

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
DEAN M. ROCKSTAD
Typist, Army, Cold War.

2001

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Rockstad, Dean M., (1934-). Oral History Interview, 2001.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 30 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Dean M. Rockstad, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his Cold War service with the Army as a clerk typist with KMAG Detachment R in Pusan and Taegu, Korea. Rockstad talks about being drafted while working as an apprentice printer for Madison Newspapers Incorporated and attending basic and combat engineer training at Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri). He describes the similarity of the climate at Fort Leonard Wood to the climate in Korea. He tells of learning to fire machine guns, including a close call on an unevacuated impact range. Rockstad mentions learning bridge building and disliking wire stringing due to a fear of heights. He recalls shipping out in December of 1955 and missing Christmas after crossing the International Date Line. Stationed with the Korean Military Advisory Group in Pusan (Korea), he comments on working with two other privates to oversee and increase efficiency at a Korean printing plant that printed information for the Korean Army. Rockstad states they spent a lot of time driving between headquarters and the printing plant. He details having trouble, as a private, dealing with the Korean major who ran the printing plant. Rockstad mentions transfer to the adjutant general's office at Pusan (Korea), duty as a clerk typist, and being paid in military script. He touches on living conditions, recreation, seeing the Korean countryside, and paying a Korean house boy with cigarettes. Rockstad states soldiers were allowed to bring Korean women to the Non-Commissioned Officers Club for dancing with the option of going home with them afterwards. He talks about availability of liquor and rarely having to pull guard duty. He details flying to Japan for R&R, staying in hotels in Tokyo, and sightseeing in Nikko. On the ship back to the States, Rockstad explains he got out of any extra duty by typing the ship's roster. He mentions keeping in touch with a couple of his Army friends.

Biographical Sketch:

Rockstad (b. March 18, 1934) served in the Army from 1955 to 1957, including sixteen months in Korea with the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG). He eventually settled in Greendale, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2001.

Transcribed by Elisabeth Bownik, 2010.

Corrected by Calvin John Pike, 2010.

Corrections typed in by Angelica Engel, 2011.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011.

Transcribed Interview:

Jim: Running. Talking to Dean Rockstad, and the date is the 12th of December, year 2001. Where were you born, sir?

Dean: I was born in Madison, Wisconsin, March 18th, 1934. St. Mary's Hospital.

Jim: And when did you enter military service?

Dean: I entered military service—my date of induction was the 20th of July, 1955.

Jim: And—Army?

Dean: Right. Draftee. Army.

Jim: Drafted. Okay. Were you single or married at that time?

Dean: I was single, living at home, working as an apprentice printer for Madison Newspapers Incorporated at the time.

Jim: Okay. And when you—tell me about your basic training. Where was that?

Dean: Basic training was in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. I guess the major thing I can think about that is that it was hot. I know that they always classified Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri as the United States version of Korea at the time. It was hot in the summer and cold in the winter and a lot of hills. So that was where I took the basic. Again, I can remember the heat. I can remember with new fatigues in the mess hall at, like, at lunch time, and the—trying to eat, like, corn on the cob and the water just dripping down my face into the tray that I was eating from. Again, I don't remember a lot about my basic training for some reason, but I was reassigned for my second eight-weeks training, also in Fort Leonard Wood, and that was with combat engineers.

Jim: Was that something that you chose or they just assigned you?

Dean: They just assigned. I know when we were kind of in our pre-basic—wherever the numbers were needed, they sent people. We would line up in the morning on, like—in rows of maybe ten or twenty people, and then they would find some menial assignment for the day, and sometimes we'd come back, and part of our row would be gone, and they would've been shipped off to Fort Riley, or—so it was just a matter of where they needed bodies for basic training, and I just ended up in Fort Leonard Wood.

Jim: And what did your training consist of, then?

Dean: Well, just basic infantry training. So all of—all the—

Jim: Second time was—

Dean: Oh, the second time was really—it was combat engineer training.

Jim: Right. That's what I was—

Dean: Right.

Jim: What did that involve?

Dean: Well, that involved a whole lot of things and I kept wondering, “How did I ever get here?” But again, it was a numbers thing. The Army did not really have printers as a—as an occupation. And so everybody that fell into kind of a nondescript category—if I was in another line I might have ended up in artillery. But I ended up in—again, in combat engineering. So what we did is a lot of bridge building. A lot of just general engineering things. I got a couple interesting stories that I think of that I remember the most. Combat engineers were more than just riflemen, because they had to actually often times go into places almost ahead of the infantry to get set up. And so, of course, now this is fall, and I—one of the things we did was we fired .30 caliber machine guns as a training exercise. And it was very dry, and we were using incendiary shells, and of course they—we set the forest on fire, so we spent only part of the day firing and the rest of the day putting out the fires that we had started in the impact range. And then later we also learned to fire a heavy .50 caliber machine gun. And I think the interesting story of that, or something I always remember, was that we had a line of .50 caliber machine guns lined up to fire into an impact range, and it was arranged—it was also used by the Air Force as a bombing range. And there were supposedly some Air Force personnel down there checking the range, and they got the all-clear that the Air Force had evacuated the area. But the range officer, for some reason, instead of holding his fire, he had the NCO fire off a few rounds just to show us what would happen, and those rounds just cleared the hill and over the hill came an Air Force truck that hadn't been out of the area. If we all had fired, you know, when we were supposed to, we would have completely annihilated that truck. So that's always kind of stuck with me.

Jim: You bet.

Dean: [Laughs.]

Jim: You bet.

Dean: Those little incidents, you know? And I guess—and another incident that happened while I was there was that—again, I would say it was probably in early November, and we went out on one of those overnights where we had to camp out. Man, when we marched out there it was hot. Unseasonably warm. And so

we really worked up a sweat. We set up our tents. You know, we did whatever training we did out there. We woke up the next morning. The tents had collapsed. It had snowed overnight. The weather had completely changed, so most of the tents had collapsed. We were now in overchilled conditions. So again, I think that's probably one of the reasons they call that, you know, the Korea of the US, just because of the climate.

Jim: So after you—did you have a specific task to perform for the engineers?

Dean: No, I really didn't. It was just a general, overall training of everything. We—of course, the other thing engineers do—and I don't like heights. And, so, the other thing that they do is they have to climb telephone poles and string wires. And the day we were supposed to do that, we were all sitting in bleachers, and we all had to put those little things on your leg, and you'd climb up, and you had to lean way back on the telephone pole to show that you could do this. Well, I stalled and I stalled and I stalled, and finally I got my courage up, and there were only probably about ten of us left that hadn't done this. So I was just strapping on those leg straps. Time—it was time for us to move. I never had to do it. So again, one of my lucky features of being in the Service.

Jim: Sure.

Dean: [Laughs.]

Jim: So then where did you move to?

Dean: After that—I'm trying to think back. I had—I had, like, probably a ten day leave between my basic training and the time that I had to go back to Fort Leonard Wood for my second eight-weeks training in engineering, and I'm trying to remember. I looked at some pictures. I must have gotten a leave to go home, because I see a picture of myself with snow in the background. And then we were shipped out to—on a troop train from Fort Leonard Wood to Fort Lewis, Washington. And then that's the debarking point for most of the troops that would go to Korea or Japan at that time. We still had troops in Japan. Course we all hoped we would go to Japan, and, unfortunately, few did. But I shipped out of that on the 17th of December in 1955. I departed Fort Lewis, Washington. This was on a troop ship. In those days very few people flew. And this was a rather good-sized troop ship. My guess is about 2,500 people. We felt it was kind of ironic that we would ship out that close to Christmas, and I guess one of the highlights was that as we traveled, we crossed the International Date Line sometime during the night. So we went from the evening of the 24th to the morning of the 26th. And my dad had clipped out a—and, in fact, I just turned that over to the museum here—a little article that was in the paper that, you know, 2,500 G.I.s missed Christmas, with a little explanation of what happened, that we had crossed the International Date Line.

Jim: So when did you end up in Korea?

Dean: Well, first we landed in—we stopped in a—we stopped in Yokohama, and we let some troops off there, but I had already known that I would've been assigned to Korea, and assumed at that time that I would go to, like, a general engineering company somewhere up behind the DMZ at the time in Korea. But what I didn't know is that—again, I have to say right now that I have been so fortunate in the Army. Again, luck kind of played into my hands. They were searching for enlisted personnel that had some printing experience that were on our ship. So they chose myself, and I was only a third year apprentice in printing, another private who was a pressman, and another private who worked in a print shop, sort of as an office manager type thing. And they put us—instead of going—they reassigned us from the engineering depot that I was originally headed for to a Korean Military Advisory Group, and the Korean Military Advisory Group headquarters is in Seoul, Korea. And from there we were told that I would be shipped to a detachment in Pusan, which is at the far end—the port city at the far end of—the south end of Korea. But our headquarters that we reported to was really a lieutenant colonel in Taegu, Korea, which is about central [Korea]. So we went to Taegu [Taegu, also spelled Daegu, is an Army and US Air Force Base in South Korea]. We learned what we were supposed to do, and they—and all this by train—and then they shipped us down to Pusan. And we were supposed to advise—three privates—supposed to advise a Korean printing plant on efficiency and just be general overseers, like supervisors, in a Korean printing plant. Well, needless to say, they weren't overly appreciative of us, particularly because we had no rank, and secondly, a Korean printing plant does not run like anything in United States runs. And as three privates, our printing plant was well into the city, really at the harbor. And so we had to—they had to assign us a jeep. So every morning we—the three of us would take turns with driving, and we'd load up our jeep with the three of us, and we'd drive to our assignment, which was in—and I think fifteen miles an hour was top speed, legally posted, and you're lucky you could do that anyway with the traffic. We had to come back for lunch, 'cause you couldn't—there was no place to eat out down there, so we had to drive back for lunch, eat our lunch, drive back again, do our afternoon duties, and then drive back home again. So we spent a good share of our time in Pusan, it seemed like, behind the wheel of a car.

Jim: What type of duty did you have?

Dean: Again, we were supposed to just be overseers. We weren't supposed to physically—

Jim: Of what?

Dean: Of this Korean printing plant. And they printed everything from Korean army publications, regulation—

Jim: Who were they printing it for?

Dean: They were printing it—

Jim: US Army?

Dean: No, they were printing it for the Korean army. And so it was all in Korean.

Jim: Okay.

Dean: So not only did we not know what they were technically printing, you know. Their method of printing was many years behind what we were already doing. We still set some type by hand, but in a left-to-right order. They would just pick the letters out—you know, somebody would just pick a bunch of letters out—and then they would assemble it. And so instead of, you know—they made a two—a double operation when it could've been a single operation.

Jim: Sure.

Dean: And those were some of the things that we were supposed to do was to try to find some more efficiency. But, again, it was run by, like, a major who kind of resented the fact that he had to deal with three privates.

Jim: A Korean major?

Dean: A Korean major, right. So we were the only Americans in the plant. Three privates. The upside of this was that the Korean Military Advisory Group lived in a compound in Pusan, a military compound, that was extremely well-done. Remember, at this time, in the—up along the DMZ, the infantry and a good share of the engineers still lived in squad tents. If you had a Quonset hut, you were most lucky. We lived in barracks that used to be part of a university.

Jim: In the city.

Dean: In the city. At the edge of the city. Compound fence all around it. We never had any guard duty, because they had Korean military personnel that were assigned just as guard duty, so I never pulled any of that kind of duty. We had a jeep, and so we had access to that jeep on the weekends. So I got to see a good share of the Korean countryside because of that, where the average person barely got outside the base for a leave. We were able to travel around.

Jim: Did you go to the leper colony?

Dean: I did not go to the leper colony, but there was some—pardon?

Jim: Interesting place.

Dean: Is it really? That was one place we didn't go, but they had something called the Tong Nei temples nearby, which were up in the hills, and so we went—we would go out there on occasion.

Jim: Did you go to Maisan?

Dean: I did not go there either. Not that I remember anyway.

Jim: Interesting things there.

Dean: Yeah.

Jim: Okay. And did you—where'd you eat?

Dean: Well, we always ate in the mess hall. Again, very seldom would we eat off the base. Occasionally, they would like to—the Koreans would like to take us out. We were strictly forbidden to eat anything but—like, an apple, I guess you could eat if you peeled it. But we could drink hot tea, 'cause the tea—at least the water was boiled at that point and should've been safe, but we were pretty reluctant to eat anywhere.

Jim: Good. I thought Korea was the most miserable place I've ever seen or heard of in my life.

Dean: Yup. Yup, I have to agree. You know, I was—so I stayed there for—that was my assignment. Again, our lieutenant colonel was in Taegu. And so he took the other gentleman that was—the other private—that was a pressman, and he brought him up to Taegu to do some office work for him. And he stayed up there a couple of weeks, and then he brought me up to do the office work up there. And there's where the story changes, because I never left.

Jim: Ah.

Dean: One of—I'm very organized, and I'm a good administrator. And the key point is, probably, the best course I ever took in high school was typing. Where all the clerk typists went I don't know, 'cause they trained them in the States. You get overseas, and they're begging for clerk typists. So I ended up in a permanent assignment to his office, then, in Taegu. So after about a month or so living on a temporary duty—

Jim: Sure.

Dean: —and having to fly back to Pusan to get my pay, because they physically handed out pay by cash in those days. There were no checks. And then taking the train

back to Taegu again, they thought, you know, “This is silly.” So they not only reassigned me, but they changed my MOS to clerk typist.

Jim: That’s a [unintelligible]. They paid you in American money?

Dean: No, we got script. That’s right. We had to turn in all American money when we went over. I forgot about that. Good point. And we were paid in military script.

Jim: Right. That’s what I thought.

Dean: Right. And then we turned the military script in, and then we had little, like, PX script money, too, if you—and chits. If you went to the bar at night, you know, you paid in, like, little chits, so you never have a cash—

Jim: What was your rank by this time?

Dean: I think I was still a private. No, I was still a private. So this was only a few months. Eventually I made PFC while I was there, and then I made—I think it was—specialist four. They had gone—unless you were in the infantry, they didn’t give you a corporal. I think a spec four was equivalent to a—

Jim: Probably.

Dean: —to a corporal, then, at the time.

Jim: I would think so, yeah.

Dean: Yeah. So I had this wonderful duty in Taegu. I worked for—

Jim: That was at Taegu where you were a clerk typist.

Dean: I was a clerk typist in Taegu, and I was in the adjutant general’s office. [Pause.] What this was in Taegu was a headquarters. And what they had is almost all high-ranking officers, because they were counterparts to the Second Korean Army officers. So all of the general—like G1, G2, G3—there were like a colonel or at least a lieutenant colonel in charge for the US, and then they probably had, like, a one-star general that was a counterpart or an advisor to in the Second Korean Army. And then there was engineers and Ordnance, and all the branches were represented by a high-ranking officer in the US Army for—to advise the Second Korean Army that was stationed in Taegu. And so the only really enlisted personnel there were clerks. They used Korean lady typists—is that an indigenous personnel? I think they call that—as a typist, but I had a security clearance of secret, so I did all the classified typing.

Jim: Because of that.

Dean: Because of that. Plus the fact—and the office that I—and the adjutant general's office had two lieutenant colonels that I worked for and one captain. And, again, the one colonel who was in charge of the two privates that were still down in Pusan, eventually sent, I believe, a captain or a lieutenant down to be in charge of them down there, so that Korean officer had another officer to talk to instead of just a private. So I had office duties, daily office duties. You know, kind of a nine-to-five type job. And I, again, lived in very good quarters. They were two-storied stucco buildings that were, I would say, part of a university at one time. They were divided kind of with plywood partitions so that two or three of us had our own little, kind of, plywood room with a chicken wire kind of up above to keep out whatever. And so we had our daily duty—

Jim: You have a mess hall, or—

Dean: We had a mess hall right next door.

Jim: PX and all that.

Dean: PX. We actually had a bowling alley. We had two bowling alleys, and we actually had a swimming pool.

Jim: So you didn't get out into the countryside from there much, or—

Dean: Actually I did. Again, it was one of these fortunate things. First of all, one of my good friends was the mail clerk, and, of course, he had a jeep. And a lot of times he could access that on the weekend. And, secondly, the lieutenant colonel that I worked for would lend me his jeep on the weekend.

Jim: Can't beat it.

Dean: The officer compound was, maybe, a half a mile or so away from the regular compound. But so he would lend me the jeep, and he would walk in—or bum a ride in—when he needed to go to eat or go to the bar, and we would go out on the weekend with a jeep.

Jim: Was there a hospital there?

Dean: There was a hospital—hmm, gotta think about this. There was a just kind of like a little emergency ward hospital at Taegu. In Pusan, there was a big Swiss hospital nearby.

Jim: Swiss?

Dean: I believe it was Swiss or Swedish. Swedish, I think maybe it was. Maybe it was Swedish.

Jim: It wasn't Danish.

Dean: I don't think so. I'm not positive on that, but I think it was Scandinavian. But I thought it was Swedish, but—

Jim: Might've been. I don't know. It was a long time ago.

Dean: Yeah. Yeah, and so I can remember when I was in Pusan we would take the jeep, and occasionally we'd go out there, too.

Jim: I left Korea in '52.

Dean: Mm-hmm.

Jim: '51. Excuse me.

Dean: Okay.

Jim: That's when I left there.

Dean: Right. Yeah.

Jim: I was there from '50 to '51.

Dean: Okay. And again, my arrival date in Korea was the 6th of January of 1955. And again, it was a sixteen-month tour of duty.

Jim: You were there sixteen months?

Dean: And I was there a full sixteen months. And so, of course, we landed at Inchon, and we had to come ashore in those days on, like, a landing craft, because of that shallow harbor.

Jim: I spent a lot of time wandering up and down that landing at Inchon.

Dean: [Laughs.]

Jim: That's where our hospital ship was.

Dean: Okay.

Jim: Spent a lot of time at Inchon

Dean: Sure.

Jim: We'd take a LCM [military acronym for the LCM-8 amphibious landing craft of the US Navy] into the shore—

Dean: Right.

Jim: —Charlie Pier and then go on.

Dean: Okay.

Jim: Into that godforsaken city from there.

Dean: Right. Okay. So, I really didn't see—Inchon. I was really there, maybe, just a matter of days 'til they processed your papers, shipped us off to Seoul, and then eventually, like I say, down to Pusan and then back to Taegu. So, again, Taegu duty was interesting. We got out into the countryside. We saw them, you know, the local people, everywhere [doing everything] from planting rice to harvesting rice to—of course, the roads were atrocious—

Jim: It's like going back to the Stone Age, I thought.

Dean: A little bit. Right. And Korea, of course, was different in that the mountains there—I guess was the interesting thing is they just abruptly started up. There were no foothills. They—

Jim: Very much like Switzerland.

Dean: Right. They just all of a sudden you just went up. And they ran in no particular order. There was no, like, a range of mountains that ran in one direction. They just were just kind of plopped down there. And again, I thought that—you know, going back to basic training—Korea really was, you know, extremely hot in the summer, and then in the winter miserably cold, 'cause the winds came down out of Manchuria. And again, we had a oil space heater in our room. We had a Korean house boy that we paid two cartons of cigarettes a month, and we never made a bed. We never got any oil. We never had to do a thing. He did everything for us. And again, there was an allotment of cigarettes. I smoked a little in those days, but not much, and I think we may have had, like, a—I'm kind of guessing—like eight cartons a month, which I smoked maybe two at most, and the rest were trading power.

Jim: Any social life there?

Dean: Social life was pretty much, again, the bowling alley. We did have a nice PX that had, like, a snack bar. And, for some reason, we always seemed to get liver on Thursdays, so it was a great escape. I didn't have to go to the mess hall. We would go over and get a hamburger or whatever they had over at the PX.

Jim: But they had no girls around.

Dean: They had no—well, outside of indigenous personnel, though, who were around at the gate, of course. There was a USO building there, also.

Jim: Oh.

Dean: —and that had a couple of women that ran the USO, and so we would go there in the morning, like for coffee break. The enlisted personnel were allowed to go to the gate and pick out a woman on the street, that lined the street there, and bring them into the NCO for dancing in the evening. [NCO—Non-Commissioned Officers' Club. A club for enlisted military personnel and non-commissioned officers.]

Jim: Oh really?

Dean: So you could check through a Korean woman in the evening and then go to an NCO.

Jim: And then at the end of the evening?

Dean: That was optional to whoever had took them, and they had to bring her back to the gate, or they could take her home if they had—

Jim: You could go to her home?

Dean: They could go to the home. That's correct.

Jim: And the disease index is pretty high?

Dean: It really wasn't that I know of. I'm not sure if the girls were checked or not. I never investigated that, and I guess I had another probably a fortunate experience again of good luck. My roommate was really a chaplain's assistant. And I think I probably would have been a little more of a—

Jim: [Laughs.]

Dean: —a bar fly had he not been there.

Jim: Had a guilt complex already built in.

Dean: Well, no, it's just that we were good friends and we—I don't know—we just did—and he wasn't a drinker. And so we tended to just do—

Jim: Doesn't sound like fun at all.

Dean: —dopey things. But I made it to the bar enough to know that, you know, you didn't have to buy just bar liquor. I think that drinks were ten cents.

Jim: Yeah.

Dean: Mixed drinks. And so you always ordered, like, Seven and Seven, or always Canadian Club, or something special. You just didn't get any straight bar whiskey. [Laughs.] If I remember right, also, we couldn't purchase bottles of liquor, but officers could, you know, as enlisted personnel. NCOs might have been able to. I'm not positive on that either. As far as our other duties go, we never really had to pull much guard duty either because, again, they had Koreans that they called KATUSAs [Korean Augmentation Troops to the United States Army] that pulled all the perimeter guard duty.

Jim: KATUSAs.

Dean: And I'm not sure what that all stands for—

Jim: Oh, that was an acronym?

Dean: It was an acronym of something.

Jim: Oh, I see. Well, KATUSA obviously started with K, then.

Dean: Right. Korean Army, something, something—I guess we could figure it out if we took a pencil and paper long enough here.

Jim: Oh, that's good. Now there's something that's new [that] I hadn't heard before.

Dean: Right, and so they pulled the duties. There was one gate that the indigenous people came through, and so about once a month—maybe once every two months—I would have to pull duty at the gate for a one-day period.

Jim: Just checking passes?

Dean: Just kind of checking passes. And really the Koreans did it. We were just there as a—

Jim: Authority.

Dean: As an authority figure. And so we would do that for, like, about a five hour shift, and then in the middle of the night we had, like, a three hour shift that we were really alone out there. And so we carried just a pistol, and the gate duty, again, was handled by the—the driving gate duty was handled by the military from the Korean military people. But the—we had one kind of a crazy young guy who got bored while he was out there, and he was playing with a pistol—none of us had

pistol training—and he shot the telephone in half. Well, they decided after that, no more pistols, so we actually had to check out a carbine and three rounds of ammunition to go on gate duty. So I'm not sure what the three rounds were for, but after that no one shot the telephone in half, anyway. So that was really the only extra duty that I ever had to do. No KP duty [acronym for “kitchen police” i.e. menial kitchen duties]. That was all handled by, you know, indigenous people. No really duties within—oh, right. Well, once every—once every, maybe, few months, or maybe once the entire time I was there, I had to pull duty in the—where everybody slept, there was, like, an office where the—I think, a major probably ran that, US major—for just personnel, Army personnel—and so somebody had to be on duty overnight just to answer the telephone. And I had to do that, and I mentioned that I had missed Christmas on a ship coming over. The next year I pulled duty that night in the office where we lived. So where everybody else went out to celebrate Christmas, I was on duty that night. And that was probably only the two duties that we had while we were there.

Jim: Sure. So after you finished doing this for sixteen months, where—then where?

Dean: Then I was, you know, rotated home. Oh, maybe I should add here—I was just thinking things as I go along here. While we were there, I believe it was every three months or every four months, you got R&R to Japan.

Jim: Oh. Okay, tell me about that.

Dean: And so that was kind of neat.

Jim: They fly you?

Dean: What they would do is your orders. After you had been there for four months, I believe—so after you'd been there four months, orders would come down that, if you chose, you could go on R&R to Japan. And so what you would do is you'd pack up your—pack up the gear that you would need for that week of vacation.

Jim: It's a week.

Dean: One week, seven days in Japan, that started when you got to Japan. So I had to get on a train in Taegu, the regular train. We had a separate car for US personnel. Take that train to Seoul, process at KMAG in Seoul—

Jim: At where?

Dean: At KMAG, the Korean Military Advisory Group headquarters, which was in charge of our detachment. Then they would process and put us into a general pool of people that were going. Then they would send us to the Kempo airfield, which was the main airfield out of Korea. We would process—

Jim: Kempo is back in Seoul.

Dean: That's in Seoul. Yeah, all of this is in Seoul.

Jim: So you had to go down to Pusan—

Dean: Nope. We went from Taegu to Seoul.

Jim: Oh.

Dean: Then from Seoul they would fly to Japan.

Jim: Oh, okay.

Dean: And what they flew us on was these—they had two planes. One of them they called boxcars. Those are really, I think—

Jim: C-130s.

Dean: C-130s. And the others, I think, were C-124s. They were big planes, double deckers that the nose opened up.

Jim: 121.

Dean: 121? The nose opened up. The guys used to call them “crash masters” because they did pile a couple of them up at the—at the airport in—in Japan and killed a lot of troops.

Jim: [Unintelligible.]

Dean: Tachikawa was where we flew into. And so that was always kind of a nervous time to fly over.

Jim: Right.

Dean: And then we would land, of course, in Tachikawa. They'd have to process us one more time. Now, you know, we've already been three or four days in a processing mode. And then we would—

Jim: The time off hadn't started. [Laughs.]

Dean: Hadn't started yet, right. So. So from that time that they checked us out at the gate and gave us a bus ride into the city, then we had seven full days.

Jim: Right.

Dean: Now, what they also had were R&R hotels for very, very nominal fees. They had R&R hotels strictly for people coming over from Korea. And we all bought—either before we left, at a PX, or as soon as we got there—we bought civilian clothes, 'cause once we were on leave we didn't need Army uniforms.

Jim: You mean they didn't want you in Army uniforms?

Dean: You could, but, you know, who wanted to be, I guess? So yeah.

Jim: So I'm saying it was a voluntary thing.

Dean: It was a voluntary thing, yeah. So some guys that didn't want to shell out a couple of bucks would wear their uniform, but most of us were—

Jim: So you went out and bought something.

Dean: Oh, shirt and slacks and maybe a sleeveless sweater, and—

Jim: Tell me the hotel you stayed at.

Dean: I'm trying to think of the name of it, and I can't for some reason. I'd have to go home and look it up on my slides.

Jim: Who ran it?

Dean: Um, the military, as far as I know. A special branch of the military ran the hotel. So you would check in and—

Jim: And it was downtown Tokyo?

Dean: It was right in a main Tokyo area, right, 'cause there was—

Jim: It was just off the Ginza.

Dean: I believe so, yeah.

Jim: Okay.

Dean: I want to say it was a Shiya hotel, but I'm not particularly positive. For some reason that clicks in. Nice rooms. Oh! I think we had double rooms. Of course, I usually went with—often went with somebody or met somebody.

Jim: Sure.

Dean: We have a room, and the rooms all kind of faced, like, a little courtyard, so there was a little Japanese courtyard when you'd look out your window. And from

there you were on your own. You could stay there. You could stay in the city. You could—you could go wherever you wanted. You were on leave. You were carrying some papers, but—

Jim: Tell me about the money now.

Dean: I can't remember if we still had to—if we had to change our money back. That's the one thing I can't remember of being in Japan, what we used for money. But I think what I do remember is that when we left the Tachikawa airbase, we drove the way we do here in the States and on the Army bases on the right side of the road. When—but Japan drove on the left side, so the buses, when they left the military compound, had to switch over to the other side of the street. And we got kind of a kick out of that, 'cause they still drove in what we call the British style in Japan. And I don't know if that's still true or not, but that's how they—so I was able to have two seven-day leaves, four months apart. And then, in March, I—we didn't wait for an R&R. A very good friend of mine—the man that was the mail clerk and I—we took a ten-day leave on our own. And then we went to the airfield in Taegu, caught a military hop to Japan, and then another military hop to southern Japan, and another military hop further up towards Tokyo. And then we went by train up to the north to Nikko, which was a big—

Jim: I know about Nikko.

Dean: —yeah, Shinto. There's a big shrine. There's two shrine areas there.

Jim: It's the most important area in Japan.

Dean: Right.

Jim: To the Japanese.

Dean: Right. And so I was very proud of ourselves—

Jim: You must have saw the Kegon falls.

Dean: Exactly. Beautiful falls. And they had an R&R hotel right up at that lake up there.

Jim: I've been there.

Dean: And so I am so proud of ourselves that we got out of Tokyo. The problem was when you came from Korea to Tokyo, it was like darkness into light. And suddenly all the things that you'd had no privilege to in Korea were there. We would go to tea shops. They had ice cream. They had beer. They had—oh, it was just—just to walk the streets, or the—in the Ginza to buy things. To go to department stores. That was the other thing. They had these gorgeous

- department stores that have, like, rooftop terraces on the eighth floor. Again, I think, coming from a city, and always enjoying the city, I just enjoyed being in Tokyo.
- Jim: You walked around Nikko though.
- Dean: Sure. Walked around—
- Jim: Visited the shrine, and—
- Dean: Right. Did all the—
- Jim: You saw the famous Yomeimon Gate.
- Dean: Absolutely.
- Jim: That's the thing to see.
- Dean: Right. And so I've got slides and a lot of pictures of all that. I went over to Korea with a black and white box camera and one of my friends over there said, "Get rid of that. Let's get you a 35mm." And at the time we did—it didn't have a built in light meter. I had a separate light meter. But, still. I got—so, again, with my being able to tour the countryside in Korea, and going to Japan and then going up to Nikko—a lot of good pictures and a lot of good memories.
- Jim: You bought a Nikon?
- Dean: It wasn't a Nikon. I'm trying to think of what it was. I don't know the brand. Long since gone. Now an antique. [Laughs.]
- Jim: Right. Well, that sounds like good experience.
- Dean: Yeah. Yeah. So yeah, I—I look back on my military history as being so lucky. Just—again, the right place, the right time, and—
- Jim: Right.
- Dean: Plain, all-out luck.
- Jim: And did you get to eat at a lot of Japanese restaurants?
- Dean: Sure. Oh, absolutely. Yeah, they would have these—I'd call them, like, tea shops, I think. You went in, and they had the order things—they had all this neat stuff displayed in counters. And so you picked out something and paid for it then. Then they delivered it to your table. But, you know, the places, of course, to us—they had entertainment. It was always kind of funny to see, like, a country

western band in those days. They was all Japanese, and they weren't really very good, but they would have that. And they would have, like, birds—birds in cages around. It was just—it was just so different than—

Jim: Sure.

Dean: We just kind of soaked up every minute. So I did not get down to—

Jim: Took a train up to Nikko, I assume.

Dean: Yes, we did. Electric train.

Jim: That was very nice.

Dean: Yeah, nice train.

Jim: Did you get any—did you get to Kyoto?

Dean: I never got down to Kyoto. Again, that was the problem of—

Jim: Sure. Off duty.

Dean: —not getting out of Tokyo. It just got too easy. Nice quarters.

Jim: And so when you got ready to go home, then they just flew you home? Or did you take another ship?

Dean: Oh, another ship home. Very few people, again, flew to and from Korea. It was either an emergency, a high rank, or some sort of, like, maybe a military—I mean maybe an emergency to go home for family leave or something. So again, I had to start that whole process. Again, right towards the end of my working at this—in this adjutant general's office in Taegu, the man that was the clerk typist—we had a brigadier general and a full colonel that ran the detachment. And then he had a captain as an adjutant assistant. In fact, the only lieutenant in the whole compound was the general's driver. So again, they were all high ranking. Major and up, usually. And I believe we had at least six full colonels, mostly lieutenant colonels and majors. So the general didn't have a typist, and because, again, I was a good administrator, and what I had done while I was there is there's a set of Army regulations—AR-1 through AR-gosh-knows-what-number—that everybody has to refer to. I was always told I had the best set of Army regulations in Korea, even better than Seoul. And so everybody had to come to the office to find out, you know, what—

Jim: The adjutant general's office.

Dean: The adjutant general's office. So they moved me from the adjutant general's office down to the—it was then—work for the captain, but technically I was the typist for the brigadier general for the last two months. So that was kinda interesting, because I—it was still spring, and it was cool, and so I'd get there early, and I'd light the fire in his potbelly stove for him every morning. So that was that part of it. But then when I was ready to ship home, of course, then my orders came down from KMAG—Korean Military Advisory Group—Seoul, to report there. Then I did the paperwork there. Back to Inchon, and then on a troop ship home, which was a smaller troop ship than what I came over on. And then we extended [time] again, stopped in Yokohama. Ah. Another thing that happened to me was that when we were in this great big room, and we're processing to go home, I heard one of the officers come in and say, "Look for the first ten clerk typist MOSs coming through to type up the ship's roster." I thought, "Aha! This could be a break." So there was a time when I was at the beginning of the line. So they grabbed me, and so for two days I typed ships' rosters. All the people and what compartments they were going and their numbers and names. But at the end of the roster list, then, then they put us—the clerk typists, then—they put us on what they call the ship's roster. We had no duty on ship.

Jim: Oh.

Dean: So, here, on the first night on the ship in my bunk, comes a great big sergeant that says, "Rockstad! You've got duty at two to three every night for fire watch." And I got to say, "Oh, gosh, I'm sorry, but look here at the back of your ship's roster. Here I am on the ship's roster, and I'm not allowed to do any extra duty." "Oh. Okay." So, I—my only other duty, then, was when we got to Japan, they let us go on leave, and then I had extra leave time, also. Because I was a typist they let us take extra leave time in Yokohama before we headed home. And then we came back to the fort—I don't think we came to Fort Lewis. Well, we came back to the Seattle area, and then they actually flew us from there back to Fort Sheridan, and then I processed from Fort Sheridan out then.

Jim: Did you keep in contact with any of these folks that you were with in Korea?

Dean: Yes, I did. Quite a few. In fact, I am still in contact with at least two of them today.

Jim: Oh—

Dean: I kept in contact with my roommate that I said was a chaplain's assistant. He and I probably served together a good twelve months out of sixteen over there.

Jim: Oh, how nice.

Dean: And—

Jim: Where does he live now?

Dean: He lived in Leland, Michigan.

Jim: Mm-hmm.

Dean: And he came—we got together a couple of times. I was still single when I came home. When I got married, he attended our wedding. When our youngest daughter got married, he came to her wedding.

Jim: How nice.

Dean: And it was shortly after that—then, I found out that he had a brain tumor.

Jim: Oops.

Dean: Yeah. Yeah, and a year later he was gone. And I still kinda contact his wife. Another gentleman from Chicago, George Clear, he rotated home after I did, but we kept in touch. We got together when we first got married, when the couples first got married. Then we kinda drifted apart. I think it was because, you know, we had kids, and were raising kids, and you know how that goes. About three years ago, I got a call from him saying he had been sick. What did he have? He had a hernia operation. And while he was recovering he got thinking about the days in Korea, and about how we kinda survived, and our friendship is really what got us through, and he called me. And we've renewed that acquaintance now. Our families have grown, and so we get together.

Jim: Very good.

[End of Interview]