

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**KENNETH G. REICH**  
Supply Sergeant, Army, Korean War.

1996

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**Reich, Kenneth G.**, (1929-2002). Oral History Interview, 1996.

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

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 50 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

Kenneth G. Reich, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin native, discusses his service during the Korean War as a supply specialist in the 443<sup>rd</sup> Quartermaster Base Depot. Reich describes enlisting, trying to get into an engineering or chemistry unit, and basic training at Camp Atterbury (Indiana). He describes the shortened, intensive training and having Friday night complaint sessions with the company commander. Reich reflects on training with only white soldiers, and serving alongside black units in Korea that still seemed segregated. Transferred to the 790<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Reclamation Maintenance Company, he speaks of supply school at Fort Riley (Kansas), recreation while on leave, and being shipped to Korea aboard a Merchant Marines vessel. Reich portrays his first impression of Korea as “filthy” and not having much to do for thirty days until the equipment arrived. He describes duty as the supply sergeant, transporting equipment by train, and living in cold weather. Reich talks about his unit’s role as a repair outfit for clothing and quartermaster equipment. He explains the unofficial barter system they used, such as trading spark plugs for C-rations. Stationed seven miles behind the front lines, he comments on occasionally having air raids, hearing news of the war from infantry officers, interacting with British and Australian troops, and working with Korean interpreters. Reich portrays visiting the open-air markets and getting dysentery from eating some local produce. He comments on religious services, sight seeing around Seoul, gambling, the alcohol sold at the Army clubs, and corresponding with home via typed letters. Reich recalls activity winding down after the Armistice was signed. He details the homecoming parade he was part of in Seattle, having a furlough, spending the rest of his service at Camp Carson (Colorado), and readjusting to civilian life, with emphasis on swear words and toilet flushing. Reich talks about his career in the drafting field, using the GI Bill for additional education, becoming involved with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and his impression of how Korean War veterans fit into the veterans’ organization.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Reich (1929-2002) served in the Army from 1950 to 1953. After the war, he returned to his drafting career in Milwaukee and attended night school at the University of Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996  
Transcribed by Karen M. Emery, WDVA staff, 1999  
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011  
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**Transcribed Interview:**

Mark: Today's date is April the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Kenneth Reich of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a veteran of the Korean War. Good morning and thanks for coming in.

Reich: Good morning, Mark. Glad to be here.

Mark: Really appreciate it. I suppose we should start at the top, as they say. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to your entry into the military.

Reich: Okay. Well, I was born and raised in Milwaukee. I've lived there all my life except for three years in the Army.

Mark: Which part of town did you grow up in?

Reich: The north side, 20<sup>th</sup> and Locust, which is—if anyone is familiar with the Sears store on 21<sup>st</sup> and North Avenue, we're about six blocks north of there. That was kind of a landmark for the north side. Went to 21<sup>st</sup> Street school at 21<sup>st</sup> and Center and North Division High School at 12<sup>th</sup> and Center. Graduated from there and attended Marquette for a year and a half as a chemistry major and gave that up and went to work as an engraver's apprentice in 1949 at the whopping rate of sixty-five cents an hour. And spent, oh, about a year and a half there and then an opportunity opened at AC Sparkplug division of General Motors for draftsman, drafting apprenticeship, and so I moved to that job. Of course, in those days you had to work in the blueprint room prior to becoming a draftsman, which was good training because you knew which drawings made a good fit and which didn't. And I started at AC Sparkplug, I believe it was August of 1950, and I would be turning twenty-one in October, 1950. About that time, of course, the Korean War had already started in June. I knew my draft number would be up by the end of the year, and at that time the Army had two programs going. One is if you were drafted, you had two years of active duty and five years of reserve time, or five years of reserve obligation. If you opted for a three year straight-out enlistment, there was no future reserve obligation. And at that time many reservists were being called up for Korean duty because the Army had downsized considerably after World War II, so I opted for the additional year and enlisted on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1950. I spent an evening in one of the downtown hotels, I don't recall which one any more, after we were inducted. The next morning we took the old North Shore Electroliner to Fort Sheridan for processing—shots, interviews, that type of thing. Spent ten days there.

Mark: Spent ten days there?

Reich: Yeah.

Mark: I don't suppose you were taking tests and all that sort of thing for ten days?

Reich: Uh, no. We were getting shots, getting Army orientation. You know, how the military way works. I don't know, I had an interview, I think I put it in this thing here, but as an enlistee you were entitled to your branch of service. You got three choices, so I opted for the engineers because I wanted to be in the drafting field. A second option was also engineers but running blueprint machines, which I had done at AC Sparkplug prior to coming in. Third option was for the chemical corps since I had studied chemistry at Marquette. When my orders finally came through it said 467<sup>th</sup> Chemical Mortar Battalion and I thought, boy, that's great; I hit the chemical corps. It turned out to be an outfit operated about five hundred yards behind the infantry lobbing chemical mortar shells [laughs]—white phosphorous and the like. I took my basic training with that. I was shipped down to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, which is about thirty miles south of Indianapolis. [pause] Had five weeks of basic training there. They shortened up the training cycle; it used to be six weeks.

Mark: Because of the war, I presume?

Reich: Yeah, because of the lack of replacements overseas.

Mark: What sort of training did you do at Camp Atterbury? I mean, how much of it was on the rifle range, how much of it was in the classroom, how much of it was just marching around on the parade ground?

Reich: Oh, very little marching around. Everything was really heavy duty stuff. I mean, a lot of classes, short marches, I would say, that lasted maybe an hour or two but just kind of a conditioning thing, in addition to your PT or physical training-type thing, with a full pack and rifle and, you know, to get you accustomed to carrying that weight. Gradually they extended the length of the marches, you know. Rifle range was only one day, really. Also one day on infiltration course, crawling on your belly and avoiding obstacles. Sort of a realistic-like training. In fact, if I can deviate a little bit, we went down, we have relations in Indianapolis and we went down there and I said, "Let's go down and see the old camp once." We drove through the south end of the camp, which is now turned over to area reservists, and as we drove around I saw these two wooden platforms. I thought, gee, that looks familiar, as we pulled up and parked and walked over there and looked south of the platforms and here was this infiltration field that we had to crawl through, and the two platforms at that time held two 30-caliber machine guns that sprayed through the area to simulate combat conditions. Of course if you got your rear-end or your head too high, you were likely to get hit because it was all live ammo.

But the rest of the time was spent right within the company area, so to speak, and a lot of intensive training.

Mark: Now I went off to basic training, although it was about thirty years after you did, and there are certain adjustments that need to be made to military life. You know, the wearing of the uniform, all the conformity and that sort of thing. Did you have any difficulty adjusting to life in the Army?

Reich: Not that I recall. I mean it was a different regime, of course. You're up every morning at 5:30, or whatever, you know, you couldn't sack in if you wanted to, and that type of thing. Of course, lights out at 10 o'clock. Meals were at a regular time and all that. No, I guess I didn't have too much difficulty. Some of the draftees did because they were there against their will, really. A lot of people, they didn't exactly hate the Army but they hated being there at that time, you know. No, I was kind of gung-ho. I was willing to serve my time.

Mark: Another thing I remember from basic training is that it brought together people from all different parts of the country. I had been fortunate enough to travel around the country a little bit, I don't know if you had been or not, but I was still amazed at some of the differences within the country and how people sort of got along in basic training. Were there people from different regions of the country when you were in basic training?

Reich: Yes. Yes, there were. At basic training, yeah.

Mark: How did everyone get along?

Reich: Uh, we didn't have any violent fights or anything like that. I was there such a short period of time, like I say five weeks, but I don't recall any difficulties at all with the people. I do recall one item; I think I put it in my thing here. The company commander we had at that time, every Friday night he would hold what he called a "bitch session." Had a lot of empty barracks because the camp hadn't been filled up yet. After he had the GI party Friday night you could go over and attend this session. If you had any bellyaches to get off your mind, you did and the old man listened to you and made his comments pro or con, whatever he said. I can recall this to my dying day, that somebody complained that we hadn't been issued gloves yet and we were going to the rifle range shortly, and this was like mid- to late November of 1950 and it was pretty cold at night. And the captain said, "All the gloves that we have are being shipped to Korea because they're in short supply, so when you get your gloves you know where you're going." And after that everyone went to the PX and bought their own gloves. That became a moot issue. [laughs]

Mark: I suppose it did, yeah.

Reich: Yeah.

Mark: Now, at this time the military was desegregating.

Reich: Yes.

Mark: In your basic training, did you have, were there blacks and other minority groups in there by this time? Or was it still whites?

Reich: No. It was all white wherever I was. All throughout my time in the States, and I did a little over a year, from October of '50 until January of '52 before I left for overseas, it was all white. In fact, I don't recall any other troops on the post itself. Overseas it was a different matter. Of course, by that time it was 1952, but if we can jump ahead to that—

Mark: Sure.

Reich: Our company went over as an entire company. We had been trained in the States for a year. When we got there we were assigned a platoon of black soldiers, but they weren't trained in our field in the things that we did, so they slept in their own tent, or tents I should say. And they were assigned to guard duty jobs while we did our thing. While the Army was desegregated per se, it really wasn't in what I experienced.

Mark: So after basic training you went where? Just walk me through the steps of—

Reich: After basic I left this chemical mortar battalion and transferred on the same post to the company called the 790<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Reclamation Maintenance Company. And this company at that time was a reserve outfit that had been called up from Boston. All the cadre officers and non-coms were from Boston. And there were ten of us people transferred in there, and this was late December of 1950, so there were ten of us plus the cadre. Well, they didn't intend to start any training until after the holidays, so everyone got a five-day leave, either Christmas or New Years. After everyone returned, after New Years, then the outfit started filling up with draftees. As soon as they had the company, full company complement, then the training cycle began for basic training for these new people. Well, I already had it, which was another experience I had when I got back from my leave. I opted for New Years leave. I was told to report to the CO and wondered what I had done. He says, "I don't know. The old man wants to see ya." And I went in there and he said, "Here's your application for supply school. Sign it and we'll send you to Fort Riley for two months for training." Fort Riley, Kansas. And I said, "Sir, I don't know the first thing about Army supply." And this company I was assigned to at that time was a repair organization and within that organization they had two machine shop trucks and I thought, well, this would be my

bailiwick. I had four years of shop in high school and that would really be the thing. I'd like to get at the lathes and the drill presses and the milling machines and that type of thing. A second time he said, "Sign the paper and you can go to supply school." And I says, "I want to go work in the machine shop truck." And he says, "Look, do you want to go through basic training all over again with these guys we're bringing in now? Or would you rather go to supply school?" And so I signed the paper and I went after the third time that he prompted me. [laughs] It was a very good opportunity for me as it turned out in the end and I'm glad I went. Went out to Fort Riley for two months. It was all class work, no PT or anything, no GI party on Friday night, no Saturday inspection. Just Friday night after chow you were excused for the weekend.

Mark: And did you get off the post much? Did you get to go into town?

Reich: Yeah, Fort Riley. Well, we—in the classes we were in they had—the highest score got an extended weekend pass from Friday night until Monday morning. I won that three times out of eight weeks that I was there and went to Kansas City, Kansas and Missouri one weekend, Topeka one weekend and Wichita one weekend. One of the weeks two of us tied, so we both got an extended pass to go. It was interesting. Wichita, I thought, was a very nice, clean town and everything. It was great. At Fort Riley I was in a separate place called Camp Funston within Fort Riley and nearby was a WAC detachment, but we were never able to get over there. [laughs]

Mark: I suppose for obvious reasons.

Reich: Yeah. While I was at Atterbury I traveled around the area. Of course I met my wife in Indianapolis there.

Mark: Is that right?

Reich: But there was the nearby town, Franklin, and Edinburgh, and south of the camp were Columbus and Seymour. I can recall one incident in Seymour. As I say, this outfit was a lot of reserves and some of the reserves were being discharged as people were being trained and brought in there at higher grades, so one of our master sergeants, our field first, he was being released for duty and we went down to Seymour and kind of took over a bar. Most of our guys were from Wisconsin and Minnesota and Michigan so it was kind of a mid-northwestern clique. But we went down—twenty-three of us guys went down there, I can recall, including the sergeant, and every time it came for a drink, we'd order a case of beer and there'd be one bottle left over out of the case. We had a great time. One of the fellas from Appleton that was in our outfit, he was kind of a great promoter, and I can recall he cut off the master sergeant's tie right below the knot and he gave it to him and he says, "Here,



you're going back to the post this way tonight." Of course, we were pretty well in our cups by that time, you know. Yeah, as I mentioned in my thing, I used to go visit the USOs nearby and all that. I had a great time.

Mark: So how long was it until you got to Korea? Reading through here, Camp Stoneman, California you eventually ended up at.

Reich: Well, that's on the way out. That's where we got on the boat there. Well, I enlisted in October of '50, and in January of '52 was when we left for Korea. We left Atterbury and it was about a three day trip on the train. We took the southern route out through Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and up through LA, and then to Frisco, and Camp Stoneman was right outside of Frisco, and boarded a ship at that point. I think I was, we had—I think we were in Stoneman for just three days or so, getting all our gear aboard and paperwork straightened out. I recall I had one six-hour pass to go into San Francisco from 6:00 at night until midnight. We were very restricted there before we got on the boat.

Mark: And you went—why don't you describe the ship voyage to me?

Reich: Well, going over we were on a general class ship, which was a rather large ship. The ship was only half full because they were, the Merchant Marines were doing some maintenance work on it so we were loaded into the aft half of the ship when we got on. And we had—the bunks as I described in here, were, there were steel pipes that went from deck to deck, and attached to these steel pipes were steel frames, a "u" shaped frame that held canvas webbing, and these folded up against a pole for daytime storage when no one was sleeping in them so you could get through them without any problem, and fold it down, and they were stacked five high, and I first opted for an upper bunk. I thought, well, I don't have anyone above me or anything like that. It would be nice to have just the deck above me, and there was a little more room between. Between bunks really there was at the most eighteen inches. You know, if you turn over or something like that, you hit the guy above you, you know. And then someone—well, no, I'm sorry, I'll have to back up. I opted for a bottom bunk at first because if I rolled out of bed, it was only about six inches to the deck. Then someone said, "Well, you've got four other guys above you, you know. What if one of them gets seasick?" Well, that's when I changed to the upper bunk. [laughs]

Mark: Was that a wise move? Were people getting seasick?

Reich: Some did, but it really wasn't a lot of them, no. One of the fellas that worked for me got seasick. He was one of my supply clerks. He—big strapping guy from Port Huron, Michigan, healthy as a bear, and when we hit the swells outside of, after we passed through the Golden Gate Bridge, he started getting

queasy. We were issued a card, mess card, which was about the size of a business card, perhaps a little bit bigger, and this had a, this was all marked off all around the perimeter of the card and it says, "BLD," breakfast, lunch, dinner, and every time you went through the chow line they punched that so you couldn't go back through for seconds. Well, this guy got sick and he started to back off on his eating and I said, "Ben, you gotta eat something. You get it in your stomach you'll feel better. They tell me citrus is good for you. Go up there and get something to eat. Get some milk" and all that. Anyway, to make a long story short, we were on the ship sixteen days; he had three holes in his mess card when we got off the ship. I didn't experience any seasickness at all, and we had a pretty bad storm about the fifth or sixth day out. We ate at tables that were like forty-two inches off the deck. You ate standing up. They came out from the, it's not a wall on a ship, the bulkhead on the ship. And the way the ship pitched and rolled, you didn't have to ask to have anything passed. If you wanted the salt and pepper, you just waited until the ship pitched that way and it slid right down in front of you, you grab it on the way through.

Mark: So this voyage took how long?

Reich: Sixteen days.

Mark: Sixteen days?

Reich: Sixteen days.

Mark: And you landed right in Pusan?

Reich: Yeah, uh hum.

Mark: What were your first impressions of Korea?

Reich: Filthy. The people lived in hovels really and they grubbed for food. It was terrible conditions. I couldn't picture anything close to that in the States. Even if we talk about our core areas, like I live in Milwaukee, you know, where the poor people live and all that; it's a hundred times worse than that. The sanitation was absolutely zero. People would use the creeks and rivers as their toilet and further downstream someone would be washing their clothes in that same water, you know. Unbelievable. You got accustomed to it after awhile. We had our own thing. We had our own water trailers that the engineers treated. Our stuff was all sanitary. But the way the people lived—of course, they were under wartime conditions.

Mark: Was it a surprise to you? Had you been sort of briefed on what to expect?

- Reich: No. It was a surprise, yes. In fact, you know, many guys, they said, “Where’s Korea?” when the war broke out. It’s such a small country, really. A lot of people, they didn’t even know where they were going or have any concept. They knew it was in the Far East somewhere, you know.
- Mark: So when you landed in Pusan you had to get all, you had to get your units reorganized and get all set up to do your mission, I guess. Why don’t you describe what happened militarily once you landed.
- Reich: Well, I was supply sergeant for the outfit so I was in charge of all of our equipment. Our equipment came on a separate liberty ship. We only had a limited amount of equipment that came with us. We had one Jeep and one truck as far as vehicles are concerned. All of the tents and cots and that type of thing were already in Korea, we just moved into those. Your clothing—of course we changed clothing aboard ship. You got—class A’s were turned in aboard ship and you drew fatigues. You wore fatigues from there on until you got back to the States, outside of OD pants for wintertime. Those you could, they were issued, and the brown OD shirts. But when we got there, of course, I had to wait, we all had to wait for the rest of our equipment, the balance of our trucks, the machine shop trucks, all of the equipment, all of our mechanical equipment that we used to repair things, so it was kind of thirty days of not doing much until this equipment arrived. Of course I had to go aboard the ship and check everything off against the manifest that we had. Yes, we had seven two and a half ton trucks, there they are, one two-seven and three jeeps, one, two, three. I had two clerks assisting me, of course. We spent many hours getting all this stuff into shape and making sure everything was there before we moved up north. Then from there, all of our equipment was loaded on a train. The equipment was put on flatcars and we rode in passenger cars which really weren’t like our passenger cars here in the States. The seats were back-to-back and they were all wooden slats, kind of a contour—I can’t describe it for your tape, but they were like this and down. It was all wood slats. Very uncomfortable. In fact, we were on the train overnight and we wound up taking the blankets out of our duffel bags and sleeping on the floor underneath the seats, in the aisles. You couldn’t sleep on that seat. It was just impossible. And it, you know, a coal-burning thing, it was a narrow gauge train and moved rather slowly by our standards here in the States. It took us over twenty-four hours to go about two hundred-fifty miles.
- Mark: And of course it was winter when you got there?
- Reich: Yes.
- Mark: One of the things people talk about with the Korean War is the cold.
- Reich: Um hum.

- Mark: And you're from Wisconsin, which is also known for cold weather. How would you compare the two? I mean, in your estimation, was it colder there than you'd ever been in your life?
- Reich: Yes, it was, but it wasn't for an extended period. You get a cold snap like we get here. It wasn't like being in Manchuria where maybe it's thirty below all winter long. It's similar to our climate but it got—I mean, I've seen nights as low as thirty below zero, which we rarely get around here. I can recall one night—we slept in ten-man squad tents, and there were two oil-burning stoves in each tent. They were about two feet in diameter and about two feet high and it had a control on it to regulate the amount of oil. These were oil burning stoves, they had a control on it which went from 1 to 10. You turn that control up to 10 on these cold nights and set a five gallon can of water next to it for the next morning for cleaning up and shaving and that type of thing, and you'd have to break a quarter of an inch of ice in the morning before you got at that water, and the thing was sitting right next to the stove. But we were very comfortable sleeping. We were issued what they call arctic bags. There were two down-filled bags, one inside the other, and they had a satin lining, and you crawled in there and it was cold like a satin-lined shirt. When you zip that up, within thirty seconds you were toasty warm.
- Mark: Did the cold affect your operations at all? I mean, were there some times where it was just too cold to do your job, or did you somehow manage?
- Reich: No, it didn't bother our operations because we were inside of corrugated metal, large warehouse-type building, a hundred foot by four hundred foot. All the equipment was—sure it was cold, 'cause you had your feet on the floor, you know, and operate the machinery. You've got to put your gloves on at times, but it didn't prohibit you from doing your job.
- Mark: I see.
- Reich: You were out of the wind and out of the elements, didn't get snowed on or anything.
- Mark: So you were seven miles behind the front. Why don't you describe a little more precisely what your mission was and a typical day in your unit during the war.
- Reich: Well, the unit as a whole, as I say, we did repair work. Our unit repaired what—in the Army Quartermaster Corps they have five classes of items that are issued. I'm trying to recall; I hope I have these all correctly. Class One was food. Class Two was clothing. Class Three was petroleum oil and lubricants, or fuel oil we called it. Class Four was quartermaster equipment.

And Five, I don't remember. At any rate, we were, we handled Class Two and Four. So of the equipment in Class Four, the quartermaster issued items like portable shower units, portable laundry units, all the stoves that the cooks used, the immersion heaters that you dumped your mess kit in after you had been done eating, clean it out. All that type of equipment that a company needs to operate but it doesn't include their trucks or their weapons or anything like that. Well, any of these items that needed repair, they would come back down off the line, our mechanics would look at them. They're repairable, yes, okay, we'll do this to it and put it back in the stock to reissue to someone else. If you can't repair it, it's called Class X and it goes to the salvage depot and is shipped back to the States or somewhere to be salvaged. From the clothing aspect, it was similar in that, as an example, in the springtime when the troops on the line no longer needed the woolen ODs for wintertime they were, of course, issued fatigues. The woolens would come back down and they would be inspected, okay this is repairable, this is salvage, that type of thing, and if repairable it would go to the dry cleaning plant that we had, or laundry if it were soft clothing it would be laundered before repaired. We had tailors in our outfit that operated sewing machines much as the women would do in the factory in those days. Repair whatever was necessary and re-bale it and it went in a warehouse for reissue anytime someone else needed anything. My part of it, I was in the supply section. I had to make sure we had all the material that we needed to perform all this maintenance work. And in addition, we had a section of our warehouse that was devoted to companies that were on the line. As an example, the portable shower units or laundry units ran on gasoline engines and they were authorized to draw spark plugs, piston rings, air filters or the like, and we maintained a supply of those for troops to issue. My office had to generate the paperwork to make, not only to process their requests and, you know, incorporate these in our next draw to replenish our supplies, but then also to type up the requisitions that went to Japan and say, hey, I need this much within the next thirty days to keep our operation going here. Well, my hours were long. I spent many twelve, fourteen hour days. We'd only get off a half day a week. That was our pure off time.

Mark: So you were pretty busy?

Reich: And how. [laughs]

Mark: Did you have trouble getting supplies up there? I mean, I guess what I'm getting at is how well did the supply system work, from your perspective?

Reich: Uh, we didn't have any problems. I can't recall we were ever in short supply of anything. The only thing I can recall from outfits that would come down from the line to draw their goods—the way the Army regulations were set up at that time, as an example is spark plugs. The supply sergeant would say to

me, he says, “The Army authorizes me, you know, five plugs for the next two weeks.” He says, “That ain’t enough. This stuff goes before that.” So we had a barter system going. Somehow we always managed to—I hope this doesn’t go back to the Pentagon—we always managed to have—

Mark: I won’t say anything.

Reich: —always managed to have more in stock than what you really needed in case of some day that something would happen that you wouldn’t have it. But things settled down, everything was pretty quiet, but we’d make a deal with these guys. “Okay, you want more spark plugs. Here, I’ve got a box of a dozen. What have you got?” There was never any money changed hands, but since we were a repair outfit I can recall one of the examples, one of the items that the quartermaster issued and we repaired were ice cream makers and storage units. We’d make two and a half gallons of ice cream at one time and we’d store forty gallons of ice cream. And we always had to test these units. Get your mess sergeant to give us some ice cream mix and it’ll help us through the lousy chow that we have, you know. Or I’ll trade you for C-rations. C-rations to us were good. The food we got was canned food from the States and we had, the cooks we had, regardless of race—I mean we had black ones, we had white ones—the food wasn’t very good. So we had this barter system: a case of C-rations, I’ll give you a case of spark plugs. Then both of us were happy. [laughs]

Mark: Now, I suppose the lines were fairly stable up there at that point?

Reich: Yes, they were.

Mark: But were there times when you had to move?

Reich: No.

Mark: The lines didn’t fluctuate so that you had to “bug out” as they say?

Reich: Yeah, no, no.

Mark: You stayed stationary?

Reich: Yeah. We were always trained to be able to move, you know. Every so often they’d say, “Well, okay, let’s review this procedure again in case it happens” and all that. We did experience some air raids. We had foxholes set up nearby and we a lot of times, I shouldn’t say a lot but sometimes had to evacuate to jump in foxholes. But they were more or less of a nuisance thing. I mean, the bombing wasn’t right up onto our facility.

- Mark: Yeah. Now, seven miles isn't all that far. I suppose you could hear the fighting.
- Reich: You could hear artillery, [unintelligible]. You couldn't hear any small arms fire or anything like that. And of course the planes that were supporting the troops, they would fly over our area. But while it was seven miles from the lines, that was air miles; to get there by road it was probably more like twenty or twenty-five.
- Mark: That's probably true.
- Reich: Because the roads wind around the hills and valleys and all that.
- Mark: Did you get much of an idea of what was going on at the front? I mean, did you—perhaps some soldiers come through. What sort of, what did you know about the fighting, what was going on?
- Reich: Well, these supply sergeants that would come down and see us, we'd get, you know, front line info from them and, "Well, you know, we got booted out of Hill 503, you know, last week and now we had to move back," or "We're off duty from the line"—you know, the troops rotated in lines, I don't recall what their cycle was, but he says, "Next week we gotta go back and try and take Hill 706." I guess it was more than what was printed in the *Stars and Stripes* but it was just within our sector. I was on the western inner front and there were—while we serviced the entire 8<sup>th</sup> Army, not all the troops came into our depot because they were so remote from where we were. They just relied on the regular Army transportation system to get the stuff to them. But I, we did, if I can deviate a little bit—there was a United Nations effort over there and I met, we met some English troops which we affectionately refer to as Limeys. They were about a mile from us and we got along very well with them. I was near Kimble [Kimball?] Air Base. That was probably about, I don't know, by road maybe only about five or seven miles and got over there on occasion for one reason or another. But there was an Australian unit—these are Air Force units.
- Mark: Right.
- Reich: And a New Zealand unit stationed there and I got to know some of those boys just perchance. While they still speak the English language, it's different from what we're accustomed to, of course. Going down the streets of Yong Dong Po one night, I did see some Turkish troops that we tried to avoid because everyone said, "Boy they're mean, don't cross them," you know. They were one of the troops that carried the long swords yet. [laughs]

Mark: Yeah. Now, as for the Koreans, did you have much contact with them? You mentioned some in the notes you wrote up. Why don't you describe that a little bit of that to me.

Reich: Well, our contact primarily was using them as interpreters and we had some girls that did secretarial work for us, just strictly typing, typing of Army forms and that type of thing and some memos. We didn't thrive on paperwork over there. Stuff that would be in a memo in the States was word-of-mouth over there and that type thing. The general population, I never really got to know much of them. Things were so bad over there and the people were so hard-up and all that, by nature they would steal you blind if they could. Anything that was left unguarded or left laying somewheres, whether it had any value to them or not at the moment, it was snapped up because maybe they could sell it on the black market to someone else and get money or food for it, and that type of thing. I wandered through their markets a couple of times. They had open air markets. I have pictures of it at home, but you'd see these big round, it's about the diameter of your table here, tubs of rice that were, oh, maybe about a foot deep and just filled with rice. And all these vendors are in a row trying to hawk their product, you know. They have open air fish market, meat market. It wasn't like our meat market where you walk inside and everything's in a refrigerated case; the meat is hanging up on a hook somewheres, you know, and the flies are all over it in the summertime.

Mark: Not terribly appetizing to a kid from Milwaukee, I take it? [both laugh]

Reich: Yeah. And speaking of markets, you know, I had spent twenty months over there all told, but after—in the second summer I was there, we were always told do not eat the local food. And after you'd done without some of this fresh stuff for over a year, you get pretty desperate for it, so I was going through the market one day and I spotted a small watermelon, green ones like we have but they were round instead, and some berries. What was it? Was it strawberries? No, tomatoes that I had. And, oh, they looked so good. So I bought this one melon and I bought a few tomatoes and ate 'em and I had dysentery for about a week after that because their food is fertilized with human dung. They—in fact, our latrines were just a six-holer and underneath was a fifty-five gallon drum and these Koreans would come and pick all this up and add it to their honey carts, so to speak, you know, and that's what got spread on the field.

The experience with the interpreters was very good. I mean, they, I don't know where they learned the language, whether it was from occupation troops before or if they learned it in school or what, but they seemed to be pretty adept at understanding what you were saying. Of course, when you got to technical terms, it was a different story. But, generally, they kind of ramrodded—we had other indigenous people that did labor work for us and



they would translate into Korean, you know, what we wanted done, and “Get at it boys, and do it.”

Mark: In terms of free time, as you mentioned you didn’t have much but you had some.

Reich: Uh hum.

Mark: Describe the sort of after hours activities.

Reich: Well, the free time was on a Sunday. You got either the morning or afternoon off, you had your option. And church services were held either time. In fact, speaking of church services, I’m Lutheran by religion but the Army was set up, as you’re probably aware, you have a Christian priest or a Christian chaplain and you have a Jewish chaplain. At times, if there wasn’t a Christian chaplain available, a Jewish chaplain would do our service and they seemed to be trained in what they were doing, and I think this is marvelous the Army does that, that these people have the cross training to provide you with whatever you need. Maybe it wasn’t as professional as a Christian one might have been, but it got you through. But at any rate, in addition to church I had, amongst all this bargaining that I did, I had my own three quarter ton truck that I used to do all my errands in and on my half days I would squeeze in some side trips around Yong Dong Po and Seoul area and see some of the sights, so to speak. A lot of times I did walking, too, walk to just the outskirts of Seoul as an example and see some of the temples and that type of thing, and cemeteries. Their cemeteries are a whole different ballgame. If you’ve ever been there, they bury the people standing up and your head and shoulders are above ground and they put a mound over that. The way it was explained to me, that’s so this person can look—[End of Tape 1, Side A]—over his land for posterity.

Mark: No, I’ve never been there, although I’d like to some day. Um, you mentioned in here there really wasn’t much gambling, which is something a lot of people associate with life in the military. You didn’t see much of that, apparently?

Reich: No, not really. The one time I was up in Seoul for about six months—I was good friends with a colored master sergeant. He ran the administrative section of the office I was in at that time, I ran the supply section, and he used to run the company craps game on payday. That’s the only day it was run, and he had a craps table that he made himself. It was like a box with about eight inch high sides and probably about four feet long and about two foot wide, all lined with green velvet. I don’t know where he got it from; probably from some of the local people, I don’t know. And he would monitor all the bets that were placed around that table and take ten percent of the \_\_\_\_\_[?]. And that guy had money all month long. He never was broke before payday. But really

that's the only, outside as I mentioned in our penny ante Sheepshead or poker, I didn't really see much gambling.

Mark: What about drinking?

Reich: Oh, it was, I guess any time you had the chance to have some, you did. It kind of relieved the tension, I guess, or we thought it did. Yeah, there was a lot of it. Of course, for the most part we had 3.2 beer and we had access to certain—Canadian whiskey was shipped in to us but no stateside stuff. I can recall one place I was, the day before payday—of course the Army paid once a month at that time—they had what they called nickel and dime night. For a nickel you got a twelve-ounce can of beer, and for a dime you got a shot. And for a buck you could be feeling pretty good. By the time your buck was gone, you know. But, yeah, there was, I would say the drinking was very prevalent.

Mark: Was it to the point where it hindered operations?

Reich: No. No, I don't think so. It was an after hours type thing. I want to unwind a little bit after I've had dinner, you know. No, really, it didn't foster any fights or anything like that.

Mark: I see. It came from the Army?

Reich: Some did. The 3.2 did and the Canadian whiskey. You were allotted just so much; I mean, you couldn't get cases and cases of the stuff. If you drew your allotment on the first of the month—you had to pay for all this stuff. I mean you had like a little club there, you know, and the club would make income off of selling the stuff. It had to be paid for. It wasn't issued.

Mark: Yeah.

Reich: And if all the whiskey was gone by the fifteenth of the month, well, that's it fellas, that's it 'til the first of the month again. So it wasn't, I mean, they didn't bring it in by the truckload and say, "Here, we'll bring you another truckload when this is gone."

Mark: Yeah. Now as you mentioned, you were there twenty-two months, was it?

Reich: Twenty.

Mark: Twenty months. Did things change over time or did your job pretty much stay the same?

Reich: It stayed pretty much the same until the Armistice was signed in July of '53, then it slacked off quite a bit because all the action wasn't going on. There

was a little flurry right after because the units replenished right after the cease-fire, but after that it slowed down considerably. Up until, I would say nineteen of the twenty months I was there I was busy.

Mark: Oh, I want to go back just a little bit. In terms of staying in contact with the States and people at home and that sort of thing, did you have much contact with say your folks or a certain girl you met in Indiana at one time? Did you get to write letters and that sort of thing?

Reich: Oh, yeah. I wrote a lot of letters. I loved to write and the Army taught, well I shouldn't say taught me. I took typing in high school one semester but I had a refresher in the Army and all my paperwork was typed up, so I was not super on the typewriter but I could do twenty-five words a minute easily, so I typed a lot of my letters. After I'd be done with my twelve and fourteen hours, I'd go grab something to eat. Well, too early to go to bed yet, you know, and you grab a beer and go back to the typewriter and write a couple of letters, you know. And the letters go faster typing and you don't get writer's cramp and all that. Yeah, I wrote a lot of letters. And received a lot from the States, too, 'cause I wrote to many people. People that were from my church, my youth friends, you know, my wife, and everything.

Mark: Did you get a sense for how the war was perceived in the United States? Because it was in the headlines, of course, in 1950 and '51 but then it sort of faded back. Did you get a sense of how the war was playing, I guess you might say, back in the States?

Reich: Not that I can recall. I don't know. I wish I had all the letters yet to reread. No, I don't remember.

Mark: The Korean War is sometimes called the "forgotten war" and it was in a sense, I suppose, even forgotten while it was going on. And you were there late in the war, so I was wondering if you had a sense of the people back home not realizing that there was still a war going on and if you had any feelings about that? Apparently not.

Reich: Yeah, not that I can recall. Of course it's been over forty years. [laughs]

Mark: So you were there when the Armistice was signed?

Reich: Yes.

Mark: Why don't you just describe when you learned of the Armistice and the fighting was going to end, your recollections and how things changed. And then from that point, I suppose, we can just follow you back to the States, I guess.

Reich: Um hmm. Well, of course, everybody was considerably relieved. I mean that was the first joyous feeling and I'm sure many drinks were consumed in celebration of this thing. I think the second thing on everybody's mind immediately after that was how soon am I going home? I mean, the war is over, I did my points, I should be rotating. And from then on I think it was kind of a waiting, well, are my orders coming through tomorrow, I hope, type thing. It wasn't really tense but kind of a day-by-day thing hoping that you'd get your orders to go.

Mark: And you were home by the end of that summer it looks like. September?

Reich: Yeah.

Mark: You got to go home.

Reich: I got back to the States in Sep—well, it would have been late September, yeah. I was transferred back down to Pusan at the end of my, when my forty points were accumulated and processed out of there and, again, boarded ship and we had a thirteen-day trip back. Uneventful, beautiful weather, and landed in Seattle. I've seen many times in the VFW magazine and other articles that the Korean veterans never had a welcome back home as did the Vietnam vets. I had a different experience. When we landed in Seattle, they took us in open trucks to Fort Lawton, which is nearby, and drove us right through downtown Seattle. The streets were blocked off, they had girls out in the middle of the street throwing flowers to the guys in the truck, ticker-tape coming out of the office buildings, confetti and that type of thing. I had a real welcome back, I must say that. From Fort Lawton we were assigned to various areas for transportation out. At that time I was in what they called the 5<sup>th</sup> Army area which was the central part of the Midwest, central part of the States at that time. The 4<sup>th</sup> Army was in the south. All the guys would line up in different spots and they'd be going maybe to Alabama or something, but I was sent to Camp Carson, Colorado. At that time, when I arrived there, I had about three weeks left to go on my hitch and I wanted to serve the entire hitch because at the outbreak of the Korean thing, some guys that hadn't, that took an early out, were being called back. So I took two weeks of furlough time. I had accumulated six or eight weeks prior to that anyway and went back to Indianapolis to get my wife and visit with them for awhile, came back to Milwaukee to visit with my mother and stay with her. I was an only child and my mother and I lived together before I went in. When I had to report back we drove out in my mother's car and kind of made a vacation out of it. Got back there, so I had a week to go yet at the time I arrived, but I didn't have much duty. Just report in for some out-processing and PT in the morning and the rest of the time was your own, so we drove to Colorado Springs and Denver to see some of the area around until I got discharged.

- Mark: And so you're out of the Army now. When it came time to get your life back on track, what were your priorities? What were the first things you wanted to do with your new civilianhood, I guess you could say?
- Reich: Well, naturally I wanted to get back to my job. I had a military leave and they had to take me back according to law. But I wasn't in too much of a hurry. We got back to Milwaukee. I wanted to more or less be with my friends again that I hadn't been with for a year and a half, you know, or really three years while they were in the Army, have some fun with those people and do some of the things you hadn't done: bowling, or fishing, or whatever, you know.
- Mark: Just sort of hanging around and—
- Reich: Yeah.
- Mark: —getting used to civilian life at that time?
- Reich: Yeah, getting back in the swing. You didn't have to get up at 5:30 in the morning, go to bed at 10:00 at night, and shut off the lights. But it didn't last too long, as I remember. I don't know, two weeks maybe at the most before I went back to work. I was glad to get back to work and be in a regular routine again.
- Mark: And did you stay at that, how long did you stay at that job? The one you went back to.
- Reich: Oh, I stayed there until 1957, which would have been an additional four years.
- Mark: Yeah. That's a considerable amount of time. And you mentioned here that you used some educational benefits as well. You took some night courses?
- Reich: Yeah. Yeah, I did. The old University of Wisconsin used to be downtown, the campus, before they built the other one. At that time I had visions of being a mechanical engineer, so I took the math and the, oh, they had a shop course type of thing, and some of the English and that. I never completed it. I think I attended for about two years.
- Mark: Would you have gone had it not been for these veterans' benefits that you had earned? For education, I mean.
- Reich: Yeah, I probably would have, because after 1957 I moved into a different job. It was still in the drafting field but it was construction instead of manufacturing. I kind of worked myself off the board and into paperwork again and eventually wound up in the purchasing end of it. I went to night

school to take computer-related items, a purchasing course, joined the Purchasing Agents Association. I always enjoyed furthering my education. I always had a curious mind, you know. Learned more and more.

Mark: Yeah. Um, there were other benefits available to veterans, for example, home loans. I don't want to pry into your finances but I'm just curious to know if you used a veterans' home loan at any point.

Reich: No, I didn't, but it wasn't—the chief reason was that when we bought a house we bought it with my mother—three names on the house—and since she wasn't a veteran I wasn't entitled to get a veterans' loan for my portion of it so it had to be a straight loan. Otherwise I probably would have used it, yes.

Mark: Um, were there any sort of social adjustments you had to make back to civilian life? I noticed on here, for example, you mentioned something about language.

Reich: Uh hum.

Mark: What sort of little, everyday things did it take you to get used to being out of the Army?

Reich: Well, not using the “f” word so much. [laughs] Well, I mean, the other swear words are more or less common these days. You hear them on the TV but, you know—

Mark: Back in 1953, that wasn't nearly so prevalent, I take it?

Reich: Right, right, absolutely. The other thing, I don't recall if I put it in there, the other biggest adjustment I had was flushing the toilet after I was done.

Mark: You did?

Reich: Because I never had to do it overseas. After a year and a half I got out of the habit of doing it.

Mark: And it took you about how long to sort of “civilianize” yourself again?

Reich: I would say probably a good six months I think before everything really settled back down into what it was before.

Mark: Um, I've just got one last area that I want to cover and that involves veterans' organizations. You joined the VFW?

Reich: Yes.

- Mark: At what time and for what reason?
- Reich: I joined in 1970. Well, the way it was presented to me it was, you know, for veterans, maintaining the veterans' benefits and aiding and abetting them. I thought, well, I'll give it a whirl and see what it's like. Well, currently I'm a twenty-five-year member now. I got rather involved in it over the years. Commander twice, Quartermaster for thirteen years, and all kinds of other stuff I did. I never joined the Legion. I don't know why, but I guess in the VFW we're told many times to get more members, and when you talk to people that don't belong they say, "Well, no one ever asked me." And I guess that's what happened to me with the Legion. No one ever asked me to join the Legion and someone asked me to join the VFW and I did.
- Mark: Yeah, I was going to say, someone asked you. Do you remember who and what the circumstances were?
- Reich: Yeah. The guy's name was Tom Brass. He ran a tavern and restaurant in Brookfield, Wisconsin and belonged to the Brookfield post, so I joined that post.
- Mark: Would you say that your activities in the VFW were more for social reasons? You know, to talk with other veterans and be with other veterans, or is more political, the sort of political issues that veterans' organizations get involved in like flag burning and this sort of thing? Or is a combination of both? How would you characterize your reasons for involvement?
- Reich: A portion of it is both. The socializing. The political is rather minor as far as our post is concerned. I don't know about others. But the primary thing is fund raising, to have some fun so that we can send money to the VA hospitals, to King, Wisconsin, the old folks home, donate—we just sent a check down to the VA at Zablocki for their clothing fund for underwear. People can donate clothing and all that but they won't take underwear; underwear has to be bought new. We send money for Christmas funds to all the Veterans hospitals. That's the biggest part of what our post does, raising money to aid the veterans. And we help our own members who are destitute or hard up. If you need a Thanksgiving basket we'll do it or some money for Christmas or whatever. I would say that's probably seventy-five percent of our post activities.
- Mark: Now, as a Korean War veteran I suspect you're kind of a minority. I suspect you're kind of overshadowed by the World War II veterans, and then the Vietnam War veterans came in. How do the Korean War vets fit into these organizations? It's sometimes called the "forgotten war." I mean, do you feel that you've been forgotten by these groups? [pause in tape]

Mark: Yeah, so we were talking about the place of Korean War veterans in veterans' organizations.

Reich: Well, we were rather a minority within the organization. We did a survey in our post two years ago just for kicks. A little over fifty percent were Vietnam, or were World War II vets, and about twelve percent each were Korean and Vietnam vets, and then the balance was a smattering of Somalia and Desert Storm and that type of thing. I don't know. We, maybe we don't blow our own horn enough to get more attention, but I really don't—we're pretty close to the World War II vets age-wise, you know; there's only about five years difference in most cases so we kind of go along with what they do. We're kind of a different generation than the Vietnam or Desert Storm type thing.

Mark: Yeah. Now as I'm sure you are very well aware, there is a new Korean War memorial in Washington.

Reich: Uh hum.

Mark: Have you been there?

Reich: No, I haven't. I've seen pictures of it, but I haven't seen it.

Mark: What does that memorial mean to you as a Korean War veteran?

Reich: Well, it sure looks indicative to me of the way things operated over there in the squad. I can picture the guys in ponchos on a rainy day, with rifles with the points hanging down. I mean, the barrels hanging down so they don't get wet. While I wasn't on the lines, that's probably what those guys experienced marching as a squad unit, you know. I think for civilians, I would hope it conveys how the war was conducted and, you know, that this was a unit that operated by itself, and here they are. Perhaps if I saw it in person, I'd have other impressions of it. I don't know.

Mark: Um, those are all the standard questions that I have. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything that you believe we've skipped over?

Reich: Can't think of anything at the moment. Probably in the car on the way home I'll go, why didn't I mention this? [laughs]

Mark: Oh, undoubtedly. I always think of questions after these are over, too. But it's an imperfect science, the oral history interview. Well, thanks for coming in.

Reich: Okay. You're welcome.



Mark: This is very, very interesting. I really appreciate it.

**[End of Interview]**