

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN G. STODDARD
Medic and Food Supply Administrator, Army, Korean War.

2002

OH
15

OH
15

Stoddard, John G., (1928-). Oral History Interview, 2002.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 45 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John G. Stoddard, a Madison, Wisconsin veteran, discusses his Korean War service with the 74th Combat Engineers. Stoddard talks about volunteering for the draft while attending Notre Dame (Indiana), assignment to an artillery survey company in a Kentucky National Guard unit where he was resented for having college education, and volunteering for duty in Korea. He speaks of transportation to Japan, where he was assigned to a medical detachment of the 36th Combat Engineer Group, 74th Combat Engineer Battalion. Stoddard describes on-the-job training, learning to medicate soldiers and suture wounds, and transporting the wounded to aid stations and MASH units. Reassigned to the food supply section, he comments on procuring and distributing food supplies to the battalion. Stoddard tells of the hard Korean winters, lacking winter equipment and vehicle parts, and the difficulty of keeping vehicles operational in the cold climate. As one of the first Caucasians to be integrated into the previously all-Black unit, he talks about being welcomed as a replacement. Stoddard describes living in tents, food quality, getting an ice cream machine, and duty as a food service preparation inspector. He details being spooked by a mountain lion one night while on guard duty. Stoddard states he did not reenlist because of the Army policy that would require a year of stateside service before he could be redeployed to Korea. He touches on a few months of duty at Fort Riley (Kansas) “doing virtually nothing.” After being discharged, he talks about using the GI Bill to finish his bachelor’s degree and earn a master’s degree in sociology and his career in corrections. Stoddard discusses his work in the Wisconsin corrections system, raising a family, and working for the Studebaker Company.

Biographical Sketch:

Stoddard (1928-) served in the Army for three years, including service in Korea from July 1951 to July 1952. He was born in Indiana, grew up in Michigan, and after discharge he worked thirty-two years for the state of Wisconsin as a parole officer and corrections administrator, eventually settling in Madison.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2002

Transcribed by Benina Ramic, 2010 and Kate Stone, 2011

Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2012

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

- James: Okay, John. This is the 12th of June, 2002. I'm talking to John Stoddard. Where were you born, sir?
- John: I was born in southern Indiana, grew up in Michigan, started college, University in Detroit.
- James: When where you born?
- John: November 20th, 1928.
- James: Eleven, twenty-eight right?
- John: Right.
- James: Grew up in Michigan?
- John: Yup.
- James: Okay. So, what were you doing in the fifties—or in the forties, before the war?
- John: Well, actually I was a year too young to get involved in World War II. I finished high school in 1945 and started college then. Then in '46 I transferred to a small school, a college in Alabama, went there for two years and ran out of money and moved to Indiana, where I could find full-time employment with Studebaker Corporation. So I worked several years with Studebaker.
- James: In South Bend?
- John: In South Bend, and I was going to Notre Dame at the time. And in the autumn of nineteen—
- James: Excuse me. Can I ask you—
- John: Sure.
- James: In what, L&S school?
- John: Yeah. Well actually I started out in pre-med and through the time I was in Alabama I was taking mostly science courses: biology, chemistry. And when the money ran out, I went to South Bend and enrolled in Notre Dame, and by the autumn of 1950 it became abundantly clear as I was in my senior

year that I was gonna be drafted anyway, so I dropped out of my senior year in January of '51 and volunteered for the draft.

James: You volunteered for the draft? I thought you said it was automatic?

John: Well, it would've been had I continued; I'd have been deferred until I graduated, but—

James: Then you volunteered in the Army then?

John: Yeah, right. That way I could get in under the old draft law, which was—

James: The GI Bill you're talking about?

John: Right, right that's what I wanted. I was getting very tired of working full time in a factory and going to college full time and subsisting on five hours sleep at night.

James: Yeah, that's rough.

John: It was difficult. So actually, in some ways my approach to the military is a little bit different, but for me it was a break in the monotony and in the tedium of life. And, uh—

James: In February '51 you took the pledge, and where did they send you?

John: I started out at Fort Sheridan and ended up being sent then to Fort Bragg in North Carolina, where I spent the spring months and into the summer of 1951. I went into—there were about half a dozen of us from the West, Midwest I should say, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin, who were inducted into a southern Kentucky National Guard outfit who's activated. This was an interesting situation; this was a group of people that had a hard time putting one foot in front of the other. These were really the Jukes and the Kallikaks of our society. But it was rather abysmal living conditions. They resented us immensely because all of us were—

James: If you had been in college, of course, then you're down with ignoramuses.

John: Oh yes, we were the college boys, and we got the rottenest details.

James: Because the sergeant was sympathetic to the fellow uneducated.

John: Absolutely. Many of them were inter-related, members of the same family. So by midsummer, I decided hey, I'd volunteer to go to Korea just to get away from them. [laughs]

- James: Basic training, how long was it then?
- John: Well, eight weeks I think. And I was in an artillery survey company which was for us, it was a real piece of cake because it was just applied trigonometry. So I was rather, rather happy to leave them.
- James: And your MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] was—
- John: Artillery Surveyor. What that was I couldn't tell you at this point.
- I shipped out of San Francisco—actually out of, what, Pittsburgh I think was the point of embarkation, and I went to Japan where sub—
- James: By air or—
- John: No, by sea; nine and a half lovely days on the Pacific, in August. It was a lovely trip, if one could get over the fact that about a thousand people on the ship were perennially or constantly seasick. But I slept on deck every night and it was lovely, beautiful. In Japan somebody looked at my records and saw, "Hey, here's a guy that had a good bit of pre-med," so I was assigned to a medical detachment in Korea. I got to the—
- James: As a what?
- John: As a corpsman, I guess.
- James: But you hadn't had that kind of training?
- John: No I didn't. It was sort of on-the-job. I spent about six weeks, when I got to—I was assigned to a medical detachment at the 74th Combat Engineer Battalion, right in the front. And, uh, the physician there was an internist from the Twin Cities and he taught us—me particularly—how to suture using an orange to work with and the basics of medication. But six weeks in—
- James: Where were you stationed at?
- John: I was along the central front as part of the 8th Army. And I actually think there were—weren't there?—I thought there were three sectors and the 8th was in the center.
- James: What regiment were you in, do you remember?
- John: Oh heavens—that was the 74th Combat Engineer—this was the 36th Combat Engineer group. We had to pick, what, eight companies or ten companies? But the—

James: Were you busy?

John: Oh always, constantly. Our people were getting injured constantly.

James: Were you in a MASH unit or—

John: No, no, no, we were just a small medical attachment. We did emergency suturing—

James: Who would go to the MASH unit?

John: We would take anything serious to the MASH unit. On occasion, one occasion, one of our people got his hand caught in the gearbox of the Caterpillar and he had to be evacuated and I had to drive him about fifteen miles to a MASH unit for care. And every now and then somebody would get a mortar shell dropped on them.

James: It was about fifteen miles to the MASH hospital?

John: Just about, yeah. We were, we were pretty much up front. And after about six, seven weeks, the Major in charge of supply asked me to move over and take charge of the food service procuring, all of the food supplies for—

James: For a regiment or for this medical detachment?

John: No, for the Combat Engineer Battalion and all of the supporting companies. I guess we probably had about a thousand troops disbursed through six or eight companies, search, road building, and demolitions and what have you. And I, I then—

James: Preparing the food service or just procuring?

John: Just procuring the supplies. So I would have to go every day to a division food service depot and pick up the supplies and then distribute them for about a thousand Korean troops and about a thousand American troops.

James: And you had a six-by to drive?

John: Pardon?

James: A six-by?

John: Yeah, yeah, oh yes.

James: Because you'd need that big a truck if you're gonna get those supplies.

John: Oh yes, yes indeed. And on one occasion, it must've been in the late autumn or early winter of '51, because the enemy had infiltrated a great deal all of our movement had to be at night and under strict conditions. Unfortunately, the driver I had for the six-by was night blind [laughs], he had had an injury to his eye, so I had to do the driving and he rode. So we had to do all of our pick-ups under darkness. But we were in the situation where constantly there were—the artillery was behind us and the enemy was probably not more than a mile ahead of us in the hills in Korea, the central front. It was an interesting time. The winter was rather brutal. We didn't have—most of the equipment we had was nothing like today. It was all equipment that was left over from World War II.

James: They didn't issue you decent winter equipment?

John: Oh heavens no; no, no.

James: A lot of guys just had some equipment and they never did get issued winter clothes.

John: Oh yeah. And we had the old Army wool coats, none of the boots that worked, just probably old—

James: Yeah, those regular boots were probably older than me. I brought those home.

John: Yeah, yeah. But again—at one point as the front moved up a bit to the—up close to what is now the line between the two, North and South, we only had two vehicles that would move under their own power [laughs]; everything else was broken down. And we didn't have parts, we didn't have equipment.

James: You had tools to repair this stuff?

John: Well, you needed equipment to repair it, you needed parts to replace, but we didn't have them.

James: Looking back, what do you suppose? They just didn't order enough stuff?

John: Well, bearing in mind the fact that, uh, the front had moved back and forth so many times, supply lines were difficult to maintain and getting material through was not really—

James: It didn't get through the screening?

John: Oh constantly, constantly. One of the things I didn't mention that when I joined, this combat engineer outfit was an all black outfit and about a half a

dozen of my fellows and I were the first Caucasians to integrate this outfit. It was an interesting time. In the sense that we were welcomed, we were welcomed as long-lost brothers because we were the first replacements this outfit had had. And they had gone through the really trying times of the Korean War.

James: In the beginning?

John: Oh Lord yes. It was a very interesting time, it was—

James: [unintelligible]

John: A major, in charge of the—

James: Black?

John: No, he was a white man, a white officer. Most of the officers were white, not all, but most of them were. And all of the enlisted men were black except for the few of us, but after we arrived then replacements began trickling through. But it was a hard winter, a very hard winter. There was no antifreeze in the wintertime.

James: Where'd you sleep?

John: Tent. As a supply sergeant, I shared a big eight-man tent with a lot of ammunition and with the corporal that was my assistant. I didn't sleep well all the time knowing that [laughs] there were several tons of ammunition in the tent with me, but we survived. It was always a question, you know, who's gonna get up at four o'clock in the morning and replace the fuel in the potbelly stove that kept us from freezing. But we were lucky as an engineer outfit we had lumber so that, uh—

James: How many to a tent?

John: Just the two of them. Normally there would be, what, eight men, but because of my position I only had just myself and the corporal.

James: Because you had the stripes?

John: Right, right. And, uh, we ate well though, I will say that. But in the—

James: Did you ever go down to K-rations?

John: No—well, only once. During this three or four day blackout period we used K-rations because our movement was really restricted. The idea was that we would close everything down along the front and force the enemy to

infiltrate, to bring their people in to get any intelligence whatsoever. Our patrols had been sent out and they were being ambushed. So that just by closing off the reconnaissance group patrols in across the front—

James: That was the blackout period?

John: Right, right.

James: Three days?

John: Yeah, three or four days, I don't recall. But then we were on K-rations for a relatively short period of time.

James: What time of year are we in?

John: This was in the middle of winter. It was the middle of winter. And the winters there were like they are here, very much the same. Because we had no antifreeze, the men in the truck pool, or the motor pool, had to go out and start the engines every two hours so they wouldn't freeze up. [laughs] Again, a commentary on the equipment we had, very poor. But again, as spring came along, as the weather improved, supply improved and we got some better equipment in. And by the time I left in the summer of 1952, we even had an ice cream maker, which was quite a luxury. But it was the belief that because we had a lot of hard-working people that everybody had to have at least one hot meal a day, so that—when we had changed positions, the first thing we would do is send out a reconnaissance group with cutting torches and we'd find a tank that was disabled, we'd cut a chunk of the armor supply from the side and use that as griddles for our cooking, so if we had eggs for breakfast in the morning, it was as you wanted them. If we had steak in the evening, it was as you wanted it.

James: That's very nice. How long were you in Korea; a year?

John: Eleven months and nineteen days, I think. But late spring of 1952, the major moved up to a group headquarters and asked me to come along with him. So I changed positions then and went from food service procuring to food service inspection. So the last four or five months, I guess it was, of my tour in Korea, I just made the round of all of the units in the group headquarters—the group, I should say.

James: What group?

John: Combat Engineer Group, the 36th Group. And I would inspect the food service preparation and service and make a report at least once a month.

James: For the whole division?

- John: It was a group.
- James: The combat engineer group?
- John: Yeah. There probably were, I don't know, twenty-forty units in the group.
- James: What's this thirty-six?
- John: 36th Engineer Combat Group. Combat Engineer Group.
- James: Got it.
- John: And though the CEO was a real bug on good food service, that food— [laughs] the truism is that an army does move on its belly. [laughs] And we always saw to it that people ate and the food they ate was good, we had good food and it was properly prepared.
- James: What about cooks? How did you make sure they could cook right?
- John: Most of them came through pretty well prepared.
- James: They were well trained before they got there then?
- John: Yes, yes, yes.
- James: Good. I'm sure that made a difference.
- John: Oh, absolutely. Well I must've left Korea in probably late July of '52. Altogether I was in Korea for eleven months and nineteen days, something like that. I would have stayed in—I would have reenlisted actually if the policy had not been as rigid as it was then. If you came back from a complete tour of duty in a combat zone you had to stay in the States for at least a year, and at that time that wasn't very appealing. If I could have gone to Europe I would have reenlisted. But I didn't, and under the old law if you served a complete tour of combat duty as a draftee, you were entitled to be released at twenty-one months, followed by a five-year term of inactive reserve. At that time, when I got back to the States I took, I had a month off, I think, or three weeks, something like that. And I loafed around and was reassigned to Fort Riley, Kansas where I spent a couple months just sweating out a discharge, doing virtually nothing. But, uh, that was not—
- James: After the war, what did you do with the GI bill?

- John: In February of 1953 I started back in school at Notre Dame and finished my Bachelors and then, because I had some GI Bill left, I went on and finished a Masters.
- James: In what?
- John: Actually, in sociology. Then I would enter a career in corrections.
- James: Corrections of whom?
- John: Criminology.
- James: Criminology—ah. It sounded useful and secure.
- John: I spent, then, thirty-two years in Wisconsin.
- James: Oh did you? Working for the State?
- John: Yup, yup.
- James: Where were you?
- John: Here in Madison. The first five years I was a parole agent in Racine and then I came to Madison in an administrative capacity and for thirteen and a half years I was the deputy director of all of the institutions.
- James: Oh my goodness, that is a big job.
- John: Oh yes. Kind of a job I was very, uh—that one was very happy to leave.
[laughs]
- James: Oh really?
- John: Oh! It was a lot of grief.
- James: Tough job?
- John: Oh yes, constantly. It's like sitting on a keg of dynamite; the fuse is lit but you never know when it's gonna go off. And it did several times.
- James: Not enough people that did what you wanted?
- John: Well, when I came to—actually I started off my career—when I was finishing my graduate work in Indiana, at Notre Dame, I was working in the juvenile court then. When I finished my Masters, I got married and my wife and I moved to the west coast where I worked for California corrections for

a couple years. And since we both worked in the Middle West we came back—actually I spent about a year and a half, well not quite two years, running a detentional in Kansas City before I settled in Wisconsin.

James: A halfway home?

John: No it was a juvenile detention home. For children. But the political situation in Kansas was not to my liking.

James: I wouldn't like that job under any circumstances.

John: No, it was tough. But it was good experience, you know?

James: I understand the experience, but my experience, I raised four kids and— [Stoddard laughs] I sure enjoyed it while they're little. Now that they're adults, I really think a lot of them. It's that in-between period that I didn't think I would survive.

John: Well, they say insanity is hereditary, you catch it from your children. [laughs] I raised five children in Madison and they all turned out very well, thank heavens.

James: So you're a veteran, you're trained, and I was trying to practice medicine and trying to figure what the hell is going on with those kids. [Stoddard laughs] You know, one of them was almost beyond me. She just tested me to the limit.

John: I had a couple like that. [back and forth about child-raising difficulties, mostly unintelligible] Raising children in Madison was a difficult task.

James: Then you came to Madison. Was that much different than what you were doing in California?

John: In 1960. Oh yes. When in California I was a parole agent and I worked a five square mile area right downtown Los Angeles. And it was, well—when you're young and full of vinegar the experience was fantastic.

James: Yeah, I suppose; if you don't get shot, that's pretty good.

John: Well, in those days it was a little bit different. The parole agent had a great deal of authority and power. We were sworn peace officers and we could've carried weapons if we wished; I never wanted to, but some of my cohorts did. That was a very difficult time. I got in some very interesting situations there. [laughs] A lot of [unintelligible].

James: You must have talked your way out of it.

- John: Oh yes, yes indeed, yes indeed. But then, well I must say I've had an interesting career.
- James: Well that's really sure!
- John: Well—[both laugh]—Nah, actually, I never really felt in danger. Well, a lot of times I would be covering some of the areas, the little seedier areas where the police would stop me if I was all alone on the street, "What are ya doin' out here?" I'd have to identify myself and what I was doing. But it was a—I've had a speckled career. [laughs] And I've enjoyed being away from it.
- James: Oh, I'll bet. So when you got to Madison, how much different was your job?
- John: Totally different, it was all administrative. Administrative and I probably supervised, oh, twenty-five, thirty people
- James: It was your job to find the people to do the things that you used to do?
- John: Well, that's right. More than that, but I always became involved in budgeting for prisons and prison building, planning, policies.
- James: I've been reading about that new prison in Belgium or somewhere in the southwest.
- John: Yeah, yeah.
- James: And I read about it for a year before they were talking about building, now they built it, now they're talking about they don't like it. I mean, it's been a headache from the get-go.
- John: Well, politicians now, it's all political. When I was working in California, I made my decision to come work in Wisconsin, although neither my wife nor I are from Wisconsin. I came to Wisconsin *purely* on the reputation this state had. As a professional working in California, one state and one state only had a reputation that was *excellent* bar none, and that was Wisconsin.
- James: Excellent in what regard?
- John: Politically clean, it was professional, it was progressive, we were doing intelligent things, and there was a coherence in policy and in operation. For many years the State Department, the US State Department used to send people from all over the free world in here to see, to observe our operations.
- James: I've lived in Madison my entire life. I've never heard anybody talk about this like that before.

- John: Well, we have no alumni so see, nobody beats the ground. It's in a sense that this is sort of like a human garbage collection; these are the throwaways of society.
- James: Doesn't make all the papers.
- John: Only when things go wrong.
- James: Right. The good parts.
- John: Well, it was an interesting one.
- James: You retired because you had to retire or by choice?
- John: No, no, it was by choice. I decided I [laughs]—the political influences were getting a little bit too strong, it was no longer becoming professional. The decisions were being made by politicians and it, you know, did not—
- James: What was their concern?
- John: Votes, votes.
- James: They wanted a prison in their area because that would give jobs to their constituents?
- John: Yeah, that's part of it, yeah. And again, I say everybody likes power. I made that decision, you know, I brought this—I can exert control over this and that and the other thing.
- James: Were a lot of communities not thrilled to have those guys hanging around? They're under lock and key, but they can still get out from time to time, makes some people nervous.
- John: In the last fifteen, twenty years that a lot of—with the economic structure such as it is, that it's jobs, a decently-paying job, a career for people who are not extremely well—prison guards make a fair salary, a livable salary.
- James: With minimum education.
- John: Right, right. Finish high school and they've got the essential IQ, if you are stable.
- James: So communities generally are not threatened by having a prison?

- John: Not really, not really. I guess I feel as though I left my mark in Wisconsin, that I was involved in some very progressive policies in the earlier years when I was here. We did build a structure that was very efficient.
- James: Like the one in Portage?
- John: Yeah [laughs]; that's another story. The prison that we sold to the Feds in Adams County, my unit and I probably put in, goodness, thousands of hours in the planning of this [laughs], and it didn't even open before it was sold to the federal prison system. And when I was in Washington—I spent a year in Washington as a visiting fellow with the Department of Justice, 1983 and '84. And they were still laughing about it; they got a steal, and we built it for them.
- James: [unintelligible]
- John: Oh yes, it was a Cadillac of prisons, and all they had to do was take over the bond payments when they came due.
- James: Why did that happen?
- John: Well, we had a governor that wanted to close down the prisons.
- James: Oh, well that makes it easy then. Tommy Thompson gave it away?
- John: Oh no, it was his predecessor, Mr. Lucey. Matter of fact, I was one of the few people—he called my boss and demanded I be fired, one time. [laughs]
- James: Because you were out of line?
- John: Oh well, I made some comment because the—some of the statistics were being juggled to fit his desires, and I made a comment.
- James: Where was this prison?
- John: Pardon?
- James: Where was this prison?
- John: It was out at Adams County at—it was the one we had to build—the state had to replace with Portage. The Portage prison was built to replace that one. Ten years later at a cost of about four times as much. That was an interesting career.
- James: You raised a family?

- John: Five children.
- James: How many grandchildren?
- John: Oh, I have ten grandchildren now. Matter of fact, in another week or so, I'm taking one of my grandsons on an elder hostel trip to Northern Arizona for a week. It's gonna be an interesting situation, a little eleven-year-old guy.
- James: Has he been at that hostel before?
- John: Oh, yes, I've been there before.
- James: You have. Has he?
- John: Pardon?
- James: Has he?
- John: No, no, he hasn't. For him this'll be a brand new experience. He's never even been in a plane before, so we're gonna fly down and rent a car in Phoenix and drive up to Flagstaff and—
- James: That's a little cooler up there.
- John: Oh yes, it'll be lovely.
- But my wife and I have enjoyed being retired. Spent most of last November in Poland as a volunteer, teaching conversational English to a group of adults.
- James: How did you get involved with that?
- John: Through an organization for local volunteers. They send people throughout the world, places where they've been invited to come and help out.
- James: [unintelligible]
- John: Yeah, I think so. Yup. No—yes. I never did either, but two years ago I was in China on a trip and I was—**[End of Tape One, Side One]**—traveling with a couple people who were, who do this every year with Global Volunteers.
- James: When you walk into Poland, you don't know any Polish?
- John: No, that's not what I was there for.

- James: You have to have some modicum of—
- John: Well, yes. On the site there was a representative who spoke very good English, a woman who finished up a Masters degree in Linguistics and she helped.
- James: A Polish lady?
- John: Yes, yes, um-hmm.
- James: I was trying to think what do you supply that she couldn't have supplied?
- John: Oh, well—
- James: The idioms.
- John: The idioms, yes, that's right. And among the people [laughs], as fate would have it, one of the people, there was a lawyer in one of my classes, a judge, a prison psychologist even. [laughs] But wherever you go in Europe, English is the language if you wanted to be anything.
- James: That's the common language; you have to have English.
- John: These people all could read and write, but to be able to speak it freely and fluently.
- James: It used to be French and now it's English.
- John: Right, right, right.
- James: Did you enjoy your time?
- John: Absolutely, absolutely.
- James: That's nice.
- John: My wife and I traveled a good deal; she didn't go with me this trip but we've really enjoyed it. As a person with a background in sociology, I enjoy people and cultures, how people assimilate. My experience in Korea was a very interesting learning experience, the fact of being involved with the insular group, an all black military outfit. But after three days, you'd never—the color disappeared. You learned that “this was a man that you can trust” and “here's a guy you better be careful of” and “these are people that have their head screwed on properly.” It was a—there was no friction at all. It was a fascinating experience and I enjoyed of course the—I had a good bit of freedom most of the time.

I think the scariest—when I moved from the medical corps to the combat engineer unit, I then had to pull guard duty; when I was with the medics, I didn't have to. But one of the first nights in early November, I guess, we just moved up the front in an area that was in sort of the center of a horseshoe and to get to the end of the horseshoe where we had our guard post took about twenty minutes. It was a very tedious walk up there and, uh, the leaves had fallen, it was a dark night, there was no moon at all, and with the artillery shells coming overhead [laughs], there were a lot of flares that we used for illuminating, so it was very a different kind of a situation. But here I am up there all alone at this guard post with a .30 caliber machine gun—or thirty or fifty, whatever it was—and I had no idea even how to use it, I had never had training. [laughs]

James: You would have had no training at all.

John: All I had was an M1[?]. And it was dark as pitch. The Chinese had entered the war at that time and I could hear this movement in the dry leaves around me and an absolutely blood-curdling scream, which just [laughs] absolutely terrorized me, and it reverberated throughout this whole little area, and in a short time, about ten minutes, I had replacements out there, “What’s going on?” but I was sure that there were all kinds of [laughs] soldiers infil—

James: You didn't shoot anything in there, did you?

John: [Laughs] Well, I couldn't shoot at anything, the noise was all around, and come to find out I really heard a mountain lion that had lost its kids. And their cry is something else. But I can hear them walking around in the dry leaves but you couldn't quite pinpoint 'em. God, it was a—and it woke everybody up, everybody was—but, uh, that was one of the aspects of my job that I didn't care for that much, but it was quite a challenge.

James: Your food services experience, did that give you any help afterwards? Did you learn anything about food service?

John: Well—

James: Not much?

John: Not much, it was just primarily basic handling the food and—

James: Did a lot of [unintelligible] work and stuff like that?

John: Oh yes, yes indeed. But they keep everybody happy and see to it—actually the food we got in Korea was quite substantial; monotonous but substantial. And it seemed to run about a five or six day cycle with fish, pork, ham, beef,

steaks, and no fresh milk, but the reconstituted. And fruit, we had a good bit of—the food was good. And that was an essential. It compensated for a lot of [laughs] what we didn't have.

James: We had good food on my hospital ship. [unintelligible] people are limited to ice cream. Ice cream was available twenty-four hours a day.

John: Ah. Oh, wow.

James: In the Navy they call those “geedunk” [Stoddard laughs]; did you ever hear that expression?

John: No, I never did.

James: A geedunk stand is a place where they have ice cream, and it's always, always ice cream available to anybody, at any time, twenty-four hours a day.

John: When we got our ice cream maker in—that must've been late June, I guess of '52—we thought we were in clover then.

James: You would, yeah; that was about the only thing you couldn't get, you had to make it.

John: Yup.

James: Very good.

John: I must say that I rather enjoyed my tour of duty. When I was touring the central front inspecting food service preparation to various units we had, I had a great deal of freedom and I had to go out with snipers every now and then.

James: What was your rank by then?

John: I was a staff sergeant. That was the inducement for me to jump from the medical corps to supply.

James: They were fun.

John: Oh yes indeed, yes indeed.

James: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

John: No, I did not. After I got out, my life became quite busy. I worked 'til Studebaker went bankrupt and I was going to school then, and finishing off

my Bachelors and getting through my Masters, and, uh, finding the love of my life [chuckles], and getting married and planning a career.

James: Did you keep track of any former—

John: Actually, I only ran into one individual; this was a fellow from Racine. His family were in the mortuary business, Jerry Drager. I was speaking to a Rotary Club, I think, or some service club in Racine on one occasion and he came up afterwards and said, “Hey!” [chuckles] He recognized me; I wouldn’t have recognized him, but the military service was not the high point of my existence.

James: There were no reunions that one of these outfits that you were in has on a yearly basis?

John: I wouldn’t know.

James: Alright. I was going to ask about the Studebaker Company. Interesting company, I was kind of sorry when they went out.

John: Oh, indeed.

James: Of course, early in their career when they made those fancy cars, as a young kid in Madison, I just admired that [unintelligible] and I still think probably the most beautiful automobile I had ever seen.

John: Yup.

James: It was really a humdinger. It took your eye the minute you saw that thing. It was just a shame when it sort of disappeared.

John: Oh, yeah. Then of course when Studebaker brought out their 19—in what, ‘47 I think—who was the Italian designer that designed their post-war Studebaker? It had the greenhouse around the back there. I worked at Studebaker from 1940 until it closed in ‘54, with, of course, the interim of—

James: My folks had a 1929 Studebaker.

John: Oh, they were good cars.

James: I think they were a hell of a car.

John: Well, their mechanical design was excellent. Unfortunately their managerial expertise was not good enough. After the war when the opportunity to upgrade everything presented—

- James: They were so popular back then.
- John: Oh, yeah.
- James: I used to love those cars. It never occurred to me that they wouldn't continue to be strong and healthy. But boy, they dropped like—
- John: Their engines, the crankshaft and camshaft tolerance on their engines were as good as Rolls Royce.
- James: Oh really?
- John: The engines were machined to a point of precision that was far beyond the industry—
- James: [unintelligible]
- John: Yes. They're all there. I worked at parts of the plant that dated back to the point when Studebaker was in the wagon business, from eighteen, what?—the middle eighteen hundreds. The Studebaker brothers—
- James: You mean nineteen hundreds.
- John: Eighteen hundreds. They made their claim to fame with wagons.
- James: Oh.
- John: Like the Conestoga wagons, and several presidents were inaugurated using Studebaker. They were the Rolls Royce of buggies, wagons; they were the greatest. But parts of the factory were so old [laughs]—they were really antiquated. And they didn't upgrade when they had the opportunity. But it was a great place to work because it was a union shop, it was well run, a strong sense of individual responsibility, and they paid well. I was making, in the late forties, I was making five thousand dollars a year.
- James: Gee, that's a lot of money.
- John: Which was a good family—it enabled me to go to an expensive school and to support myself.
- James: That was good money in those days.
- John: Oh, yeah, yes it was, yes it was.
- James: Hudson was another car that I was sorry to see go; those were great cars.

John: Yup, yup.

James: And I suppose the same problem, they just didn't have the leadership to stay up with the big boys.

John: Well—

James: But gosh, they had some awfully nice cars.

John: My family was deeply rooted in automobiles. My middle name is Graham. Robert Graham was my godfather, one of the three Graham brothers that had built Graham-Page. And my father worked for them, and then—

James: Graham-Page, was that a Studebaker—

John: No, no, no, they went out of business in thirty, what?, '39 or '40.

James: I know they made cars, but I don't remember which.

John: The first car that had streamlining. And they owned—

James: Is that right? I remember that name.

John: Actually the Graham brothers made their money with—they built up what is now Dodge truck. And they sold to Dodge.

James: Oh.

John: And then they went into automobiles. But they also were in some—Robert Graham was instrumental—

James: [unintelligible]

John: Ummm, that's a very—no, they were built in Detroit but the family was from southern Indiana, where I was born. But my father then worked—he retired from Pontiac motors, my brother retired from Ford, and I got through school courtesy of Studebaker.

James: Well that's interesting. It's all tied in there.

John: Oh yeah. The next thing with Studebaker was that I spent most of my time with Studebaker spray painting, finish spray. But then I could work—I was working forty minutes out of every hour then. They didn't care if I brought in my textbooks; I had twenty minutes out of every hour to read and prepare for my classes.

James: I remember I took care of a kid who worked in the Janesville at the—

John: The Chevrolet plant?

James: —Chevrolet plant. And he was a painter in the painting section.

John: Oh yeah.

James: See, every time he came into the office, he'd bring me a piece of jewelry, multicolored jewelry. What that was, was collected paint, you know these cars, the [unintelligible] spilled the paint.

John: Sure.

James: And after about a month, they had every color of the rainbow packed inside the [unintelligible] and he would dig this out and it was hard as a rock.

John: Oh, yes, yes.

James: And he'd take that home and he'd put it on a wheel and he'd put it in various shapes of jewelry.

John: Clever.

James: I thought it was really clever. He made me a couple of things, and made some for my office nurse and—

John: Sure, yeah.

James: They were gorgeous! And I still have a couple of them left.

John: Oh yeah.

James: They were just solid paint, interesting.

John: Oh yeah. Well, actually, I made my experience with Studebaker, I worked all over the plant, I would do my, my job assignment in accord with what my class schedule was.

James: Well that was nice.

John: I drove the personnel people crazy because [laughs] I was moving around—

James: With the [unintelligible]?

John: Yeah. Doing whatever work, whatever jobs were available that would fit in with my class schedule. And as I say, it was a great place to work.

James: I guess so, I guess so. You wouldn't find them like that today.

John: That's true.

James: Well, I've run out of questions to ask you.

John: Very good.

James: I appreciate you coming up; it was a nice interview. I'll take these home and put 'em on my video machine and make a decent video tape for you.

John: Okay, very good. Well, my situation is a little bit different than a lot of people, I'm sure.

James: Everyone is different.

John: And we're all unique.

James: Yeah, in our own little way.

[End of Interview]