

Cpl Wayne P Boshka

Born: Aug 28, 1931
at Sturgeon Bay

Died:

Period of Service: Korea

Sources: Svc questionnaire,
Plaque on monument, J Gay
interview, JG

Enlisted in Marine Corps August 28, 1953 in Green Bay.

Trained at Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego.

Stationed at Camp Pendleton, Camp Fuji, Japan. Served during Korean war.

Released August 27, 1955.

Medals include Sharp Shooter, Foreign Service.

Joined American Legion Post 402 in 1997. Was post commander.

Son of Lucien and Gladys Boshka.

Was salesman for Proctor and Gamble for many years and retired to the Island.

See attached John Gay interview.

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Wayne P. Boshka

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

August 11, 2010

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This is August 11, 2010. This is John Gay and I'm with Wayne Boshka. We're at Wayne's place on Washington Island on Main Road. We're going to ask Wayne about his military experiences, what he was doing when he went into the service and when that was.

Entering Military Service

When I went into the service I had an interim job after graduating from college, knowing I had to go into the service. I decided to enlist in the Marine Corps because I felt it would be less boring than a couple of years in the Army – and it was. I was signed up out in the field – the potato field here on the Island that I was plowing – by the recruiter who drove up from Green Bay.

I was sworn in at Green Bay and later took a train to Los Angeles. I was picked up there to go down to boot camp in San Diego – MCRD. I went through boot camp and we moved up to Camp Pendleton for our combat training. That lasted I think about ten weeks. I was then assigned to go to Japan to reinforce the First Marines in Korea. I was with the Third Marines in Japan.

What unit were you in?

I was in the third regiment, in the headquarters battalion. I started out – I was assigned communications, but I was later selected to become crypto chief. And that was my duty the rest of the time I was in the Marine Corps.

What did that entail?

It was decoding encoded messages of importance that were sent that ultimately ended up with the colonel who was in charge of the headquarters regiment. I was eventually cleared for secret and top secret information. But before I was I had to go and wake up Major Lavis, who was the communications officer, to finish decoding the messages – if they were secret, if I decoded that much of it, or top secret.

Did you go to school at Pendleton for that?

No. It was on-the-job training with the fellow who preceded me. It wasn't that difficult. We had a couple of devices that we used. I had a driver assigned to me to deliver the decoded messages to the officers in charge of the other platoons. We were headquarters for four locations in Japan: South camp, North camp, Middle camp Fuji, and Camp McNair.

These were all American messages. You weren't trying to get anybody else's messages.

No.

So you weren't operating the enigma machine.

No.

How did you happen to be chosen for this?

I don't know. I guess they felt that logically, since it was a part of the message center, that we get somebody from that message center. And they selected me out of about a dozen men there. I'm sure they looked at certain things in my background, like my education and GCT – your general intelligence scores.

I was serving as the crypto chief when I was approached by the chaplain of the base to become his assistant because he was losing his assistant. I said I just didn't think I could make that change. He said "Believe me, I have the influence to get you to be able to do it." I said that from a practical standpoint they had spent a lot of time and money training me and investigating my background, I felt, and I just didn't think it would be fair to back out of it to become a chaplain's assistant. I said I thought I could serve my country and the Marine Corps more logically and better as a crypto chief.

Did he back off then?

Yes, he did.

This is pretty interesting work. Did you intercept a lot of messages that needed to be...

Yes. There were a fair number of messages. It was kind of tough to keep all of them secret, as I had to do. I remember men would order clothing from various vendors, most of them Hong Kong, and I knew we were going to have to be transferred to Korea. I really wanted to say to these guys, "Look, don't order anything you won't get quickly." But I really couldn't tell them anything.

Deployment and Duty Assignment

You went in during August of 1953. And Korea was just about over.

It was over. But we got credit for being on active duty in a war zone because we were still providing patrol duty in Korea. But as it turned out I didn't go to Korea. After six months they transferred my whole group of guys I'd gone over there with to Korea, but they couldn't replace me as a crypto chief at the time, so I stayed in Japan for another six months. And my buddies went over to Korea.

And we got back to the States at the same time – those of us whose enlistments were up when mine was. I was reunited with them at Camp Pendleton again.

This was a two-year enlistment, unlike today's which is a four-year.

Yes. They had a special deal at the time. That's why I joined the Marine Corps. Of course they worked on me real hard to extend it.

I have a grandson at Pendleton right now. He signed up on his eighteenth birthday and went in the same day, right out of high school, and was at MCRD for his training. We didn't know where, but they were going to replace troops around the world at various points. Of course he couldn't tell us where he was, but we found out the other day he'd spent five months in Afghanistan. Apparently he tore up his shoulder somehow. Not through enemy fire or anything. It had to be operated on, and he's not able to re-up, I guess, for back, shoulder or knees. So it was kind of disappointing to him because he wanted to make that his career. All that is beside the point. But I can understand why, when you leave your group it's kind of tough.

Yes. I hated to see those guys go. There was one guy from the Island – Frank Hansen – he went in with me. We were fairly near each other. In Japan he was at North camp and I was at Middle camp. So we'd get together fairly often. We shared a pleasant ride over to Japan for 21 days in an APA vessel (chuckles).

I was talking to Ray Hansen yesterday, and he said he went over to Leyte and it took 36 days to get over. But he said when the war was over it took a straight shot to get back to San Francisco. Were there any outstanding memories that you have of the camp?

We had some very interesting training sessions. It seems they felt we needed to get out on the worst weather to get trained adequately – like climbing up mountains and so forth when it was raining. I remember one time a guy in front of me kicked a rock loose. If it hadn't hit the butt of my rifle it would have banged into the head of the guy next to me – my assistant squad leader. Also, cold weather training up at Pickle Meadows, they called it, I was assigned to be the radio man. I had a 30 pound radio on my chest and a 60 pound pack on my back and we went wading through up to five feet of snow. And it seemed the colonel didn't want to broadcast until we were moving. I can't believe right now that I did that, but we did it.

So what did you have to do? Did you have to unbuckle all the equipment in order to get it going?

No, no. I could broadcast right there – it was a mobile thing.

And did you go on these training sessions very often? Was it something they did just to keep you ...

No. This happened while I was still at Pendleton. We went out for cold weather training. Of course we were training five days a week – various types of training. A lot of rifle training and a lot of crawling through under barbed wire with explosions going on above you, firing above your head.

Live ammo.

Yes. They kept us busy. It was less boring, I'm sure, than being in the Army.

Coming back from Japan I was lucky enough to get on to a general class ship – the USS General William Weigle. So it took only 14 days to get back, versus the 21 going over.

The admiral makes them go faster.

We practiced landing on Okinawa one time. I had to take my safe along and jeep, decoded messages while we were there – the whole thing.

The safe. Was that a big metal box?

Yes, it was. It was something I couldn't lift myself, and was something I had my decoding devices in.

Did they change the codes again to keep them fresh, to keep them from being intercepted?

Oh, I'm sure it's much different now. They changed them every day when I was doing it.

So you had to be given the key in order to take care of these messages.

Yeah. I guess I could say that much. We had different colored strips of paper we used to insert into the machines depending on what day of the week it was. I'd get calls occasionally. It seemed that the crypto chiefs at the other bases were lieutenants. "Lieutenant So-and-so here. What color are you using today?" I said I didn't think I could disclose that. But we'd work it out. Sometimes he'd have to drive down to figure it out. I didn't know how he could get it so screwed up.

So, in other words, he didn't know the answer and he hoped he'd get the answer out of you.

Yes. Just the specific color of the strip that I would insert in the machine for that day. It was funny.

I was asked, of course, while I was in to go for training to officer training school. I passed. I soon learned when I went into the service it wasn't something I was going to make a career out of – being told all the time what to do and exactly how to do it.

And that would require another year or two of service?

Oh, yeah. Before I could even start my four years of mandated officer service I had to wait for the next school to open up. So it would have been up to five more years. So I chose not to.

Did you get to Tokyo or some of the other cities while you were there?

I spent a lot of time in Tokyo. As it happened I had a cousin who was an Air Force officer who was married when I was there. I was his best man. So I visited a lot with them. And other guys would go down to Tokyo. The rate of exchange was 360 yen to the dollar, so we'd get a hotel room in a nice hotel for \$5 a night. Booze was pretty cheap, too; entertainment. Yeah, I spent most of my weekend liberties in Tokyo.

So you were pretty close to Tokyo.

Yeah. I was near Gotemba at the base of Mount Fujiyama. That's why it was called Camp Fuji. It was just like an hour and a half ride on the train.

Was that a big detachment there, at that camp?

Well, the four camps combined totaled a regiment. I can't remember how many people that is, but it's a bunch. We occupied four sizeable bases.

Covering the whole of Japan.

Yeah.

Did you pick up any Japanese while you were there? Japanese language?

A little bit. I couldn't speak that well. I could say 'yes,' 'no,' 'how are you,' 'I'm sorry.'

Discharge and Return to Civilian Life

Then your duty time came to an end. Were you discharged then?

I was discharged at Camp Pendleton. We took a bus back – it was the cheapest way to go – from Pendleton to Chicago.

That's a long trip.

Yes, it is. It was alright. We stayed and slept on the bus. It was a couple of days – we went pretty much straight through. We went back to Japan – Frank and I, together.

You came off at the same time?

Yes. He enlisted the same day that I did, and we got out the same day. We went back to Chicago and spent a few days with his brother, Ted, who owned the Fish Keg.

They'd given a care package to Frank just before we boarded this boat to go to Japan. And he was up in the bow of the boat where you get all of the motion. I was lucky. I was more or less in the center. They stacked us seven high in bunks in the main area. I decided to choose the top bunk because I didn't want anybody getting seasick with me below them. But for Frank up there, it was pretty rough leaving the States – you'd get that off-shore swell.

I went up and said, "Frank, why don't we open some of this stuff." So he opened up a can of sardines and said, "Hey, smell that guys!" The guys would be rushing out to lean over the side of the boat.

So you got back to Wisconsin and went back to work?

Yes. I began re-interviewing with some of the companies I'd interviewed with while I was in college that I was interested in. I chose Proctor and Gamble, which was a mixed bag because they're a very regimented company, too.

It was like being in the military!

Right. The first thing they said was I had to wear a hat. And I mean a dress hat. I'd vow I never would wear a hat again when I got out of the Marine Corps. But I had to buy a hat. I did well with them, but I decided to change.

A guy I worked with at Proctor and Gamble, his father was in the insurance business – a career officer with Northwestern Mutual. Eventually he talked both of us into going into the insurance business.

With Northwestern?

No. I didn't go with Northwestern. He did – the kid. I went to work with a mass-marketing firm. Well, no. Actually, at first I went with Connecticut General when we were trying to form a series of offices that would sell life insurance through casualty insurance agents. It sounded good, but it got overloaded. So I left and went to work down the hall for a mass-marketing firm, and stayed in that field for the rest of my career.

Mass marketing ...

Mass-marketing life insurance and disability and so forth, largely through the mail to members of associations – like the Retired Officers Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National League of Postmasters, to name a few of the organizations we sold to.

So you didn't necessarily have people on the street. A lot of it was ...

My job was to find and keep brokers – independent insurance agents who were out making the contacts; largely that way. Sometimes I would do it with them.

We ended up insuring, among other groups, the Marine Corps Association. And I was working with a retired general who wanted me to call him, George – as though we

were equals. I'd go to meetings periodically and we had people in the insurance committee ranging from the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps on down. It was kind of ...

Tough not to say, "Sir." Where was your office? Where did you work out of?

I worked out of Chicago, near O'Hare field.

How long were you doing that? Was that your career, principally?

Let's see. Most of my work was in the Chicago area. I started in Milwaukee with Proctor and Gamble, then I got assigned a zone in Chicago. And then when I got in the insurance field I was also in Chicago. I started out with Continental Assurance downtown and then eventually I went to work for All American Life for the longest stint, and they're out near O'Hare field. So I was in the insurance for – 1956 through 1994.

Almost 40 years.

Yes. It was a good business. It was challenging, but it was very satisfying. I worked with a great group of people – these independent brokers, some of whom I'm still in contact with. I still dream at night, at times, of being in that line of work.

Lasting Effect of Military Service

Did the military service change you in any way? Did you feel you had been changed by it?

Well, yeah. I think to some degree it matured me a little further. But having gone through college and graduated before I went in had changed me in some respects, too. I think camaraderie was something I had gained more of, even though I was on teams – sports, athletic teams in college.

Did you play ball?

No. The only thing they didn't have at Lawrence College, which is now Lawrence University, was baseball. And that was the only thing I had participated in up here. I was in the Door County league team, you know. But I did run cross country and track – distance.

That reminds me.

Before, when I knew I was graduating and would have to look into military service, one of the recruiters who came around was from the Marine Corps. He was trying to recruit people for officer candidate school. And they rejected me. Because I had flat feet. I said, "Guys, I ran track and cross country for four years." And as it turned out, they accepted me as an enlisted man which was probably more demanding physically than any officer.

It's upside down! Did you play ball in the service?

No, I didn't. As a matter of fact, once I became crypto chief, my times off were somewhat limited. I had to coordinate with the major, who was the only other qualified person there. So I didn't get assured liberty every weekend, nor off the base every night, necessarily. If I did go off base at night, and of course they had typical bars and so forth that spring up around any military installation, I had to let them know where I was.

You were on call, in other words.

We didn't have the little what-do-you-call them now, back then to carry with us.

They had to know you were down at Joe's Bar.

Right.

Well, Wayne, I appreciate your time. It was very interesting learning about your service. If you have no other additions to this, we'll end it.

I don't know what to add at this point.

My military service was obviously less exciting or dangerous than that of many people. I don't regret having had to do it. I really do think it still should be mandatory.

I agree.

As it is in Norway, for example.

Well, thanks. We're going to end this now and conclude our interview with Wayne Boshka.