

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

World War II and the Korean War

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MAURICE GARMAN

Interviewed

by

Salvatore Aliberti

on

December 5, 1989

## MAURICE GARMAN

Colonel Maurice Garman, U S Army Retired, was born on March 13, 1925 to Ross and Helen Garman in Waverly, Illinois. He is one of eight children. Before World War I, he attended and graduated from high school in Waverly.

He enlisted in the U S Army in 1943 and served in the European theater during World War II in a combat engineer unit as an enlisted man. He was discharged in 1946. He reenlisted in the U S Army in 1948 and was stationed in Berlin during the time of the Russian blockade of the city. At this time, he was an investigator for the Military Police. After Berlin, he attended two years at the General Educational Development College at the U S Armed Forces Institute. After this, he went to OCS (Officer Candidate School) which he successfully completed. He then started his tour of duty during the Korean War as a lieutenant, once again in an engineer unit. He was discharged from active duty in 1953 to 1980 when he retired with the rank of colonel.

Colonel Garman was decorated many times for his service during the War years. For his service in World War II, he received the European Theater of Operations Ribbon and four bronze Stars. For his service in Korea, he received the Korean Service Medal, five Bronze Stars, the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Badge, and other decorations as well.

While still on active duty, he married his wife, Katherine, on May 18, 1952. They have one daughter, Katherine, who is now thirty-six. After he got out of active duty, Colonel Garman and his family settled down in Cambell, Ohio. His active duty experience with the Army Engineers paid off in the civilian world when he was hired by the Ohio Department of Transportation in 1965. He retired from his job there in 1985.

Colonel Garman and his wife are active members of St John's Russian Orthodox Church in Cambell Colonel Garman is president of the Cambell Chapter of the Federated Russian Orthodox Clubs and Governor of the Ohio District of the Mahoning Chapter of the Reserve Officers Association

His hobbies include golf, bowling, gardening, and ceramics Of these, his greatest passion is in ceramics Together with his wife, they have created many beautiful decorations for their home as well as many Christmas decorations To control the process as much as possible, they even have their own kiln in the basement.

--Salvatore Aliberti

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INTERVIEWEE MAURICE GARMAN  
INTERVIEWER Salvatore Aliberti  
SUBJECT World War II and the Korean War  
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A This is an interview with Maurice Garman for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on World War II and the Korean War, by Salvatore Aliberti, on December 5, 1989, at his home, at 3 20 p m

Can you give me a little background of yourself prior to the war? What you were doing when Pearl Harbor occurred?

G Well, I was born in a little town called Waverly, Illinois, and shortly afterwards we moved up to Galesburg which is about 170 miles southwest of Chicago I am from rather meager surroundings My father was a laborer I am one of eight children in the family I finished high school in 1933 When Pearl Harbor occurred, of course, I was still in school I think I was getting ready to go to church on that Sunday morning when the news came I guess I was probably a sophomore or junior in high school at that time

A Did you enlist or were you drafted into the Army?

- G I quit school my senior year and volunteered to go into the service. I probably should have continued to go on with school because they did not take me until June. But I did get my diploma, because I had enough credits when I quit in the early spring. When they did take me in I went to Camp Bowie in Texas for basic training with a combat engineer battalion. After basic training we went on maneuvers in Louisiana. We more or less became experts in bridging. And so they kept us there for an additional tour of maneuvers to repair the roads and fix the bridges down in Louisiana that the Army tore up. After that it was off to Europe, and World War II.
- A You keep saying that they sent you down to Camp Bowie, for basic training. Did they already know at this time that they wanted you to be in the engineers?
- G Yes, because that is where I was assigned. I don't know how they arrived at this assignment.
- A Describe a typical day in basic from beginning to end.
- G Of course, you learn a lot of things in basic. You start off early in the morning with reveille, and fall out for some calisthenics. Then it's off to breakfast. Then you might spend an hour policing the area or cleaning the barracks. We would spend some time on weapons, [especially] on how to assemble and disassemble your private weapon. Then we also had squad weapons which were machine guns. We got classes during the day on these. You get lectures on different aspects of combat, tactical training, etc. They kept you hopping from morning until night.
- A Based on your experiences throughout the war, did you feel the training you received was adequate to the job or that there were too many things that were left out?
- G No, I think my training was adequate. The engineer training that I had initially was taught by a cadre that came from the Third Engineer Brigade out of Hawaii. These were all regular army soldiers. They were tough. They had been around a long time. So I think our training was really good. Of course the old saying was, "What you learn while you're growing up, or what you learn in training is what you take into life or combat." The theory behind our basic training was that, "We are going to teach you the things that will help you in combat."
- A You mentioned that you were a combat engineer. Describe the mission of the combat engineers.
- G You have different groups of engineers. You have divisional engineers who were normally assigned to a division. The battalion is further broken down to a line company supporting a regiment. Then you have combat engineers which are corps troops, who were actually your front line people. We went in to division areas for them and built bridges for them as corps engineers. We built bridges in the divisional areas because their combat engineers were busy doing other things like hauling ammunition, and setting up obstacles, such as up barbed wire.

and concertina. Our battalion built 175 bridges in Europe of various sizes, from twenty feet to 1384 feet across the ground. We as corps engineers were called upon many times to come up and escort the tanks and the armor units when they were on search and destroy missions, or just searching out the enemy. We as engineers would accompany the armor units to sweep the roads ahead of them for land mines.

A As combat engineers, were you frequently expected to do these kind of activities under fire?

G Absolutely. Of course, you are first of all a fighting man. Second, you are an engineer. Many times we've done these things under fire or under observation of the enemy. I recall one time in Korea where we brought up a search light and set it back about a mile behind where we were working. It bounced off the clouds to give us a moonlit night to put in a bridge because the infantry had to get across in the morning. But many times with combat engineers you did things under fire.

A Describe a typical combat engineer platoon. How is it organized, or who does what in the process of building a bridge or building an entrenchment of some kind?

G Your normal engineer platoon consisted of up to 41 men. You had three squads of thirteen men and you had a platoon sergeant and his driver. Each engineer squad has certain tools. They had engineers, and different tool sets for different things. Each squad had a demolition set. That included explosives, the primers, the caps, and everything needed to set off charges. They had the pioneer tools and we had construction tools. The squad had a two and a half ton truck. These tools were carried on the truck. Each platoon had so many trailers, either cargo or lumber. They were expected to do just about anything in the construction field, whatever they needed to get the troops advanced to accomplish their mission.

A Would building something like a pontoon bridge or a bridge for the tanks to reach a river or stream a platoon type job or would this be a company job?

G Well, it depends upon the size of the river. We went out many times before breakfast and put up a twenty or thirty foot steel treadway bridge. If it was a big job, then it took the company. When we crossed the Rhine river in Europe, we put in a floating steel treadway, 1280 feet in thirteen hours. That is quite a feat. That was done with more than the company. We had a battalion. We had light equipment engineer companies who furnish compressors because the engineers have one compressor per company. When you are blowing up all of these pontoons (rubber floats), you can't get by with a couple of compressors. So it depends upon the type of crossing you are making, whether you need a squad or whether you need the battalion plus support units of other types.

A Describe your progress through the war through world war II, where they first sent you, and what your various missions were.

G We finished our basic training down in Camp Bowie and Louisiana Maneubers, Texas The whole battalion was sent up to Camp Miles Spanish, Massachusetts which was a staging area to oversee shipments We were there about three weeks Then we boarded a ship out of Boston which was the Mauritania At that time, the German submarines were quite active in the Atlantic The Mauritania was a sister ship to the Queen Elizabeth So those ships travelled alone Most of our smaller troop ships were escorted by battle ships of some sort.

About half way over, we did have a submarine alert The ship did a hundred and eighty degree turn This rolled half the guys out onto the decks But we got there safe and sound We went over to England for about a month waiting for the call to go to Europe D-day had already passed They shipped us to Omaha Beach They were, at the time of our landing, breaking through St Lo which was three miles off the beach So you can see how much fighting was taking place, because in fifty days they had only moved three miles Once we broke through St Lo we were assigned as part of the third army. We trailed the 4th armor division and the 80th infantry division most of the way through France Until the Battle of the Bulge, they sent our unit up to bridge the Rhine for the 9th army which was the army that made the Airborne landings Of course, the troops had already crossed at that time, but there was no real beach across the Rhine

We stayed with the 9th army after the armistice was signed in May They did not send us home They sent a lot of troops that left Europe through Alfa, Normandy, and various staging areas in Normandy and Southern France These areas were named after cigarettes, such as Lucky Strike, Camel, and Chesterfield Our engineering unit along with others were sent back to France There our battalion had 2000 German prisoners of war that we used as laborers to repair Frances roads and bridges for them Our unit returned home in December of 1945 I was discharged in January of 1946

A I would imagine part of the mission of your unit at Omaha Beach would have been to dismantle various German barriers and such

G That is exactly what we did We were broken down into companies that were in support of various regiments of the 80th infantry division Many times we found ourselves out in front of the infantry clearing off roads of vehicles that our airforce had destroyed and were still burning We would take our bulldozers with us

A Were booby traps during this time a serious problem?

G Not really because, although I have had some of my good friends get killed, the Germans really did not have time to set many They were moving so fast They didn't even have time to set up mines We had very few problems with booby traps and things of this nature There were a few around

A Describe the type of barriers the Germans would set up that you would have to dismantle or clear

G Well, we ran into very few barriers. Like I said, we were moving through so fast through France. Of course, you know the old marginal line was there as well as the Siegfried line. The marginal line didn't mean much because our army flanked it. Once they got around it, it was very easy to blow the steel rails and everything. It was the same thing with the Siegfried line. It didn't hold back much either. But we didn't have much either you know. Our biggest problem was clearing the roads of debris that our Air Force had raised so much havoc with. [We also cleared] the Abbees the German blew (trees on both sides of the road intertwined)

A Based on what you observed, were the German engineers as well trained, and as well equipped as the Americans were

G I'm not sure if they were as well trained. I think in the initial stages of the war they were well equipped with equipment. But I think the advantage that we had was that there was an endless supply of material, and of course the Germans didn't [have an endless supply]. We would go by the areas where the air strips were. The planes were still sitting and were destroyed by them or our own Air Force because they had no fuel to get them out. So it was a matter of quantity. I would say they were as well trained as we were.

The Germans had some good equipment. We had the floating Bailey bridge during World War II. It was classified as a secret weapon. We built a lot of Bailey bridges, not the floating Bailey but Bailey bridges which when built went together just like an Erector set. They had panels that were six feet high and ten feet long that weigh six hundred pounds a piece. It takes six men to hold and heave them into position. [You would] start them off on rocking rollers and plain rollers and you kept building the bridge and pushing it until you got to the other side. Then you would jack it up, put on the pedestals, jack it down, put the ramps on and away you would go. We were not in a position to use these things if they had it because they were on the move. We went through like greased lightning.

A Describe your personal role throughout your unit's advance through Europe what rank you started off at, what you would end up with, and what you would do at each rank

G Well, I started off of course as a private. By the time we left the states I was a corporal in charge of the machine gun section. By the time I got to Europe I was a weapon sergeant. A weapon sergeant commands the machine gun crew, and they teach because you are always getting new men into the unit. There is always teaching and instruction going on even though you are in a combat situation. The engineers, when the infantry went back to rest, would build and repair the roads. Although we weren't up on the main line everyday fighting hand to hand combat like the infantry would, we were up front a lot of times. It was our job to keep the main supply routes passable so that we could get the ammunition and food up to the front line troops.

A Was your purpose then not so much to engage in engineering activity as to cover it, but to provide support.



G No, we actually did the physical work. We built complete roads in Korea. Across the mountains we would start out from scratch and start bulldozing. We built a lot of lateral roads in Korea. Korea only has three or four main roads up in the north and only three or four in the east or west. As a necessity, we built roads across the mountains to be able to tie our troops together and support them laterally. So the total support for the engineers was to make sure we got the roads passable to keep the main supply routes open, and to support our troops.

A You mentioned you were in command of a machine gun section. Was that all you had to do, or was that just one of your alternate duties?

G That was just an alternate duty then. The next day I was platoon sergeant. Then you've got all three squads to take care of. Of course as you go up the ladder your responsibilities increase and the number of people you have under you increases.

A Describe some of the more harrowing experiences your unit endured.

G One of the roughest crossings we ever made was at the Mosell River. We were in a little town called Duliard. In order to get our army across we had to build a bridge to an island and from the island to the mainland on the other side. It was the only logical place to build a bridge.

A Was this river very wide?

G Yes, it was a pretty wide river. We decided to build the two that go to the island, and from the island to the mainland because of the access. We got the one bridge done and started to work on the other and just about the time we would get it done the Germans would open up with the artillery and blow some of the pontoons out of the water. So we lost a few guys that way. We finally got some artillery of our own. It kept quiet enough so we could complete the bridge. We finally got the armor, and once we got the armor across we were in pretty good shape. The crossing of the armor was a big operation. We had 48 battalions of artillery in support of that crossing. We were up there ten days before the crossing making our positions. At that time I had the two sections of thirty caliber machine guns. Envision this as a big hill with a cliff going down to the bottom, and there is the river. So down here about fifty feet above the road was a whole string across of different units with thirty caliber machine guns. One-hundred yards behind us was the 50 caliber machine guns. Up on top of the hill they had the 40mm guns. There was a machine gun left and a machine gun right and I'm in the middle in a fox hole. We built covers over the foxholes at night to complete these emplacements.

The morning of the attack and the crossing the Mosell was signaled by artillery flares. As soon as the artillery flares went off we all started shooting. My one gun got off about a hundred rounds, got a direct hit on them, and killed both gunners. My other gun got off one

belt and got hit by shrapnel. These were water cooled, 30 caliber. It tore open the water casing so it could not fire anymore. We sat under that barrage and a minute later artillery opened and this was the Germans countering our artillery. They evidently had pre-zeroed in on our positions. That was a hair-raising experience to get through that day. As you woke up in the morning, all you can see is the trees, nothing but bare branches hanging where they were blasted. Fortunately we had covers over the top of our holes.

Another time in Korea I was out on the reconnaissance of a bridge. I was out in the middle of this bridge which was pretty long. The Chinese were up on the hill, but they did not bother me as long as I was an individual. Then a marine tank came around the corner and then made a squirt across the bridge. Then all hell broke out. I finally made it back and got into a hole. I hollered at the marines, "Get that tank the hell out of here," and they finally took the tank out. One time in France we were out ahead of the infantry clearing the roads near LeMans, France. We had been clearing the road of all the debris the Air Force had smacked up. While going down the one road this Frenchman jumped out of the ditch and waved me down and said you cannot go that way.

A Why?

G He said, "The Germans are only up there about a block." So we almost ran right into the Germans accidentally. Also, a lot of things happened that are kind of hairy at the time. The Germans had a fifteen inch railway gun over at Sargamines. We were in a little town just down the way from Saar Union. Every night for a week this railway gun would shoot in that direction. We were responsible for bridge guards. Within so many miles of the front line we used to have the bridges all wired for demolition. In case of a counter attack, all the guard had to do was turn the detonator and blow the bridge. In fact one of these fifteen inch shells landed close enough to the bridge in Saar Union that by synthetic detonation destroyed the bridge and two of my men. Now there was a hit in the town that took the top floor and the attic right off the building. They make a hole lot in the field that you could drive a two and a half ton truck into it. So that is kind of hairy to just sit there when you can't do anything about it, just take cover. The good lord has to be with you to see that you're not going to get hit.

A You hope that they miss.

G Yes. [You] hope they keep hitting the field.

A You received a number of different medals and awards. Which ones were from World War II?

G Well, in World War II you got a lot of service ribbons. The most significant is probably the European Theater of Operations ribbon. Of course I had four major battles. The bronze stars are for major battles. So we had four major battles in Europe. There was Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, and Central Europe. The Korean service medal is the one with

five bronze stars which was for the Chinese Communist Intervention, the first UN counter offensive, the Chinese communist spring offensive, and the second UN counter offensive. Of course, the Meritorious Award was given to me when I retired from the Army. It's been a long time, you know. I have a good conduct medal which is something that all officers don't have. I spent five years as an enlisted man before I came back to the United States and went to OCS. From Europe, I came back in 1946 and relisted in 1948. At that time I went to Carlisle Barracks to the M.P. school. A buddy of mine wanted to go to the M.P.'s so I said, "All right let's go." So we went to the M.P. school, only I said, "I do not just want to be an M.P."

They were offering at the same time a class in criminal investigation. Upon graduation I was assigned to Berlin during the blockade as a criminal investigator which was a nice experience. We, as investigators, dressed in civilian clothes and drove civilian cars. At that time I was a staff sergeant. We went to the press club, the officers club, and the yacht club because I was a crew member of a couple of big American overseas airlines officials. My chief agent says to me, "Why don't you go to OCS?" I told him that I really did not have any desire. He said, "Well, I think you should go to OCS because I think you officer material." I kind of shrugged my shoulders and he told me that as long as he was here I would never get promoted because if I did not want to help myself, he did not want to help me either. I went down and took the battery test, which is four two hour tests. About a month went by and I was on my way back to the States for OCS. I ended up in Fort Riley in Kansas. At that time OCS was six months. World War II had what they called the Ninety Day Wonders. I went to OCS, it was six months. Then you went three months for your branch training. As an officer you have a choice of what type of branch you would like to go into, but you do not always get it. It depends upon your aptitude for the field that you want. A lot of guys wanted to go into engineering but they didn't have the aptitude for it. We graduated 62 out of a class that started out with 158. You would get there in the barracks in the morning. You would get up and fall out. They would start calling names and that is the last you would see of them. Out of the sixty-two that we graduated there were only five engineer officers. It was kind of an elite group. We were the only branch in the army that had its own distinctive buttons on our own uniforms.

A As for the reason why the engineers are an elite group in comparison to other branches, what made them special?

G I think it was a lot like my civilian profession, the state highway department. Back in 1965 when we were doing a lot of the interstate roads, you could see what you were doing. You have a sense of accomplishment. You would go out in the morning and you see there is a bombed up bridge. The next day we made a bridge across to replace it. You could physically see what you had accomplished. It gave us some pride when we built permanent bridges in North Korea and Europe. Some of those bridges are probably still in existence because a lot of the bailing bridges that we put were later welded with drift pins that hold them together so that they were permanent structures. You knew that somebody is counting on you to get that bridge built because they would have a certain time that they wanted to

cross. So you would build that bridge and you get it all there, and here comes the lead vehicle. It gives you a lot of pride to see that you've done your job and away they go. They were using my product. I think it is the satisfaction, physically seeing something accomplished.

A: What was your attitude toward what was going on when you served in Berlin? Did you feel another war was coming?

G: Well, my brother, of course, is a retired army officer. He always had the opinion that by the early fifties, we would be in conflict with the Russians. Fortunately, that never happened. I never really felt threatened. I was in Berlin during the blockade when they were having a rough time of it. We had the air lifts coming in. On good days a plane would be landing every minute. On bad days they would be landing every three minutes. When they would rotate, they would taxi around and the plane would be sitting at the end of the strip. The minute the plane hit the end of the runway the one sitting there would make his turn and follow him down the runway. The one would be coming in and the others could not get off.

We had a lot of problems with the German people. We hired a lot of Germans as truck drivers and so forth. The Tempelhof air base was on one corner, and on the opposite corner were our Quartermaster Warehouses. All the things that were coming in on our air lift were going up to the warehouse. It got so bad. We were losing so many trucks because the Germans would drive them over to the Russian sector. That was kind of off limits. So we would get a call from the Russians. It was, of course, a crime committed against the Army, and so the CID (Criminal Investigation Division) was called in on it. We would get a call from the Russians because they had found our truck. We would go to get the truck and all we found was the chassis. There was nothing left of it. We put shotguns riding in the front of the trucks, and these little cars would pull up with guys on the hood and he would jump up on the truck and start passing stuff back. We had to take a shotgun and put it on the front and the back. Then we were saving all our goods. It was a nice experience in Berlin. I used to go out to the airport and just sit and watch. I was fascinated the way these guys flew those airplanes. The approach of the runway came down between two big apartment buildings. Needless to say the apartment building wasn't full of kids because there was too much noise and they could not sleep.

A: At this time, what was the attitude of American soldiers toward the Germans? Were there relatively friendly relations or were there still a lot of hard feelings left over from the war?

G: For the most part, even during the war, I do not think that we were really hard on the German people themselves. By and large when you are in battle, it is kill or be killed.

A: Was there anything else you wanted to add about Berlin?

G: Well, not really. I enjoyed myself there. I kind of hated to leave, but they put the pressure on me to come back to the OCS. It was a nice experience.

A Describe the standards that the OCS implied at that time How was it different from the previous types of training that you had

G OCS was all together different It was very strict, almost to the point where you say, "I am glad I did it, but I would not do it again " It is the type of training that separates the men from the boys The old saying was, "If you can't take an order, you can't give an order " If you cannot take OCS, they want you out It was a lot of field training, classroom work, and general tactics because you did not get into the specifics because you did not know where you would end up So you did very basic, standard training You really get a little bit of everything You get infantry, artillery, engineering, quartermaster, and ordinance, but only in generalities, not really in specifics It is when you leave OCS and go to your branch training that you get into the specifics about your particular branch OCS separates the men from the boys, guaranteed.

A Describe a typical day at OCS

G Well, we got up about 5 30 a m At 6 00 a m you were out for PT After physical training you are back in the barracks to get yourself and the barracks cleaned up by making your beds and all that jazz You would bounce a quarter off it and see if it would bounce By that time you are ready for breakfast After breakfast you start falling out You may end up doing close order drill for an hour They take the whole company out there, you know They break you down into squads Each man has his turn in command of a drill for a couple hours or maybe for all morning if we have drill for a particular day Then we have a lot of classroom The army does a physical fitness test every six weeks We used to have to do push-ups, or we may have been out in the drill field all morning Then in the afternoon we might go to classes Then, like I said, every six weeks we would have physical test You had to do twenty push-ups, 50 sit-ups in two minutes, 50 squat-jumps in two minutes, twenty pull-ups, and a 300 yard dash in 10 or 20 seconds But you had to do that to max it You might have a study assignment for the next day so after the drill, of course you break for lunch, and you break for supper You spend some time studying at night and hitting the books You have a lot of exams It was a hectic six months We used to go out into the firing range and direct the artillery There was a lot of field work

A When did the typical day end?

G The typical day would end after supper, which was about 6 00 Sometimes we went on night marches. We would go on force marches, nine miles in one hour and 45 minutes Twenty-five mile hikes used to take us about six hours

A Let's get into Korea now Did you say that you entered Korea in 1950?

G Yes I went to Europe in 1949 and came back in the late 1949 I went down to Fort Riley,

Kansas to OCS I finished OCS and moved to Fort Belvor in Virginia for my engineering basic training I finished engineering basic and they sent me to Korea I got to Korea and joined the 1st Cavalry Division At the time I got there we were still in orientation when the Chinese came across the Yalu River We were already north As far north as we ever got The Chinese came across the Olive and that is when we started back Some buddies of mine were in the second engineer, second division and a couple of them got killed A couple of them got beat up bad because the second division committed their engineer battalion as infantry They did this because they did not have anybody else to fight That should be one of your last resorts to use your engineers as infantry but as I said, you are an infantry man first and an engineer second We were up at Kuna're We came back down to Seoul Then in the spring we took off again and went up north of the 38th parallel which was set up as a defensive area which we called Defense Line Jamestown It was a fortified position with mine fields, barbed wire, and the whole bit First, we set up Line Golden which was just north of Seoul. We set up a bunch of mine fields Then we went up to Jamestown That is when we set up another defensive line up there

My platoon put in 9,532 mines in ten days I personally armed half of them because I did not have any trained troops to do it. The turnover in Korea was real fast I took over a platoon, after my orientation, in the Eighth Engineer Combat Battalion I took over a platoon in which half had already been killed or wounded in the fighting up North So we really did not have the trained people They were not really trained in Korea, so consequently I did most of the arming of those mines We went up and down Korea a couple of times We finally got to the 38th parallel and that is where they decided that is where they would stay If they go all the way up north our Air Force could not work We would have lost our Air Force because there was no place for them to bomb They could not go and bomb China There are certain times in war where you, by advancing too far, put yourself in jeopardy, which is what we did in Korea We lengthened our supply line, and shortened theirs That is why we decided to sit on the 38th and say this is it We would sit here and having accomplished our mission which was to rid South Korea of North Koreans.

That is initially where we should have stopped, but McArthur took it upon himself to say, "No " We would go all the way to the Yalu River Of course, he misjudged the fact that the Chinese were going to come in and help their Korean friends When the Chinese came in, they kicked our butts back down because they had man power They would line up ten deep When the first one got shot, the next one would pick up the rifle and keep coming We would retreat and we were a mechanized army We would retreat a hundred miles a day The next morning they would be sitting there looking at us They marched all night The reason that McArthur was fired in Korea was because Truman who was President at the time didn't want our American forces to go beyond the 38th parallel McArthur pretty much thumbed his nose at him and said, "I am the boss here." You do not go around telling your boss to jam it because you will end up on the short end of the stick That is what happened to McArthur He defied his (McArthur) orders not to go farther than the 38th parallel We went and got our butts kicked and McArthur got fired There was a lot of resentment for Truman firing him because he was our great American hero He filled his pockets plenty full in the Philippines

I was in Korea for just about as long as you could be. I was there for seventeen months at that time. I was number one on the rotation list to come back to the states. I volunteered to stay in order to get my promotion to Captain. In the mean time they changed the point system for the Korean Theater. We got a bunch of guys in from the Philippines, Guam, and areas like that. They were given point credit for that service. So there were five captains sent in and the battalion filled all the captain slots. So I said, "Send me home," but I ended up 13th on the list to come home which kept me in Korea from July--I could have come home in July if I wanted to--until Christmas when the whole division rotated to Japan. We were relieved by the 25th Infantry Division. We left all our equipment, our tents, and everything set up in Korea. All we did was move our personal things to Japan. The 25th division picked up their bodies and came over to Korea and occupied each respective area by type units. Then I rotated back to the states.

So I finally came back in January of 1952. I ended up at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. Then they closed that camp so I ended up in Carson, Colorado. When I was at Carson, I got my orders to go to Panama. I was going to Panama and had my family inoculated for the tropics. We got to the East Coast and my orders were changed to Europe or Alaska. I'd been back in the states for seventeen months. I got married after I got back. One year later we had our daughter. At that time Alaska was a hardship tour. It was one year. Europe was a three year tour but you had to wait fifteen to eighteen months for your dependence. I just did not feel like waiting fifteen months to see my daughter. So that's when I put in for early release. They let me out. It took me 90 days for the chief of Engineer to grant my early release. There were five engineer officers scheduled to go to Panama and none of us went. They were all changed to Europe or Alaska. So that is when I decided to get out and they finally released me. I came out and went in the reserves and served there until 1980 when I retired.

A How did the role of the combat engineers differ at all from what they did in WWII from your experience?

G Well, basically it is the same thing, keeping the main lines open. In Korea, it was a little bit different than Europe. In Europe, it was more modern, like the United States. In Korea their roads were hideous. They did not have the heavy equipment that we have and this took a toll on their roads. There was a lot of road repair and a lot of road maintenance. We actually built new roads going across the mountains. It was nothing for us to move into the rice patties with a dozer and to build an air strip. We built air strips all the time for the artillery, [such as] observation planes and so forth. We would build an air strip once every third day as we moved north.

A How long would this take, each air strip?

G We could knock out an air strip in a couple of days or less. All we had to do was take a dozer, plow it, and get the grader in there to do the final touch so we could get some drainage in there because the ground was frozen all the time except for the summer, when it was dry. We had probably more road building in Korea than Europe did. We had done a lot of

bridging. Ironically I was the only officer at the time that knew how to build a Bailey Bridge. The company commander came back one day and said we had to put a Bailey Bridge up. We had to go to the 25th Division area and pick the bridge up. He said, "Wagner, it is your job." Wagner was a West Pointer. Wagner said, "I don't know anything about a Bailey Bridge." At the time, I was new with the company. I was the supply and transportation officer. He told another guy, A. A. Becker, a Pointer also, that he did not know anything about a Bailey Bridge. There was also an engineer officer from VMI. He did not know anything about a Bailey Bridge. These guys were stationed over at Camp Drake in Japan and did very little engineer training. So Captain Skanze says, "Does anyone here know how to build a Bailey Bridge." I said, "I know how to build a Bailey Bridge." He said, "You're kidding." I said, "No, I'm not kidding you. I built a lot of Bailey Bridges in Europe in WWII." He said, "Well, it is your job then." During the first CAV (cavalry), we built eight Bailey Bridges and I built seven of them because I was the only one that knew how to build a Bailey Bridge. The first winter prior to the above action we were almost at the Yalu River. We did not have any winter clothes. We were up north and we built all kinds of shack cities. Finally, my guys built me a house trailer. It was one of those lumber trailers. We had a lot of bridge lumbers. After General Ridgeway came in, he came up and looked at the front lines. We were all eating C-rations and K-rations. In the back, they were all eating hot meals, steaks and chickens. Ridgeway says, "From now on my front line troops will have two hot meals a day." So they had two hot meals after Ridgeway came over. He was a soldier's soldier. Then I rotated back.

A What was the food typically like in WWII and Korea for the average soldier?

G In WWII, most of the time, we had one hot meal a day, maybe two. We ate a lot of K-rations and C-rations. In Korea we had K's and C's until Ridgeway came over. Then, when he (Ridgeway) put out the order, we were getting tired of steaks and chickens. We got tired of it. We had warm clothes the rest of the war. We also had Korean laborers. Each company would have 500 that helped us work on the roads. They always stayed back. We had a front line company up front. We furnished them with rice and dried peas. The Koreans would go down to the river bank and set up their wok and build a fire around it. They would take the water right out of the stream, cook the rice, make the rice balls with peas mixed. We furnished and provided transportation for all of the road crew. By and large after Ridgeway came in, things got pretty good.

A How about hygiene?

G Germany was a little bit different. You could go in the houses when we built up Europe after the war. We were up in Bremen, Germany, and we built a bridge next to the Kaiser Wilhelm Bridge over the Weser River. It was a big arched bridge. We moved into town and we just took a row of houses. We gave them an hour to get their stuff out or whatever they wanted to take out. We would move in a squad in each house. The battalion commander would take over something like a theater. We were going to be there for several months building this



bridge. So, the sanitary facilities there were pretty good. Now in Korea, the best you could do was to sponge bathe. Then, maybe once a week you would get to go back into a shower in various areas. You could go back and get a hot shower. We had Quartermaster Units that set up showers periodically.

A What about toilet facilities?

G In most cases you had a slit trench. We would be in the engineers, we would build our two and three hole portable commodes. It was a box with three holes sitting on the slit trench. [There was] no privacy, because there was nothing around.

A It was not even like a full fledged out house.

G No. It had no sides on it. It just had a box with three holes. You grabbed the box, set it over the trench and that is where you were. [In the] winter and summer, [they were] not really convenient.

A One thing I wanted you to elaborate on was your opinion of McArthur. You seemed to have a negative opinion of him. What were some of the reasons?

G I don't really have a negative opinion about him. He was a good general. He did his job well in WWII. But then there comes a time when I think some people get so big they think they are greater than God. This, I think, in my own opinion was McArthur. He (Truman) thought that General Douglas McArthur could do no wrong. What I have read and so forth was that this was when Truman had decided that the 38th parallel was accomplished. We had rid South Korea of North Korean's. Perhaps the war would have ended a lot sooner. At least the troops would have ended sooner if we would have stopped at the 38th parallel, but McArthur was an egotistical thing. He wanted to go all the way to the Yalu River. He went there, but it was against Truman's policy. So, Truman fired him. You just do not tell the commander in chief to go to hell. This is in essence what McArthur did. After all, the President is the commander and chief of the armed forces period. You just do not tell your boss to go to hell.

A I heard it said that McArthur basically conducted the war from Japan. Was this basically the case or did he go out to Korea and see what was going on?

G He wasn't in Japan. Do you mean the Korean war?

A Yes.

G His headquarters were in Japan. He had field generals. I forget who was the head of Ridgeway. McArthur's headquarters were in Japan. I do not even remember him being in Korea. I never saw him.

- A Was he looked down for this or was it expected that this was the way that things had to be?
- G I do not really think most of them gave it a single thought because that is so far above the average man who was down fighting I don't think we even gave it a thought about where he was at because we had our own commanders and corps commanders who were right there in Korea We could care less
- A Throughout your service, both in WWII and in Korea, did the American units you were with ever have to deal with allied troops of some kind?
- G In Korea, we had our division We had our own troops We also had ROK (Republic of Korea) army people with us that were attached to us The division had a regiment of Greeks, and a regiment of Turks We only had a few ROK soldiers that were attached to each company These regiments answered directly to division headquarters so we really did not get much into that
- A Of those you dealt with, what was your opinion of allied troops? Were they doing their part?
- G Oh yes You take the Greeks and the Turks, they were fierce fighters They would rather fight hand to hand combat They were goofy, especially the Turks In Korea, we had blackouts It was total darkness You could see them light a match from several hundred yards away and it would stick out like a sore thumb The Greeks and the Turks had bonfires all night The ones we had were good fighters
- A How about the ROK forces?
- G The ROK forces we had with us were all right They had total ROK forces There were several instances where they would retreat and fall back and cause salients in the lines. In fact, a couple division commanders were shot because they did not maintain their lines So, if you had a ROK unit on your flank you were always a little weary on whether or not they were going to stay there I guess after they made a couple of examples by shooting a couple of Division Contras, the message got out that you better stay where you were at
- A Is there anything else that you would like to add, or is there something we have not covered?
- G I think my voice is getting very close to the end of the road I told my wife, "If this is the life you want, fall in love, otherwise forget it," because I was going to be a military man all the way When I did get out in fifty-three there was a lot of discontent in the service You had to expect to go overseas, come back in the states and spend three years At that time you were lucky if you got a year and a half Seven or eight months and I was already on my way I decided to give it up because I thought more of my family than I did the service I have always been a great advocate of the young people [I] have an obligation, and even after the

I decided to give it up because I thought more of my family than I did the service. I have always been a great advocate of the young people [I] have an obligation, and even after the obligation is over I stayed active in the reserve program. It is very beneficial. I know that in the early years, I did not have vacation time. My vacation time was spent going to summer camps. My wife resented this quite a bit. I told her, "For almost everything that is good, there has to be some sacrifices. Someday you will thank me for these sacrifices we are making now." Of course, that day has come true. I get a very nice pension from Uncle Sam. It is the difference of eating steak and eating hamburger. That is the same thing with an officer. I spent five years as an enlisted man and 28 years as an officer. I tell these young guys, it is like day and night. RHIP (rank has its privileges)

A Thank you very much

G Your welcome. I hope that this interview will somehow enrich and enlighten historians who read this. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW