then later, after eight weeks of that, why, I was sent to Madigan Army Hospital in Tacoma, Washington. And there I finished up my training. And I was graduated out of there as a medical technician, and after two week stay at home, I was sent over to Korea.
- Mik: Again, was it just an arbitrary track or did they decide that you would be better in the OR than in the--
- Julius: Well, we worked in OR and we worked in other phases of the hospital also on medical wards, orthopedic wards, and then, ah, whenever needed if a push was going on; wherever you were needed, why, you filled in. Sometimes we would take part in autopsies and so forth and it all depended on what was going on at that particular time. Our duty hours were supposed to be from like seven in the morning till seven o'clock at night and from seven at night till seven in the morning, but sometimes we went round the clock twenty-four hours. Like I say, the need made the job.
- Mik: The need made the hours.

Julius: Yes, right, yeah.

Mik: And was there ever any question that you were going to Korea, or did some people go elsewhere?

Julius: We had ah--when I got drafted there were four of us from Milwaukee and we all stayed together, Fort Meade, Fort Sam Houston. We got split up; one went to Walter Reed, one went to Fitzsimmons, and Madigan, and another went to another camp, but I can't remember the name, but we all ended up on the same boat going over to Korea. We got off, ah--several of us got off at Pusan, some got off at Inchon. Seemed like those of us that left, left off at Pusan, ended up near the 38th Parallel and those that got off at Inchon seemed to end up down around Taegu and so forth. So we never did know where we were going. At the time that we arrived there, most of the pushes were done. The battles were for the hills and for the locations, so most of the wounded and things that, people that we took care of, were from these battles for trying to take possession of property.

Mik: And so you were pretty stable where you were located? It wasn't like the front was moving up--?

Julius: No, the front had moved in 1951; that was the battle of Wonju. When they made a stand, the 8th Army made a stand, and the Chinese kinda read the picture the wrong way and of course the Americans held, the United Nations held, and then the offense took over and then they forced their way, forced them back over the 38th Parallel. But that was the--Ridgway was the commander of the 8th Army at that time. And our hospital was sent over in 1951, and we ended up at Chonju in a schoolhouse there. And then after the battle of Chonju, why, we were moved to Wonju and after they cleared the area for land mines and so forth, they set up our evacuation hospital, which was a semi-mobile unit, and most of it was there at--and then the rest followed, the stationary units followed later.

Mik: Were you in there for the set up?

Julius: No, I got there after that, yeah.

Mik: Tell me about arriving at the hospital.

Julius: Well, we ah--we left San Francisco on the *USS General Pope* and we had about thirteen days on the ocean and we landed in Japan at Yokohama. They took away all our class A uniforms and so forth, and left us with our fatigues and the equipment that we were going to need when we got to Korea. We loaded back on the boat. We hit a typhoon between Japan and Korea and ah--which I think more people were hurt on the boat than actually in battles, but [laughs] it was kind of a rough ride. And then we unloaded at--like I said, some unloaded at Pusan and some went up to Inchon. But we took a slow moving train up to Wonju, and it was quite interesting

because they took like about twenty-four hours to get there and it was just at a snail's pace. And along the way, once in awhile, you would get sniped at from some of the still remnants of the guerrilla units that were left, the Chinese or the North Koreans and of course, they left us without any fighting equipment. The only thing we had in the car was a piece of pipe, so I don't know what we would've done with a .50 caliber machine gun and a pipe, ya know. It was interesting.

Mik: And do you remember arriving at the hospital?

Julius: Yes, we got at the hospital and, of course, first thing you know, we meet our first sergeant and start assigning tents and giving us orders of where were going to, what we were going to do. And I remember it being very hot and very humid at that time. And, but we were right in the swing, I think we were there two days and we had a red alert. Bed Check Charley came in, and in the middle of the night was a small plane that the North Koreans and Chinese used to irritate the troops. They would fly down in between the mountains and look for places to throw grenades and so forth, just to keep the troops on edge, ya know. But it was interesting; we got to work practically immediately, as soon as we arrived. Pushes were being made on, ambulances were coming in, helicopters were coming in, and we didn't have much time to think of home.

Mik: And what condition were your patients in when they arrived? Just field dressings?

Julius: A lot of 'em were just field dressing, some of 'em had hit M\*A\*S\*H units before and, but it all depended on what sector they were coming from and where the M\*A\*S\*H unit was set up. We got a lot of 'em that were--came direct.

Mik: But you weren't a M\*A\*S\*H unit, you were--

Julius: We were an evacuation, a semi-mobile unit. Which meant that we could divide it into a stationary and a mobile unit. Later on, toward the end of the war, in 1953, our hospital took care of Operation Little Switch, which was the repatriation of the first wounded during the Korean War. And then, of course, I left in July and shortly after that, our hospital helped with the Big Switch, which was the repatriation of all the prisoners.

Mik: So Little Switch wasn't prisoners, it was wounded?

Julius: It was prisoners, but they were the wounded, seriously wounded prisoners, yes. And North Koreans and, ah, the Chinese weren't as bad, but the North Koreans did not take care of the American POWs very well.

Mik: So how steady was the flow of wounded into your hospital?

Julius: Oh, it depended on how many, on the size of the push and what was going on. A lot of 'em would be fragments from grenades, mortars, machine guns, that type, those

type of wounds. Sometimes, I remember the one time we had, I think it was like about ninety-three or so wounded come in. And they had 128 wounds on them. So some were very serious, and others were a couple days rest and medication and it would be back on line.

Mik: And tell me what your job would be like when there were a lot of people coming in.

Julius: Well, we would usually get the alert that the ambulances were coming in and we would go to the pre-op stations. And received the patients and checked their tags and see, check their wounds and so forth and then see which ones were the most serious ones that had to be taken care of. Ah, and then the minor ones and so forth. Went to different areas in the hospitals, sort of like a triage.

Mik: And that's what you were doing?

Julius: I did that, and I did several other jobs in the hospital, as being a medical technician I worked, like I said, on medical wards. I worked with hemorrhagic fever patients, which was a disease that was carried by a mite and that would get into the, ah, the patients' blood streams and give, cause bad hemorrhages and so forth and a very high fevers. A lot of those patients had medical problems afterwards.

Mik: What kind of care did they need?

Julius: A lot of those with the high fevers, we would bath them in alcohol and pack them up in ice chips, keep their fevers down and ah--and give them a lot of fluids and IVs and so forth.

Mik: Did you know about hemorrhagic fever before that?

Julius: I didn't know about hemorrhagic fever until one day they told me that I was going to help with the hemorrhagic fever patients. So we had medics rotating in and out all the time, new ones coming in or time, the older ones, their time was finished up, their ETSS, and so some of the medics coming from the States, about a year later had different means of taking care of wounds and so forth. Ah, different techniques that had been--come about and so forth

Mik: So it was new to the whole medical establishment?

Julius: Just about, yes.

Mik: Could you give people anything for it?

Julius: No, there, while we were there, there was nothing, no medication that could be used to prevent it. They did use DDT, ah--the uniforms would be dipped in a barrel of DDT and so forth to prevent the mites from getting into the skin by killing them just like other insects and so forth.

- Mik: And somebody told us earlier that that's how the infection would happen. They would get shot or shrapnel and then it would take fabric from their clothes into the wound.
- Julius: Right.
- Mik: And then it would be infected.
- Julius: It'd be infected. There were quite a few patients that died from infections, got there with minor wounds but because of the rice paddies with the human waste materials in there, picked up very bad cases of infection. And I think more died from, in the hospitals with infection that were caused by waste materials in the fields and so forth.
- Mik: And then where would patients go from your hospital?
- Julius: We would, if they were able to be evacuated, we would either send them back to their units, if they were ready to go back, minor wounds. Those that were more extensive would probably be air lifted out to a hospital ship or to Japan. We had an air strip just a short distance away from our evacuation hospital. Also, the P-51 fighter planes were based there, so we would have the fighter planes going over with their napalm and so forth and then the, I believe, would like the DC-3s and so forth. The old C-47s were equipped to handle the, the patients to take them to Japan, or evacuate them by helicopter to a hospital ship.
- Mik: It's quite a complex, that hospital. How many people were stationed there?
- Julius: I would, we had about 225 I think, I never did get the roster. We had nurses and they stayed in one area. The officers had another area and enlisted men were all by themselves. We were all self-contained, for water facilities, purifying water, for electricity, for operating our x-ray machines, and all the other equipment that was needed. A lot of the GI's would come if they had minor medical problems, such as teeth problems, toothache or, or other things, ya know.
- Mik: And what kind of facilities did you have for the hospital, for the patients?
- Julius: Most of our hospital was ah--tents. Toward the late, latter part of 1952 and then into '53, they started taking down the tents and putting up metal prefab type buildings. Our wards, hospital ward tents consisted probably of about fifty people in a tent. And that would be the maximum bed to bed, ya know. And ah, but on a normal basis, why, maybe thirty-five or so.
- Mik: And how many of those wards were there?



Julius: We had four wards. We had surgery, orthopedic, medical, and then we had a small psycho ward there too.

Mik: So you mentioned x-rays, but what other kind of equipment did you have there?

Julius: We had an artificial kidney machine that was one of its--one of three at that particular time in 1952 and that was brought from Walter Reed Army Hospital. And we were able to take care of the soldiers that developed kidney shutdowns and we would run them on those. And there were cases where soldiers had been evacuated and then brought back from Japan or the hospital ship to be run on the artificial kidney machine, so they were taken from a close combat area and almost back into a combat area to get medication and to receive the benefits of the artificial kidney machine.

Mik: Was that a real common problem, kidney shutdown?

Julius: Yes it was, and that was one of the reasons the commander of our unit decided to kind of go past the command, his commanding officers, and sent one of the people from our unit to pick up that machine and bring it with him and all the supplies. He later, I found out, was passed over for a pretty good job.

Mik: Why was there such a high incidence of kidney failure?

Julius: The shock and the high fevers and the infections and so forth. A lot of the patients suffered from shock. And then of course with all the infections, that helps shut the kidneys down.

Mik: So did you have any advanced warning that there were gonna be attacks or movements on one of the hills?

Julius: None, none whatsoever. No.

Mik: The only advance warning was that the--ambulances?

Julius: When we knew they--when they would start coming in, we were on the main supply route and so it didn't take long for 'em to get to our hospital.

Mik: And what was the biggest day you ever had, in terms of casualties coming in?

Julius: Oh, I can't remember. There were, the days just kinda went in from one to another after awhile. And there would lulls, and we would have little bit of free time and time to play practical jokes on one another. And to keep our sanity, ya know, but there were, there were times maybe, three, the longest time would been about three days in a row where we were just going constantly, maybe four hours off in between.

- Mik: And where were they coming from, the ones that came straight to you? Were you near any of the hills that we heard of?
- Julius: Ah yes, most of the hills were around the Wonju area there, and most of them had numbers at that particular time. I don't remember them. Some of them came in from probably Baldy or some of the other ones that were mentioned during the Korean War. I--we never did, everybody had the different name, Pork Chop, right, and Marilyn Monroe and [laughs] so they had a name for every hill.
- Mik: And how far were you from the--
- Julius: We were about fifteen miles from the line. And ah--that was for purposes so that we could get out when we had to, if we had to, if things started moving back pretty fast.
- Mik: But you never did have to evacuate?
- Julius: We never did, no. We had ah--like I say, we had one or two alerts and then ah--the next time we got an alert was to move our semi-mobile unit up to ah--take care of the wounded up at Panmunjom, up there.
- Mik: You mentioned that it was hot and steamy when you first got there, that changed?
- Julius: Well, that changed, yes. There were temperatures outside of about 108 it was down in the valley. And then we had a little monsoon area. Period of time where there was monsoon, rain, wet, and muddy. And then, of course, along came the winter and then it was cold, not too much snow, but very, very cold and very windy.
- Mik: And that was a challenge?
- Julius: That was a challenge, especially when you had to walk guard, yes [laughs]. And of course our tents had no insulation at all that we lived in. We had a little salamander stoves and we were rationed about one gallon of fuel per day, per man. And so we would try and get as many people into a squad tent so that we would be able to have more fuel to last. Working on shifts from seven in the morning till seven at night, or seven at night to seven in the morning. You had to find a place to sleep and of course sleeping bags were nice, but when you wake up with frost on the top of 'em, why [laughs] it's, ah, it's kinda tough.
- Mik: And how warm were you able to keep the wards?
- Julius: Just barely comfortable, we kept them probably at about fifty degrees would be about the hottest.
- Mik: Same with the operating rooms?

Julius: The operating rooms were a little bit higher because those were prefab type buildings and had more of an insulation quality than a tent.

Mik: And was everything connected from OR to ward or?

Julius: No, we had to go out to the outside, yes, yeah. Yeah, it was all separate.

Mik: Kinda hard to push wheelchairs around.

Julius: Yeah, [laughs] a lot of carry work [laughs]. Litters were used quite often.

Mik: Now I read in your interview, you got involved with--you were assistant chaplain or?

Julius: Yes, the last about a month and a half I was there, I was working on a ward one night and I, I went to sleep at seven in the morning and I got a wake up call about ten, and they wanted to see me down at headquarters. So I went down to the headquarters. And they asked me what religion I was and I told them, well, I was Catholic and they said, "Well fine, thank you." And hell, "What's this about?" "Well, that's alright, that's all we wanted to know." It's what, could've asked the runner that same question. Well, I went back to sleep and about a week later, why they called me into headquarters again and asked me what religion I was and I told them and they said, "Good, you're the new assistant to the Catholic chaplain." And of course our chaplain had become ill and was evacuated to Japan and then I assumed the responsibility of taking care of some of the religious needs of the Catholics and some of the other wounded at the hospital, and I had a Korean interpreter at my disposal so, and a Jeep, so we had a Columban Mission down in the town of Wonju and ah--for any of those soldiers that were passing away and needed a last rights of the Church, why, we would buzz down to Wonju and pick up the, the missionary and he would come up and give the troops the last rights of the Church. And then during the week, I, during the times when we weren't doing that, why I would be going through the wards and writing letters for some of the patients who were unable to write, and I would answer some of the mail for them and I would hold little prayer services in the chapel and things of that sort.

Mik: Was that difficult work or rewarding work?

Julius: Well, it was kinda rewarding work. I kinda enjoyed it. I've always liked to help people out and I guess maybe that's why I got into that medical field. Maybe they knew I liked to help people, so they put me in the medics. But, ah, I did get a few letters from parents thanking me, and I had one experience where my dad had wrote me a letter. And he asked me if I knew of a fellow Marine, not a fellow Marine, but a Marine by the name of Jerry—I won't mention his last name—that he had worked with Jerry's dad on the railroad. And when Jerry's dad found out that I was at the 11th Evacuation Hospital, he wanted me to check up on his son, Jerry. So about the same time that I got that letter I had just made arrangements for the missionary from

Wonju to give Jerry the last rights. And Jerry had been run on the kidney machine, but he had passed away. And when I got out about, oh, it was about two months after I left Korea, I had gone to Jerry's parents' house and assured them that he had gotten the last rights of the church and that meant very much to them.

Mik: That's amazing, isn't it, that the connection that your dad and his dad--

Julius: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And they, they worked together and my dad just mentioned, "Well, the kid is at the evac hospital, you know." "Oh, well, that's where my son is wounded over there, ya know." And later I had to go and tell them that.

Mik: What was the mortality rate?

Julius: Well, our hospital from 1951, from about June 1951 until July of 1953, the end of July, took care of 28,000 wounded. And the mortality rate was, oh, a couple percent from the hospital. We had suffered--I can't recall, I think it was like 37,000 killed in action, or killed over in Korea and we had a percentage of that.

Mik: I understand that the death rate was actually lower in Korea because of the medical, that people were able to get the care faster.

Julius: Right. A lot, a lot more so than World War II. I think I read an article on World War II, I think they lost like about 9,000 soldiers a week. We lost about 900 a week. So there was quite a difference there.

Mik: You also lost as much in those three years as almost all of Vietnam.

Julius: Right. When I made the revisit to Korea in 2002 I was able to attend the ceremony at the Korean National Cemetery on June twenty-five of 2002, which was the fifty-second anniversary of the start of the Korean War. And it was quite an experience. They, at that time, they had just found about sixty remains of some South Korean soldiers and they were being entombed in that cemetery there. Ah--was quite, quite a thing.

Mik: When you wrote letters for people, you never had to write letters to parents?

Julius: I, I wrote letters to the parents, if requested by the boys that were in the hospital, yeah.

Mik: But I mean you wouldn't have to write and inform them--

Julius: No.

Mik: That would be taken care of--

- Julius: That was taken care of by the government, yes. They have a special team that goes and ah--comes to the house and gives them the news.
- Mik: Was that emotional, writing the letters for the--
- Julius: It was kind of, yeah, but the rewarding part was, after I would sometimes get a letter back. I always didn't get a letter back, but some, I got a few back. And that made me really feel good that I did something to make the parents feel a lot better.
- Mik: What kind of things would they ask you to tell their parents?
- Julius: Oh, ya know, well, they'd say, ya know, we're doing fine, hopefully we'll make it home, we're gonna be being evacuated and, and, ya know, keep praying.
- Mik: Did they sometimes make it sound better than they were?
- Julius: Most of the time, most of the time, yeah.
- Mik: That's pretty common, we run into people that were severely wounded and their main concern was that their parents not worry so much.
- Julius: Right.
- Mik: They weren't that worried about themselves, but they didn't want their parents to worry.
- Julius: We have been holding reunions with members of our evac hospital, those that were there toward the end. And about three years ago, we had an ad in the VFW magazine for members of the 11th Evac to attend a reunion. And we had gotten two calls from people or soldiers that had been taken care of by us at the 11th Evacuation Hospital. And they requested that they, if they could come to our reunion and thank us for the job that they did. **[End of Tape WCKOR049]** *Ah--one was a an Al Kalinowski[?], ah, he was a Marine, stepped on a land mine and had both legs taken off. He was evacuated to the hospital ship and then later came back from the hospital ship to the evacuation hospital to be run on the kidney machine. There was Andrew, ah, Hisler[?] and he hit a, he was laying a camo wire and fortunately they had a helicopter—***[Start of Tape WCKOR050]**
- Mik: I was just thinking of working in a hospital and how it must always be emotional working with people who were ill, but working at an evac hospital, you have some people that are ill, but you must have seen everything. I mean that's pretty awful to have limbs blown off.
- Julius: It is. It's a traumatic thing for, especially those that have them. And, you know, how do you tell them? Because they're anesthetized and they're coming to and they can't feel the pain and they don't know they don't have their limbs, you know.

- Mik: So I would think it would've been pretty important for you to be even-keeled and sort of a stabilizing force for these--
- Julius: You almost have to be, yeah. You gotta hold it back yourself sometimes. You know, to give those people courage that, and you got to care for people. If you don't care for people, then that's not the job to be in.
- Mik: Did it ever feel like it was just too much?
- Julius: No. There was something different everyday. It, you know, wasn't the same--all like going to a same machine and punching the same old thing. It ah, it was always a different patient and always a different wound or a different something to take care of, and although we did have--we did have some fun once in awhile. You know, some of the patients, funny things happened you know. And we laughed about and ah--
- Mik: Different everyday?
- Julius: Yes, and one thing that happened to me at the time that I got drafted, there was a friend of mine who was at the draft board and his name was Gordon. And we were sitting there waiting for our number to be called and pretty soon they called Gordon and he said, "Well," he said, "I'll be going right home," he says, "When I, when I get done here," he says, "Because I can't see a thing without these glasses." I says, "Okay Gordon, good luck to ya." So, I'm over in Korea and this was about a year later, and ah--I look at the new admissions on to the ward and I see ah--US 55191 and the number is close to mine. And I thought, I looked at the name and it's Gordon Benway, my friend Gordon Benway. I went over to his bed and I kicked the bed and I said, "Gordon, what are you doing here?" I said, "The last time I saw you, you were at the draft board telling me you were going home cause you couldn't see a thing without your glasses." And I says, "They put you right up front so you couldn't miss a thing huh?" [laughs] He said, "Yeah." [laughs] So anyway Gordon was being evacuated and going to Japan and then heading home and I said, "Well, when you get home," I said, "You just walk right past the house, stop in, say hello to ma and pa, and tell 'em we're doing good," [laughs]. He did. So there's funny things, you know.
- Mik: You said something about playing practical jokes. Was that rampant?
- Julius: Oh, yeah. You know, like I said, we had two shifts and sometimes the shifts were longer and when it was hot, you know, and the people would be laying there and they had their arms sticking out from underneath the mosquito bar, why we'd fill their hand up with shaving cream and then tickle their nose with a straw, you know. And of course they would slap their face and end up with all this shaving cream all over their face, you know and--but we did all kinds of things [laughs]. But it was just to, kind of keep our sanity [laughs].

- Mik: Oh, I would think so, I mean, you're there dealing with the worst the world can throw at you, and yet you're kids.
- Julius: Yeah. And we would, ah, we would have little parties, you know. We'd get a package from home and it would have sausages in it and stuff, you know, and of course we didn't have electricity in our tents at that time. We were still using kerosene lamps, and we'd have these kerosene lamp in the center of a small table with all the sausage and crackers and cookies around, you know. And we'd probably celebrate Christmas maybe four, five times a month, you know. But it was always a--always a good time. And occasionally, we would have--some of the USO people would come around had actors like Jan Sterling and Piper Laurie and some of the other US shows, USO shows that would come along. And we would take the ambulatory patients that were able to get out and we'd have some benches out there for them to sit on or the wheelchairs and so they could enjoy some of the things that were going on, try to cheer 'em up and so forth.
- Mik: Now when they did a show, they would come to the hospital?
- Julius: They'd come to the hospital.
- Mik: And they'd bring their stage?
- Julius: We had a little stage that we had made up especially for them, when they would come. Just kind of a make shift thing, you know. So they would be above the--the people sitting on the ground or on the wheelchairs and so forth.
- Mik: That must've been a great feeling.
- Julius: It was, it was, yeah. And then, of course, it was a treat to have a movie star sit at your table, you know, when you were eating [laughs]. And ah--
- Mik: Piper Laurie sat at your table.
- Julius: Yeah--
- Mik: Did she?
- Julius: Yeah, she did, yeah [laughs]. Yeah.
- Mik: And what pleasantries did you exchange with her?
- Julius: Oh, you know [laughs]. Talk about girlfriends back home and home time, you know. Things of that sort. Yeah. Great.
- Mik: How often did have to be on guard duty?

Julius: We probably walked guard maybe every two weeks. We would go through the enlisted ranks and then walk the perimeter; we would walk two hours and off four hours and back on for another two hours. And I know one night I was walking guard and we had these salamander stoves, and sometimes somebody would turn 'em up too high and the chimney would get red hot and all of a sudden the sparks would come flying out of the tent, I mean out of the stack and land on the tent and start the tent on fire and all and smolder. And I was walking guard in a military manner one night and this happened, and when I got off my shift I went in the tent, you know, and the song popular at that time was "Don't Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes." So I start singing that as I walked in [laughs]. Course I got a few helmets and some shoes, few other things thrown at me, but ah--[laughs] you could see the star light through the holes in the top of the tent [laughs]. It was funny.

Mik: What is a salamander stove?

Julius: It's a small metal stove that can be used either for wood, for coal, charcoal, or have a small unit, oil unit--burning unit put in there and then the oil is outside, and then gravity flow flows into it so it's always in the bottom of the stove. Burns a lot of fuel sometimes, doesn't give you very much heat. Right around it, it's very comfortable, but you get about 3 feet away, it starts cooling off very fast.

Mik: And you said something about during the monsoons, and it's a little wet?

Julius: Yeah, a little wet, yeah. We, we were able to, toward the end, our tents were ah--equipped with wooden floors so that we wouldn't have our shoes and things in the mud, ya know. We were a little bit better off than those infantry men that were on the line living in bunkers and so forth. Ah--it was ah--like I say, it was a little advantage over them, but--

Mik: What was the fuel used with the bigger stoves that were heating up the--

Julius: They used a, they used a diesel fuel or oil, diesel oil. And once in awhile, they would freeze up and actually what happened is the fuel oil jelled and then was not able to run through the tubing and so we would have to warm that up before it got into the burner. Sometimes it caused a little problem with that.

Mik: Now why were those outside of the tents?

Julius: Ah--for the exhaust purposes. The fuels that they were burning.

Mik: Oh, cause you didn't want everybody to die.

Julius: No, asphyxiate, yeah right [laughs]. Yeah [laughs].

Mik: What was your chow like?



Julius: Most of the time it was fairly good, but it seemed like when the boatload of certain foods came in, why, we would have that quite often. We prepared, ah--we had a mess hall and it was prepared there. We had a supply depot down in Wonju and the trucks would go down and pick up provisions down in Wonju, and bring 'em back every day. Sometime we would have frozen pork, and turkey, and ground beef, and some of the boys think of it as the SOS, ya know, ah--[laughs]. Same old stuff, you know, but--and then we had the green dehydrated eggs and things of that sort, you know.

Mik: So the boys on the line would've been pretty envious of that.

Julius: You bet yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, once in awhile we would have C-rations, but not too often. I had gone to Japan on R&R and I went to Seoul, at Kimpo, their base there and when I arrived, they mentioned that there was hot C-rations being served in the mess hall, and I thought, "Boy, hot C-rations, now that's a deal." So I walked through the door and here was a fellow had a fifty-five gallon drum cut in half and in there was an immersion heater with all the cans of C-rations and he had a tongs and he reached in there and he threw you a can and the can was so hot, you couldn't hold it and inside the spaghetti and meatballs was still froze [laughs]. So ah--

Mik: Relatively speaking--

Julius: Yeah, hot rations in the C hall didn't mean much, but of course after we were in Japan, ah--well then we kind of ate high on the hog and walked the dog for about five days and then we were back over to Korea again doing the same old thing.

Mik: Do you remember the Christmas you spent at the hospital?

Julius: Yes, yeah we, ah--my mother had sent a Christmas tree, small artificial Christmas tree with decorations. And we set that up and we saved all our packages for a nice party and then Delmer Berg, he was from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and I were invited over to Medical Ward that we had worked on that week. And the nurses at the ward there gave us a bottle of Southern Comfort because we did a very good job. So we had some of that, and we had a party in the lab. We took our Southern Comfort and we mixed that up with a little ice cream powder and we made a drink called Sweet Lucy. And everybody celebrated [laughs] Christmas Eve and at midnight, why, I took a deuce and a half truck with a few other, some patients and some of the members of the hospital, and we went to Wonju where they had midnight mass for, for all the soldiers there, and it was quite an event.

Mik: I would think that would sort of stick out of--you probably went to many midnight masses on Christmas [unintelligible] and probably--

Julius: But this one was a little special [laughs]. Yeah.

- Mik: Did it make you closer to your religion? To be in that kind of a situation?
- Julius: I think so, yeah. We're always supposed to take care of our brothers and--we sure did.
- Mik: And I would think as a kid, if you're ever gonna think of spiritual things, that you would find yourself when you were facing North Koreans everyday.
- Julius: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You have to be thankful for what you got. My wife tells me be thankful you're healthy everyday, yeah.
- Mik: So tell me about getting out?
- Julius: We left in July, and it was on the Fourth of July. We left our unit and we went down to Pusan and we took a train and it took about eighteen hours to get to Pusan from Wonju. On the way there we stopped at Taegu and wouldn't you know, one of the four fellows I was drafted with got on that train at Taegu. And Leon happened to have a little bottle with him and the four of us celebrated [laughs] that we were going home. We were in Pusan for about ten days and then we loaded up on the ship and started back to U.S. The ship we were on was the one, the first ship to land in the U.S. the day the cease-fire was signed on July 27th of 1953. So as we unloaded off the ship, why, we had the Can-Can Girls there with the confetti and all of the serpentine and all the little fancy things going on and we were pretty proud to be the first ones to get to the U.S. the day the cease-fire was signed. But about fifteen minutes after that, we were loaded on the troop train and we were on our way to Fort Carson in Colorado to get mustered out. And we were there about four days and, in the meantime, the Milwaukee Journal had found out our--WTMJ was, they found out the boys that were on that ship from Wisconsin, and they, ah, they broadcast it on the radio. So I was going to surprise my folks when I got to Milwaukee and give 'em a call, and when I called 'em, they said, "Well, where are ya? How come you haven't called ten days ago? We knew you were home." [laughs] So that blew that out of the water [laughs].
- Mik: But they weren't grateful for the call at all, were they?
- Julius: Yeah--[laughs]. No.
- Mik: Did you stay involved in medical pursuit at all?
- Julius: No, I didn't. I, ah, I had an opportunity. My sister was a registered nurse and she worked for a small clinic in Milwaukee and the doctors had offered to pick up some of my costs going to medical school, but I had, I had enough at that time. And I didn't think I wanted to do that. So I had been working for Woolworth Company and I went back to work for Woolworth Company and became a manager, managing stores and then later went into my own business with the Ben Franklin Business.

Mik: Did you feel like the Korean vets were ignored at all?

Julius: Well, I had a feeling that when I come home, some of the people said, "Well, where have you been? You been on vacation?" "Yeah, I've been on a vacation. Been gone for two years." And we, ah--most of us that were drafted had jobs, and families, or something to go back to. And we didn't worry about it, we just went back to where we had ended off before we went into the war. And I never took advantage of any of the benefits that the GI's got. I couldn't get a loan; I'd made my living, was making too much and so I didn't depend on 'em for anything, so-- But if I'd had to do over again, I would do it again. I had a good experience and met a lot of friends. I'll be meeting my friends in the first week in October again down in Florida, if it's still there [laughs] after the hurricanes.

Mik: Two more hurricanes by then.

Julius: Two more, two more are coming [laughs] and, oh, we talk of all our good times, and the bad times, and then we meet some of these patients that we took care of, and they thank us for saving their lives and that means a lot. It really does.

Mik: Were you a different person when you came back than you were when you left?

Julius: I think I was, yeah. Yeah.

Mik: You mentioned that the doctors, the officers, and the nurses, and the non-commission guys, they all had their own compounds?

Julius: Yes.

Mik: Was there much interaction other than in the wards?

Julius: Oh, there was interactions in the wards. And some of the nurses were very friendly, you know. And ah, and the doctors and always, but there always was that rank, you know, don't fraternize with the officers, you know, so we didn't. We had our own little non-commissioned officers' tent, you know, and we'd go in there and we'd have a beer and we'd laugh and poke fun out of one another. If something happened during the day, or you pulled a boob or [laughs], you know, you could, you knew you were gonna hear about it later on. Sooner or later, there were no secrets there [laughs], yeah.

Mik: But that never happened to you?

Julius: No, no, no, no [laughs]. I had mentioned about my friend, Christopher Lackus. He would always tell me that I was one cliché after another, so I never did know what a cliché was [laughs]. But that's ah [laughs] here or there.

Mik: You said that you shared a tent with him.

Julius: Yes.

Mik: But was it just him or were there other--

Julius: No, there were others, there were others with us, but he was right next to me. Yeah. We had about nine, usually nine in colder weather we would try to get ten in there, but squeeze another bunk in there to get that extra gallon of fuel. But most of the time there were nine.

Mik: So I would think that in a year of sharing a tent with a bunch of guys, you'd get pretty close to them and then there would be a couple that you never wanted to see again.

Julius: [Laughs] Yeah, most of the--most of the fellas that were there were good--good sports, and most of 'em were, there were some regular Army that were enlisted personnel, but most of us were U.S. We were all drafted and we were there to do a job and our sight was set on getting that job done. Rank was frozen at the time that I arrived there and it took me about nine months to become a PFC. And I was doing a job of probably a sergeant or corporal for sure and, so one day I made my PFC and I saw that up on the board said, "Wow, I finally get a raise in this army." And the next month I was made a corporal. And I, "Wow, two months I went from a private E-2 up to a corporal." And my enlisted term of service was coming to an end and I got called into headquarters and I was asked if I would like to extend for a few more months. And the warrant officer that was there, I looked at him and I said, "Mr., Portman, the Army hasn't got enough rank to keep me in it." And I saw a little tear in his eye [laughs]. Because it was tough to keep fellows over there, yeah [laughs].

Mik: So another stripe or --

Julius: Just for a couple more months.

Mik: So you didn't have any regrets about leaving?

Julius: No, no, no. I was, I was getting ready to go home. I was there thirteen months, so--

Mik: When you mention the mess hall, was it one mess hall for everybody, or did each of the compounds have their own mess?

Julius: There was a mess hall for the patients, their food was delivered to the wards and the officers would eat by themselves. And the enlisted men had a tent that we ate in. It was, as you see, M\*A\*S\*H on TV, the mess hall in M\*A\*S\*H is the same as that we had, you know, same as Klinger and the bunch ate in, you know.

Mik: Except there the doctors all ate with the nurses and the enlisted men--

- Julius: Um hmm, yeah, ours were more separated. They ate the same food we did, but it just wasn't that camaraderie between the two. The joking and the pushing and shoving and so forth [laughs].
- Mik: And you never got shaving cream on your face.
- Julius: I won't say [laughs]. There was a little trick with warm water too, but--[laughs].
- Mik: Yeah, I know that trick.
- Julius: [Laughs] But yeah, we had, we had a good bunch. And when we get together, you know, we have a great time. And like I said, I mentioned the revisit program was great. To go to Inchon at Green Beach to see where the Marines made the invasion and to go to the Korean Memorial Cemetery, to be there for the ceremony and the war museum, to be up on Panmunjom, to visit Freedom Village and the Bridge of No Return. It was, ah--it was quite shaking, I had a hard time once in awhile there.
- Mik: When you mentioned the cemetery, what would happen to your patients who didn't make it?
- Julius: Most of the patients went through grave registration and then were shipped back home. Most of them were.
- Mik: I think that probably does it. You guys have any questions?
- Unknown: One thing I was curious about; you said you had a psych ward, was there a lot of problems, guys just going over the edge?
- Julius: There were a few that were in the psych ward. And ah--
- Mik: Shell-shock type of thing?
- Julius: Yeah, tough when you're under pressure for a long, long time, and ah--and you know, seeing your friends go, and it wears on sometimes.
- Mik: Did you ever have duty in the--
- Julius: Yes I did, yeah.
- Mik: And how did that--those symptoms manifest. What were they?
- Julius: Oh, they would start out in the units, you know, with the soldiers fighting amongst one another, and disobeying orders and then finally, just kinda going off the deep end, you know. And they just couldn't take no more, and leaving their positions, and things of that sort. Then they would bring them in for medical care and some of 'em were treated with medication and so forth and others had to be taken back to the

States or Japan for treatment. Either in Madigan or Fitzsimmons or some of the other Army hospitals.

Mik: Was there ever a danger from any of those patients?

Julius: Oh, they would get a little violent, you know, but there was usually enough help there to control the situation. And mattresses are very nice to take punches with [laughs]. You hold 'em up in front of you, you know, yeah. But yeah, there weren't many, but there were enough, you know, where people were stressed out and they just needed some time to get together again.

Mik: And did you have a lot of cases of, I know the winter, at least the first winter was really hard on people, did you have to deal much with frozen feet?

Julius: We, we had some, but not as much as they had with the first year. Most of ours was by neglect, people not taking care of themselves, their feet properly--and becoming frostbitten. The first boots that we had were sort of like a Sorel boot that they have, but we wore a three pair of socks instead of a felt liner in 'em. If your foot was a size nine, you would start out with a size ten sock, the next sock would be an eleven and the next one would be a twelve, and your boot would be a size twelve. And then you had these three layers of socks on while your feet would sweat and of course the wool would kinda shrink and hold your toes together. Why, you would get poor circulation and then of course your feet could get cold and start to freeze and, but when the Mickey Mouse boots came into effect, they were a lot better. But still, you had to change your socks quite often, otherwise condensation built up inside those boots and you ended up with the same thing. Some of the cases that I did see, I didn't see too many GI's with frozen toes that had to be taken off, but I did see some Koreans, and of course their equipment was not, not that good--as ours. We took care of some United Nation troops, the Republic of Korea Army troops, plus U.S. soldiers and some Marines.

Mik: How about civilians?

Julius: We had some civilians that we took care of too.

Mik: And what was that usually?

Julius: Those were cases that would come like through an orphanage or something like that, where they couldn't, couldn't take care of them.

Mik: What about prisoners of war?

Julius: We had one prisoner of war and he was, happened to be a Chinese. And he was wounded and they tried to talk to him and interrogate him, and he wasn't saying anything and somebody said, "Well, let him die." And then he started to speak a little English. But he was the only one that went through our hospital.

Mik: No babies delivered?

Julius: No, none that I know of.

Mik: [Laughs].

Julius: [Laughs]. But we did have a few children and so forth, and we did have a boy that I mentioned in our conversation before the interview about, he was a shoeshine boy or cabin boy, whichever you wanna call it. And he took care of cleaning some of the tents and the GI's gave him food and clothing and some shelter and then later, as the unit left, why, the boys chipped in and gave enough money to a Papasan there to put him through school. And he later became a major in the Korean Army and came to Washington D.C. on some military business and did look up one of the members from our hospital and they had a nice reunion, and ah--

Mik: Were there a number of boys?

Julius: We had about four in the unit. The cooks had one to help clean up around and then the motor pool had one, the fire--we had a little fire brigade and they had one in the fire brigade there. And, ah, and I think they had one around to dispense reefer, cleaning up and the things of that sort?

Mik: What was the security like in the hospital? Just the fence that you would walk round?

Julius: We had the barbwire fence and we had some machine gun parapets and stuff on the outer rims and bunkers, ah--and then just the guards walking.

Mik: And was there ever any problems?

Julius: Oh, we had problems with the people trying to infiltrate, to get inside, to get some medical supplies or something. Or steal fuel or food supplies, things of that sort. We had some Korean workers that worked for us doing laundry and they lived outside the compound, and every morning they would come in through the compound to start doing their job and we had an incident there. We had one of the troops was, we nicknamed him Rinso, and he was walking guard and they--he saw this movement and it was dark, **[End of Tape WCKOR050]** *early in the morning and ah—he--*

**[End of Interview]**