

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Korean War

Personal Experience

O.H. 1223

WILBUR E. VALOT

Interviewed

by

Don F. Baker

on

July 6, 1989

WILBUR E. VALOT

Wilbur E. Valot was born on June 17, 1929, at his parent's farm in Milton Township, Ohio. [He is] the son of Eli and Mabel Jones Valot. He graduated from Newton Falls High School in 1947.

Mr. Valot married Jeannette M. Bailey on May 25, 1952. They have three children: Kenneth, 36; Kevin, 30; and Kathleen, 28.

Mr. Valot was inducted into the U.S. Army on February 21, 1951. After his basic training, he was assigned to the Signal Corps. After further training, he was assigned to teach Signal Corps recruits who were destined to serve in the Korean War. Mr. Valot served in this capacity for the period of time that he was in the Army. He was discharged from the Army on February 21, 1953.

Mr. Valot worked for the Thomas Steel Strip Corporation, located in Warren, Ohio, from 1947 until he retired in 1991, with 44 years in that company.

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INTERVIEWEE: WILBUR E. VALOT

INTERVIEWER: Don F. Baker

SUBJECT: basic training, Signal Corp, leadership, Korea vs. Vietnam Veterans

DATE: July 6, 1989

B: This is an interview with Wilbur Valot for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Korean War, by Don F. Baker, at 2651 Milton Newton Road, Newton Falls, Ohio, on July 6, 1989, at seven o'clock.

Do you remember how you first found out about Korea and what you knew about it at that time?

V: When I went to school, they taught about Korea. I just thought it was another part of China. I understood that these people fought to exist. It was a way of life with them. I didn't think too much about it. I heard about their problems over there. I didn't think we would ever get involved, but low and behold, it developed. So, they started the draft back up in 1948, because they saw this coming. By 1951, February 21st, I went to the service. I wasn't really in favor of this conflict, but back in those days, "It was my country, right or wrong." That's a fact, believe it or not. And so, you didn't question. You went there and, whatever they asked, you did, which at that time, [you] felt it was your obligation. I still feel that way, as far as that goes. When they called for me to go, naturally, I went without any regrets or any qualms what so ever; and [I] tried to do my best.

B: Do you have any thoughts about going to Korea itself, when you knew that you were going to become involved and [be] drafted? What were your feelings at that time?

V: I felt that we really didn't have any business over there, but there again, "[It's] my country right or wrong." If they say, "Go," I will certainly go and lay my life on the line, because my forefathers have done it and the guys that just came back from World War II [have done it]. You just felt as though it was your duty, and it was. So, we went. I just lucked out. I didn't have to go over. That's just the long and the short of it. I happened to get into an instructing job, and I had a critical MOS, obviously. I ended up being an instructor, and [I] stayed in Camp Gordon, Georgia for a full two years.

B: What's a critical MOS?

V: When you went into the service back in those days, they started a new idea--I think it was new at that time. You took what they call an Army-Navy Qualification Test [ANQT]. They found out what your basic skill was. Then, they also took your civilian employment into consideration. I happen to be an electrician, starting out as an apprentice electrician. I knew a little bit about generators, a little bit about motors, and a little bit about electricity. So naturally, when I took this test, I shined in that category, and they were looking for people in the Signal Corp who had vast experience in that type of thing. So, I went down to Fort Meade, Maryland. [I] spent about thirteen days down there waiting for them to get a train load of guys to go to Camp Gordon, Georgia. There was another thing that entered into it. If anybody wasn't completely physically perfect, they also took them in the Signal Corp, especially if they had a little bit better IQ. That way, they could use them more to their benefit, because they really weren't physically perfect for infantry or artillery or something like that, where it was real stringent. In fact, they called the Signal Corp the "sick, lame, and lazy" division of the Army. We always resented that a little bit, naturally. (laughter) After they got a train load up to go to Camp Gordon, Georgia, that's where we went. The camp had been closed up until . . . they closed it in 1948, and there hadn't been anyone using the place, [only] on a stand by basis. So, we opened the place back up. Before it was all over with, we had thirty thousand troops there, so I heard. We can get into the basic training or whatever you want.

B: That's what I was going to go into next. What was your basic training like? Would you describe a typical day?

V: A typical day, as I say, we went there. When we were at Fort Meade, Maryland, they gave us our clothing and basic toilet articles and things like that. A point I want to make, at that time, the war industry or war effort was wound down to nothing. They had nothing but leftover World War II equipment. About the only thing that I saw that was new would be a Chevrolet or a Ford pick up truck that they took off of the assembly line, and they painted it OD. They had a few new things like that, but all of your radio equipment, all of your big trucks, all of your basic equipment like generators and motors and things like that were all of World War II vintage. So, they didn't even have clothes for the people, especially if he took larger sizes. A lot of the guys were two weeks into basic training before they got a pair of military shoes. It was nothing to see a guy with a civilian jacket, maybe civilian pants, even. If their waist line was too big for what they had, you waited until such time that they were able to gather this up from somewhere, or [they] made the guy [do] enough exercise where he lost weight to where he fit the clothing, possibly. But at any rate, we were poorly supplied. Believe me, [we were] poorly supplied! Of course, we weren't alone; everybody was in the same boat. Some guys didn't have overcoats and things like that, so they maybe wore two pair of underwear. We got by.

When we got to the basic training area--these buildings had been closed down since 1948--when we first went in, naturally we weren't soldiers. We didn't know anything about discipline or military procedures or anything, so they proceeded to whip us into shape. They put us into a barracks that had already been opened by a previous basic training group, a company. We would move into these cleaned up barracks. Already, the post engineers had come in and fixed up the windows and things, but we cleaned the rafters and the floors; and [we] GI'd and all this kind of stuff. [We] fixed up the Mess Halls and did all the work at the same time that we were learning to be soldiers, too. We were out on the field everyday, but you come back at night and GI'd the place. You cleaned it and worked day and night, like they did back then. They whipped us. The first thing they did, they made soldiers out of us, or tried to. Then of course, we were cleaning up the area. We started out in one that somebody else had cleaned up, and we remained there for two weeks. Then, we left that company area and went down on another street, and [we] opened up another company area; because now, we were starting to learn the ropes. We cleaned that up, but in two weeks time, they moved us out again and moved us into another company area. All that time,

they're opening the basic training area up, and these new troops are pouring in. I don't know just when the big flux of troops came in, but I would say I was definitely one of the first ones. They didn't really get going on this until about 1952--I suppose [that] was when the thing was in full order. We didn't have rifles. We practiced with sticks, believe it or not. There was a lot of the things we trained with that were very obsolete, even by the standards then. But eventually, the stuff started coming. Of course, we were only in basic training [for] about eight weeks, for Signal. That was what they call "Signal Basic." They taught you all the fundamentals--the rifle range, all [of] the drills and all [of] the procedures for gas--the usual basic training stuff.

After we got out of basic training, you went to the school, which you had been selected for. They had many schools in Camp Gordon, Georgia. It was all Signal. Incidentally, they had three Signal camps. Camp Gordon, Georgia was the big one. They had one in San Louis Episcopal, California; and [they had] one at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. That was kind of the garden spot. They told us it was beautiful. We all wanted to go there, eventually, but none of us ever made it. Some of the people did go to the San Louis Episcopal, in order to open up new schools out in there. I didn't have the opportunity, so I stayed right at Camp Gordon and took my twelve weeks of schooling as a power man, which consisted of generators and motors and maintenance of the equipment, is what it added up to. Of course, I did pretty good, because of my previous experience.

Then, I stayed as an instructor. They sent us to an Instructor's Guidance School, which they referred to as "charm school." That was a couple weeks long, three weeks or something like that. They give you the basic idea of how to teach students. Then, they send you back to the school area, and you were an instructor with an instructors arm band. Incidentally, they pay was about, I think, \$78.00 a month. If you made some rank or if you got married, you got a little bit of a [raise]. I think, before it ended up, I was a Corporal. I had married in the mean time. I think, with her and I both, we were given a whole \$144.00 a month, with her subsidy or allowance. Anyhow, that just barely made things meet, but that's okay. We made it. That's all history now.

B: What time did they get you up in basic? Go through the day. Did they get you up at five o'clock or four o'clock?

V: Oh, boy! Yes. It just depended. If you [had] KP duty that morning, you might even get up at three o'clock in the morning and head for the kitchen, and you didn't get out of there until one o'clock in the morning the next [day]. That was a very long day! You got ready for breakfast, then you were getting ready for dinner. Then, you were getting ready for supper. After supper, you cleaned the stoves. You cleaned the kitchen. You cleaned all the dishes and everything. Nothing was ever good enough. If some officer would come in and find grease on some of the trays--he would look through the whole stack until he would find one--and then, you would do the whole stack all over again. That was part of the job. That was part of becoming a soldier. As far as the day goes--if you weren't on KP, which only happened occasionally, but everybody had a turn at it sooner or later.

A normal day, you'd get up at five o'clock and they'd go out for role call. Of course, it was a routine thing. First [they] call out, "All present and accounted for." He was either present or else he was accounted for. There was no hanky panky. If you weren't there, you weren't there. And, you had to be accounted for. If you were on KP, you were accounted for. Then, as the squads reported that all their squads were there or accounted for, what they call the Platoon Sergeant, he'd report that his platoon was all present and accounted for. Of course, you had four platoons, and they'd all yell out. The first platoon, "All present and accounted for, sir." The second platoon would do the same, and the third and the fourth. That made up the Company. Then, they would give you a little pep talk, tell you what you were going to do for the day and what kind of gear you were going to need, and so on. Then maybe, you'd go back for breakfast, gather everything up and be squared away, standing out there in a formation, ready to go. They would march you out to the field and give you your basic training, or maybe, you would go into an old, deserted barracks that nobody was in. If it was a rainy day, you might sit in there for some kind of schooling or classes, like on tearing apart your rifle and putting it back together and things like this. We didn't have as rugged and strenuous, or maybe, as rigid a basic training as some did, because we were signal personnel; but yet, by today's standard, I'm sure it was very strict. They just made soldiers out of you. You didn't question. You did what you were told, and you did it now. That's the way it was. Maybe it's still the same today, I don't know.

B: What was the food like?

V: Very good, only not enough of it. You kept an appetite worked up. As far as I was concerned, the food--I've heard a lot of people complain about Army food--but, we always had good quality. We had an ample amount, although with our appetites, sometimes you didn't feel as though you got enough. Sometimes, they didn't give you enough time to eat it, because you had so much time. When the whistle blew, you moved. So by and large, [there were] no complaints what so ever. [We were] well fed and well taken care of. You took your lumps, all right! There was no doubt about that, but still, you were treated fairly, as long as you did what you were supposed to do. What you were supposed to do is what they told you to do, and you did it. It's just that simple.

B: We were talking about your basic training, I guess. I lost my train of thought there, where we were.

V: As I say, that consisted of twelve weeks. After that, you went to your school, and that was about twelve weeks. The fact of the matter is, basic training was actually eight weeks and your schooling was twelve weeks--depending upon what course you were in. My course happened to be twelve weeks, but if you were in radio lab, you had to learn to type. You had to learn Morse code, and you had to learn how to operate your radio. So, that was a longer course. Of course, they had other courses, cryptography, which was very secretive. They checked everybody out to the end degree. They spent weeks--some guys laid around for weeks, waiting to be checked out and cleared, before they could even get in these cages. They actually worked inside of fenced off areas. [It's] very secretive. It has something to do with coding and decoding messages. You had to have a very high IQ and a very good clearance. I think they had clearances in different categories. Everybody had a certain amount of clearance, but [for] cryptography, you had to be as clean as clean could be.

As far as the school went, as I say, there was cryptography, radio opp., radio repair--which took a lot of brains, too, because radio repair is a complicated program. There was [also] power man, which I was, which maintained the equipment that produced the power for the radios and the different types of equipment that they had for communications.

There was also cable splicer, which had to do with teletype, the telegraph. They spliced the cables that were in the lead cable. They [the cables] were all in one 4 inch diameter tube. These fellows learned to splice the wires together. They learned to burn the lead, in order to make the bubbles that covered up the

splices, and make them waterproof. That was considered a very good trade, and a lot of people wanted in that so they could learn a civilian trade. But then, later on, it turned out that lead burning is a very dangerous, unhealthy thing. Of course, we didn't think of it back in those days. In fact, that was before they realized that lead burning wasn't safe. Today, they just don't do that anymore. Of course, they have different means of communications now, too. I'm sure they don't do that in the service.

But, each and every school--that's one thing I can say for the Signal Corp--they taught you. If you couldn't learn and couldn't make it, you washed out. The fellows that washed out went to pole line construction, which is just considered the labor gang of the whole. Boy, that was tough work! They had to learn to set poles, climb poles, [and] string wires. Anything [that has] to do with cable communication, they did it. It was rough work. They used to climb up these poles--they had pole yards where they'd set hundreds of poles. The guys would climb up the poles, and they'd have them playing ball up there. It appeared as though they were having fun, but that gave you the training to reach out. [It] gave you confidence in your belt and in your spurs. They'd be up there pitching those balls back and forth, and the object was to keep the ball moving as long as you could without letting it hit the ground. Of course, the Army was always safety conscious. They taught you how to climb, and you weren't allowed to kick out your spurs and see how many steps you could come down. That was out. Guys used to sneak around and see if they could come down a pole in three hops. But, that was not allowed. Don't get caught.

Anyhow, they had a real training program there. If you were a good instructor, they critiqued you. If you didn't make the grade, they would tell you what you were doing wrong. They watched to see how you used your training aids. And incidentally, we had to make all of our own training aids and come up with our own training material. They taught you. They knew what they were doing. They said that you have five senses. And, the more [of] those senses you can touch upon as an instructor, the more those students are going to be able to retain. So, if you had something they could see, something they could feel, something they could smell or anything that appealed to the senses, then it would stick. And so, that was one thing they told us, that you use your training aids to appeal to their senses, and it works.

Of course, we'd go to the scrap yards--I think they called them salvage yards then--and we would pick up old generators, old starters, old pistons, old anything

that pertained to power equipment or the generation of electricity, anything used to generate electricity. Then, we'd use that. We had an electrical section in our power equipment school. You started out with basic electricity. They give you the schooling, and then, you went on to the electrical equipment. Then, they had a gas section, because we had gasoline engines that run all of this equipment. So, you taught gasoline engines from A to Z, tear them down, put them back together. Two times a week, we tore down those old jeep engines, because they used them on what they called a PE-95, which is a big power unit, 10-KW job.

And, we taught the panel board. We taught the engines. We tore the things apart. We took the pistons out of them, the rings, the rods, everything. [We] laid them out on the table, and then, we'd have a rundown. We had another word that we called it, which I can't recall right now; but you laid out all the parts on the table. You went through the parts. You described it. All the students asked questions, and that was the big thing they taught you, student participation. They didn't want you to lecture them. They wanted you to get them interested and let them ask the questions.

Incidentally, something that I always remembered, as an instructor, you'd never learn anything off a smart student, because he's thinking right down the line, just like you are. But, the guy that maybe wasn't too smart, he's coming in the back door. He's thinking in some other angle all together. Pretty soon, he hits you with a question, and I don't care how well you know your subject--he's got you. He's thinking in a different angle that you never thought of, and those are the guys that will teach you stuff. You'll say, "Wow! The guy's got a point there. I never thought of that!" Well, that's the fun of being an instructor, learning right along with the students and learning the game. After a while, you got so good, you even knew the questions the kids were going to ask before they ever came up with it. You could just look at them sitting right there [and] thinking, "Now, that guy told me this, and I'm going to shoot him down, because he told me this yesterday." So, he'd come up with a question. Well, you had the answer. [You] gave him the answer. [He'd say], "Oh, okay," and that would be it.

As I said, [it was] very interesting. I think they would put an eight (8) in front of your MOS, which was the Army number that they gave you for the job that you were trained for. They put an eight in front of it, which meant that you were instructor in that. Therefore, when you went out into the field someplace, they'd say, "Hey, this guy's been an instructor. We'll give him a more difficult job."

B: Let's go back a little bit, because I got confused. First of all, you were talking about a 10-KW something or other.

V: Yes.

B: Do you want to explain what that is?

V: Oh, it's a 10 kilowatt, which is ten thousand watts; and that was the maximum capacity of this PE-95, which was an Onen [trade name] generator, driven by a jeep engine. Incidentally, we had two different companies that made this jeep engine. Ford made engines for jeeps--I think it was Willie's Oberlin that made jeep engines they [Oberlin] couldn't make them fast enough during the war--so Ford made some of them. They were exactly the same looking engine, other than just a few little changes, like maybe, one of Ford's had an eighth of an inch bigger crank shaft, and mains and rods. They may be a little bit beefier here than there, but [they were] the same basic engine. We had many generators. They had big diesel generators, which were used for what they call permanent installations. These smaller generators were mounted on trailers. The PE-95 had a regular trailer that was associated with it, and it built it right in there. You'd take the thing through the mud as far as you could pull it, and if you couldn't take it any further, you unhooked a few bolts and drug it out of the trailer. It had skids on it, and it would slide along like a sled.

Much thought went into all of this military. They were way ahead of their time! People make a lot of fun of the Army, but I can personally guarantee you that I never saw anything that wasn't 100 percent pure quality, right down to their clothing, like the wool. You know, it insulates even when it's wet. You can't get that with this modern material or cotton or anything else. That's why you had wool clothing. You could lay down in the water and still stay warm, so to speak; where [as] you couldn't with other kinds of material. Well, they tested all [of] this stuff. It was tested to great lengths, and people were held responsible. If you couldn't produce what they wanted, they found somebody else that did. It was just that simple, which is good because people's lives are dependent upon it. I never, ever felt that the Army didn't make every effort to take care of you. They wanted a lot out of you, but they were willing to put a lot into you by the same token, which was fair enough.

B: What specifically did you instruct the men at?

V: I worked in the gas section, in power equipment maintenance. I taught gasoline engines, panel boards, and units. I taught all the different units that they had that were gas driven. They all had panel boards where you'd plug in, and [they had] frequency meters, volt meters, amp meters, and circuit breakers on the panel boards. I would teach the panel board. [I would] teach the engine itself. As far as the generator goes, they had already had that in basic electricity and in electrical fundamentals. They already had that background, but now, when it came to the individual unit, we taught them all phases of the maintenance. [We taught] how to service them, how to run them, how to maintain them, [the] maximum loads, [and] anything that they were going to be using in the field. When they went out of there, we felt as though, "Hey, these guys' lives are on the line, and someday, if you know your job, you can save your own life or save somebody else's." Guys back in those days realized it.

I had officers in my classes, military officers. In fact, I even had ones from foreign nations, we'll say Thailand. I had the Thailand personnel, a captain and a lieutenant. They sit right there. You outranked anybody. Of course, I still only get my \$144.00 a month. (laughter) But anyhow, you outranked the highest ranking man in your class. There were sergeants, and what have you, there. And, you had the authority. Of course, you didn't exercise it. It was just the fact that you were the boss, and they knew it. So, there was no quarrel. The guys behaved. They wore their clothing. They were properly dressed, and incidentally, when it was break time, we gave PT at breaks. You'd have to have fifteen minutes of PT in the morning and fifteen minutes in the afternoon.

B: What is PT?

V: Physical training. They wanted to keep you in shape. You did fifteen minutes in the morning, fifteen minutes in the afternoon, and when you'd go back to [the] company area, they'd take you out and give you another half an hour or so. You'd run, do push-ups and sit-ups and whatever. The school sergeant used to come around and make sure you were doing your job right and that everybody was squared away and doing their exercises properly. If they weren't, he'd tell you about it. If they still didn't, he'd tell them about it. He didn't mince any words. When they spoke, they made sure that you understood. As I say, [there were] no problems what so ever.

Incidentally--one little point that might be of interest to someone--during World War II, Whites and Blacks never slept in the same barracks or never were put

together. And, I slept right next to a Black man. I can even remember his name. [He was a] nice fellow. There definitely wasn't very many of them, because most of them didn't have, at that time, a high enough IQ. [They were] young fellows that didn't have the proper schooling or whatever. [It was] no fault of their own. It was just the way it was. We did have Blacks, and we did treat them with respect; and there was no problems. I can honestly say that. That was a beginning at that period, because in 1945, they still weren't doing it. I just happened to think of that today, and I thought that would be a good point to mention.

B: That's very interesting. What was your day like as an instructor?

V: We were in instructor Company A. That's the Company number, "A" is the letter that it happened to be. We were considered to have it pretty soft, by military standards, because we had civilian KP's. We couldn't instruct and do KP work, so they had civilian KP's that would come in. On Saturdays and Sundays, we'd have to do our own KP; but the pressure was off. There wasn't somebody coming around nit-picking about grease. They had to be cleaned, and they were inspected; but there wasn't any of the--we had a special word for it--chicken manure or whatever. Anyhow, that was down the tube by that time. We did it. We washed them clean. Of course, we learned how to wash them, too. [We put] hot water and a stick in there and shuffle through them like a deck of cards, and [we'd] get that water in there, the GI soap, the number ten pans, and all this kind of stuff. So, you learned the tricks by this time. You knew the short cuts. So, it was quite a simple matter on weekends, but during the week, you had civilians that came in and did it. So, that was a big relief. That was one of the fringe benefits of being an instructor.

We lived off post, or at least I did because I was married. If you were not married, you had to live on post; but you'd get up in time to get your breakfast and buy time to get to school and get yourself squared away. That was always very important. You had to be standing tall, [with your] shoes shined [and] the usual stuff. [You had to be] shaved and [have] all of the buttons buttoned and the hat squared away and clothing patched, or whatever. It had to be neat and starched, and looking good. We had to be at school at seven-thirty in the morning. Every hour you had a ten minute break. The guys could relax and "smoke if you had them." That was the old thing that everybody said, "Smoke if you got them." So, you had your little break. Sometimes, the students would lay down out against the building. They had to be squared away as

far as the uniform of the day. You had a uniform of the day. If it was fatigues, which it always was when you were going to school, you had to have your fatigue hat. It [the hat] had to be on any time you were outside of that building. You could take your jacket off when you came in, but it was hung neatly on the back of your chair. If you went outside of that door, you didn't go out there with your T-shirt on. You had to be in full uniform, "the uniform of the day," whatever it was. There was a class "B" uniform and a class "A" uniform.

B: What's a class "B," and a class "A?"

V: Class A is when you had your Ike jacket, like for the winter time. That one consisted of an Ike jacket and suntans--I think we used to call them [that]. The shade was kind of a beige color, kind of a light brown. Then, you had your wool pants and you had your low quarters (shoes), they called them. That was considered a class "A" uniform, with your brass and the colors. The class "B" uniform would be your fatigues, and that was your work clothes. But there again, they always had to be cleaned and squared away, neat and all of the buttons buttoned. By this time, you knew what they expected, and you didn't question; because when you were in basic training, if they came around and you had a button unbuttoned, they simply took that button and cut it off with their knife. They'd call you to attention, open ranks, and the officer or the sergeant would walk up and down the ranks, back and forth. He'd walk up, look you right in the eye, and look your buttons over. If there was a button unbuttoned, there was no reason to have it unbuttoned. If it isn't buttoned, then he'd take his knife and cut it off. [He'd] stick it in your pocket. [He'd] take your name, rank, and serial number. That night you'd have to sew it back on and show it to him. He had a bunch of details. You could go to the kitchen and go clean the stoves, or maybe, you could go out and clean the grease pit; or you could go out and police the ditch, pick up all the papers and cigarette butts in the company area. Or maybe, you could do a little duck walking or something like that. They always had . . . that was part of the training. After a while, you learned to be squared away. That was just automatic. You stepped outside of the door and locked, "My hat is on. My buttons are all buttoned. I'm squared away." You look yourself over, and you're on your way. Nobody bothers you. So, that was just the way it was.

B: What about recreation?

V: Oh, my. [It was] practically nonexistent.

B: Really?

V: Yes, sir. We had no recreation. On Sundays, you could go down, and maybe get a basketball out of the recreation center, and go out and shoot a few baskets. I'll tell you the truth, come Sunday--especially when you're in basic training and so on--you're tired. Of course, by the time Sunday comes, you owe somebody some letters that you didn't have time to write all week. Many a times, I've sat in the latrines. At night, the light was on in the latrine, [and] I'd write letters after "lights out." "Lights out" was at ten o'clock or something like that. Or, if you didn't have your shoes shined, you went down to the latrine and shined them, because you had to be squared away for the next morning. So, if you have a girlfriend or if you have a family back home that you like to write to or any of your relatives, that came out of your own time. Time was precious. They kept the pressure on you every minute. As far as recreation goes, forget it! It was nonexistent. And, that is a fact. There was no ball games or no company recreation. Today, I'm sure they have competitions between companies and battalions. That was nonexistent back in those days.

B: Did you get any leaves?

V: Oh, yes. You got your thirty days a year. Three day passes were unheard of until, maybe, if you got on some kind of a permanent set up where they might be just a little bit slow. They'd say, "Well, if you want a three day pass, we'll be able to work one in." You might get Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, or Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. You practically always had Sunday off, anyhow, but Saturday morning, you had parades up until noon, and that kind of thing. So, they kept you hopping [and] kept you busy. If you were tired enough, you didn't want any recreation. You were ready to go to bed and get some rest, and get ready for the next day. When you went to school, it was a little bit more easy. [It was a] little bit more of a routine procedure. [In] basic training, they'd call you out right in the middle of the night. If you didn't fall out quite fast enough, they'd tell you to go back in. They would blow the whistle, [you'd] fall out, and they'd time you. If it wasn't fast enough, you'd go back in again, and again, and again, until you got it down pat; and when you fall out, you were in formation. You'd stand at attention, and you were ready to go. They were very strict then, punctuality. They were the boss, and you better know it. (laughter) That's just the way it was. They never really, I'd say, physically abuse you, but they had . . . if you wanted to show your resentment, they had ways of taking it out on you. I can guarantee you that! They'd get you up in the

middle of the night. They would take you on field problems. That was another thing they used, group punishment. If somebody goofed, the whole bunch paid. Boy, that gets them squared away in a hurry, because when you get your fellow men down on you, you're in trouble. It's bad enough to have your superiors down on you. But, when your fellow men get down on you, you feel left out. You're done. You're just an outcast, and you'll square away.

B: What do you think of your leadership, like the lieutenants and the captains and all of those people in the camp? Are they pretty good?

V: [They were] excellent, absolutely. They were all professional men. They had high IQ's. You couldn't become an officer unless you had an IQ of one hundred and--the numbers deceive me right now. IQ was a big thing. A lot of people that had the high IQ's, they came around and gave them the opportunity to go to Officers Training School. Several of them did. They took the cream of the crop. If you weren't the cream of the crop, you didn't get to go there. I had a borderline IQ. Mine wasn't really high enough, I don't believe, to be an officer. Not that I wanted to be, because that was a lot of responsibility. You, as an officer, they had more pressure on them. I'm not saying they didn't kick up their heels and have a little bit more of an opportunity, but they were responsible. They were held responsible, and if you weren't top notch, they kind of. . . . [There was] a lot of prestige there. If you were a misfit, you were just given some pretty poor jobs. You would be put in charge of a basic training company, or something like that; or [you would be] in charge of a firing range, where it would be a very poor life. I always figured the worst job in the Army would be a DI, a Drill Instructor, where every day was like basic training. They did what they asked. They didn't ask you to do anything that they wouldn't do themselves. That's the way the military worked, and that's the way it should work. If you're going to be a soldier, as far as I'm personally concerned, I think that's where a lot of things come today. They're just not soldier stuff. They take all different groups and different individuals, and they put them in there. They don't make soldiers out of them. Maybe they're extremely intelligent. Maybe this is the way that it's got to be today, because with our modern technology, you've got to have the super intelligent people. By the same token, when I think of a soldier, I think of a field soldier, and you've got to have somebody that, if he's living, he's going to be there. You've got to depend on him. You've got to have discipline. You've got to have law and order, so to speak; and in today's Army, you don't

have that. It's a different ball game today. It's hard for me to comprehend that a soldier can be a guy that works from eight [o'clock] until four [o'clock], with weekends off, thirty days off a year, good pay, automobiles, recreation time, and ice cream stands on every corner. I drive through Camp Gordon now, and--honest to gosh, to me--it's depressing. There's ice cream stores on the corners. There's guys standing around out of uniform. You wouldn't know he was in the military. You'd think he was in a boy scout camp, and that's putting it mildly. I think, "My goodness! We're depending on these people to protect." But, as I say, I'm from the old school. I'm not saying that I'm right and they're wrong, because it's just a different ball game today. I think education is the answer to a lot of our problems, both privately, industrially, and militarily. So, I'm not knocking at. . . . Today, everything is push button. Back in those days, it was survival of the fittest, and you had to be the fittest. That was it, or you didn't make it. As I say, I never complained about the discipline, because you learn. Especially as you get older, you realize that without discipline, you don't have anything. As they said, they told us at the time, "If you don't have discipline, you are a mob, and that is a fact. It was mild in my time. I had a friend that was a World War I Marine, and he says the Marine's in the only thing. He said, "If you're trained and if you're breathing, you'll be there. You're fellow man has got to depend on you. If you aren't disciplined, you can't make it, because your fellow men can't depend on you." So then, you have this mob, you see? You've got to have that discipline in order to get the job done, back in those days; but I suppose today--as I say, it's hard for me to realize--it's a different ball game. I was on the tail end of the old Army, you might say. If I went in again, I'd like it just like it was, because you're there to soldier. I am proud of the fact that I was there. I'd go again. I might not agree with why we are there. As I told you previously, I don't agree 100 percent with this Chinese business, because I heard they've been fighting for twenty years before we got in on it. And, I heard they fought for survival. Why should we take sides. The point is, I was asked to go, and I went. I did the best I could when I was there. I would have went over and laid it on the line if I had to. I wouldn't have wanted to, but I would have done it, because I thought that it was my duty. Like I say, I'm from the old school. If I was born today, maybe I'd feel like a lot of the people did during the Vietnam. I'm not saying they were wrong. At the time, I thought they were; but then again, time has proven that maybe they were right. That's about all I have on that subject.

- B: Back to the discipline, a lot of people said the military doesn't want it's men to think, they just want them to react. Did you find that true in your training, and as an instructor, did you teach them that way?
- V: No. We taught . . . we were kind of a specialty group. We were like a technical . . . we didn't think of it back in those days as being a technical thing, but we were in comparison. When I think back now, it appears that we were a technical organization. We taught our guys to think, absolutely. When they went out of those schools, they knew their job. We knew that they knew their job, because they had to prove themselves to us. The fact of the matter is, at the end of school, they went to the field for two weeks. They had instructors out there that watched them set these units up, and saw them operate them. Then, when you were out in the field, you had your radio operators, your radio repairmen, in case any of the radios went bad. Of course, everything was tube type and everything was old fashioned resistors, capacitors, and obsolete equipment. Even in those days, let alone today, everything is solid today, no trouble. That's it. Back in those days, everything was big and bulky. You had all these troops that all these different schools had trained, and for two weeks, they met in the field. There was somebody out there all of the time, because as your groups graduated, they went to the field for two weeks. There was a field full of guys out there. They take them ten miles out into Camp Gordon, out in the sand and the boon docks. They would set up out there in tents. Actually, [they] produced their own electricity for lights, for the radio equipment, for anything. They had little mock wars. I didn't get in on that much. When I went there, as I say, the school was in it's infancy. It grew and improved as time went by. We made sure. The instructors out there would see to it that they overloaded the equipment, burned up the engines, run them full tilt twenty-four hours a day, until they did blow or burn up or whatever. Then, they would send them back into the area and repair them, and take them right back out there and do the same thing all over again. [They would] patch them up and keep them going. They were worn out stuff, and they deliberately tried to wear them out. [They would] make the troops fix them. I feel that the troops that went out of our area were trained. I feel as though I could depend on them if I had to. We made a point of that. The guys were proud of that fact. A lot of times they complained about the instructors. We used to have to make them clean up the . . . everything had to be cleaned. After they got done tearing their engines [apart], they'd have to GI the shop and just get it spotless. Sometimes there were complaints, and everybody figured they were being picked on; but by the time

they got out of the school, they knew their job. They knew that the school made an effort to train them. I feel certain that there's lots of guys running around there today that some of us people had an influence on your life, just like if you were a school teacher. I'm sure that somebody told them the trade that we tried to teach them. I'm sure that some of them are good at what they're doing. I know none of them. I would like to meet somebody that would remember me and some of the old things that we used to do. I was more fortunate, because to be a rifleman, to me, that would be just depressing, monotonous, as well as dangerous. Laying out in the field all day long for month in and month out on all kinds of training missions and mock wars. That isn't my idea of fun, for sure; so to be a field soldier, that would leave a lot to be desired.

B: Going to a political realm a little bit, do you have any thoughts about Truman and his firing of MacArthur, or anything about MacArthur, anything in reference to that area?

V: No. I never really took sides. Not being a Democrat or a Republican, I always figure I'll vote for the best man. If the guy wasn't in my choice, I used the people's choice. I let it go at that. I really didn't think it was much of my business at that time. You're young, and when you're twenty-one years old, you're not thinking too serious about those kinds of things. Like I told you a while ago, there was only just a few years between World War II and this Korean conflict. Yet, as I think back, as I remembered it back then, it was a long time in between. Actually, you start thinking [it was] five years, that's no time at all. That's what happens when you get older. I never got into the political end of it. I think, back in those days, we weren't as well educated along those lines. Our school teachers didn't teach us that much about politics. We weren't politically develop or inclined. To tell you the truth, communications were so poor back in those days, that you really didn't know too much what was going on. Today, you turn on the television and you see everything right there before your eyes. I think our youth today are much more up on current events than what we were, because we were kind of back in the dark ages, so to speak, in comparison. So, when you're a soldier back in those days, you do what you were told, and you didn't question why. I think we had some kind of lingo that said, "Ours is not to question why; ours is but to do or die." So, that was that. We just went with the flow.

B: You hear a lot about Vietnam and the veterans of Vietnam today, and very little about Korea. Do you have any feelings on that?

V: I'll tell you the truth. I have sympathy and compassion for Vietnam Veterans, but sometimes they demand respect. You can't demand respect from anyone. That's something that you've got to earn. I'm not saying that they didn't earn it, by any means. They went. They did their job that they were selected to do. I don't think they deserve any special attention. As far as them claiming that they got cancer from agent orange, I don't buy a whole lot of that. People have been dying from cancer that never heard of the word. People of all walks of life die from cancer. I don't think they're any more prone, or [that] their children [are more prone] to have birth defects. I think this is something that got blown out of proportion to some degree. I'm not saying that this hasn't, in some remote cases, caused these problems; but I think it's grossly exaggerated. I don't feel as though I deserve any special [attention]. Of course, as I say, I wasn't over there getting shot at; so maybe that has a bearing on it, too. I think when you're called to do a job for your country, you go and you do it. You come back home and get on with your life, and forget about it. I'm proud of the fact that I was in the service. Even if I would have been over there and gotten killed, I don't think that I would deserve any special kind of a monument to my whatever or to the Korean Veterans. I think it's nice to think of these people and realize, "Hey, these people died for our country," or, "They fought for our country," or, "They spent five years of their life." I think that's part of the obligation that you have for serving your country. I think it should be considered an honor, rather than being discriminated against or abused. Of course, as I say, I'm from the old school. We didn't get to become a great nation because we didn't believe in our country. I think we owe a lot to our forefathers. I think that we've lost a lot of that along the way. Of course, there again, you think differently when you're sixty [years old] than you did when you were sixteen [years old]. I kind of go with the flow, yet. I really don't have any quarrels with anyone.

B: Okay, just one last thing, and then we'll call it a night. I just wondered if there was anything else that you would like to tell me that I may not have covered or thought of?

V: No. I can't think of anything. As I say, I'm satisfied. I have no regrets, no quarrels. I think we've pretty well covered it.

B: Okay, good.

V: Thank you very much for the opportunity to express my views.

B: I appreciate you taking the time to let me come over and talk to you, that's for sure.

V: I've thought about this for, maybe, several years. Today and last night, after you called, I got to thinking about some of this stuff and what you said about history. I thought, "Things are changing and, by gollie, maybe people think differently now." Maybe that's good. In fact, I'm sure it's good, because I know a lot of my thoughts were wrong back in those days. (laughter) Probably a lot of them are today. But, I do welcome the opportunity to give my little opinion, right or wrong. I thank you for taking the time to come out here and listen to this, although I don't really know how much I contributed, because I had one of the better jobs. I was very lucky. Everything worked out just peachy for me, as far as my personal end of it went. As I say, I was glad to be there and I would do it again.

B: As I say, people focus in on the combat and stuff, but there were an awful lot of people that did the other things that were just as important. All of the men you trained, and what they did, I'm sure, contributed. It's important that we know about that, too.

V: Thirty thousand men in one camp, that's a lot of people! When you stop and think about the population of the city of Newton Falls, you're talking five times [the population of the camp is five times the population of Newton Falls]. That's a lot of people. And, we didn't have any problems. There were probably problems, but there was no disrespect for property, no theft, no deception or no fights, or no quarrels. As I say, I've always respected the military, because they've been there. They know every loophole. They've got the answer to everybody's problems. One of the big answers is to keep them moving. You might think you're bad, but when you go there and they [say], "This guy is bad! We'll keep him. . . ." They'll get you up in the middle of the night and tell you to go to the bathroom. They have a name for that, too. They'll wake you up. They'll interrupt your sleep. [If] you take away a man's sleep and work him twenty-four hours a day for about three days--I don't care if he's Charles Atlas--he's at your mercy. He's a whipped puppy dog, and all you have to do then is shoo him the right way and he goes in there. It works.

B: I just thought of one other thing since you've been talking. Korea--at least in the history books I've read--is considered to be one of the unpopular wars.

[It's] right before Vietnam in it's unpopularity. You just said that you really didn't feel that that was the case with the men that you were involved with. Do you want to elaborate on that a little bit?

V: Well, you say "unpopular". We never talked much about it, but I felt as though, "what do I care if these people are Commie, democratic, or fascist," because whatever they are is because that group is feeding them. It's a matter of existence for these people back in those days. My opinion of them is they were just like animals, and anybody who will feed them, that's who they'll swing to. If the Communist happened to offer them the best piece of pie, so to speak, that's where they go. Just give them enough time, and there will be something else tomorrow. They fight to exist. And, for us to choose sides. . . . I've always thought it's like a husband and wife fighting. If they're fighting, the best thing to do is to try to stop them from fighting, but don't get too close, because the first thing you know, you're involved. I wasn't really in favor of that Korean War. I had my own personal views. As I've told you before, I didn't think we had any business there. Back in those days, young men said, "It's my country, right or wrong," so I didn't question it. But now, I can see we're doing the Korean thing. We're not drug out. I can see where the people--and especially, the people back home--aren't behind you. Then, you wonder, "What am I doing over here?"

Then there also got to be other points that got into the Vietnam thing that weren't in Korea. There were groups that, because they said, "I'm not going," they didn't have to go. Some of them went to Canada, and they got away with that. Like I say, I'm not saying they were wrong. The Korean deal was a little bit different. At least the people back home were behind you, and you felt as though you weren't being handled or [being] taken advantage of. As I say, my brother was in the military, and all my friends were in the military during World War II. It was expected that they be there. You were proud of the fact that they were there, and it was your turn. That's the way it was back in those days.

Today, it's a different ball game. If you're a young fellow today and thinking young, I just don't know [if] another Vietnam. . . . I'm sure there would have been another Vietnam if it hadn't have been for the folks back home and the guys in the military objecting, deserting, and demonstrating. Let's face it, we'd like to think that we're the nicest people in the world. Well, you can look around and see [that] we're pretty violent. I'd hate to admit that, but it's true. I'm a

pretty gung ho American, but we're a vicious bunch. We've got an awful lot of nice people, but we have some bad people who, if there's a dollar involved and if a person has an opportunity to gain by causing some kind of a national calamity or world situation, take advantage of it. The military people . . . they're trained, and this is their life. They actually don't hate when these skirmishes come up. They get in on it. They're reasonably safe. They go in and serve a little time. [They] come back and live a good life. That might sound anti-American, but let's face it, we've got to look at the other side of the coin once in a while. Like I say, I'm 100 percent American, and always will be. I even have views on destroying of the flag.

B: I'm sure you do. (laughter)

V: Well, I'll tell you what I feel about that. I figure that all we're doing--by saying it's illegal and [that] you can be arrested for burning the flag, is opening the door for these people. Everybody that's got a gripe or complaint or a grudge, that's the first thing they'll do. They'll burn a flag in order to get attention to try to prove their point. We know there isn't enough jails in the United States to hold the people who are willing to burn a flag. The thing to do is say, "Hey, it's perfectly alright to burn a flag. Do whatever you want to do with it, but you're a no good bum if you do." [We should] teach decent people that respect the flag. And the ones that don't respect it, everybody look down their nose at them. The first thing they'll do is run off some place and not want to be seen. As it is, when they can cause a ruckus, get on television, get their name in the paper, and get whatever organization that they're representing, you're playing right into their hands. The thing to do is--I'd want to punch them, but you can't stop them--teach decent people to respect. I think that's the answer to the problem. Decency will always win, I believe. Nobody wants to think that they're an eight ball or a misfit, but that's exactly what they are. I think that's the way that they should be treated. Good people will come out on top, I feel. I think that's the answer to the problem. I have no quarrels on if they burn the flag. I wouldn't think of doing such a thing myself, because I had a better fetching up than that. And, if they don't, shame on them. They're to be pitied. Well, that's about it. Thank you.

B: Thank you.

V: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW