

Sgt Earl R. Davison

Born: June 2, 1930
Cranbury, NJ

Died:

Period of Service: Korea

Sources: Svc questionnaire,
J Gay interview

Enlisted Jan 23, 1948 in US Marine Corps at Philadelphia.

Trained at USM Recruit Depot, Parris Island, SC.

Stationed at Camp LeJeune NC, Camp Pendleton CA, US Naval Air base Whidby Island, WA, Osaka, Japan.

Served South Korea, North Korea.

Medals include Good Conduct, US Korea Svc (with three stars), UN Korean Svc, National Defense Svc, Presidential Unit citation with two stars, Republic of Korea Presidential Unit citation.

On board ships:

USNS Buckner

USS Clymer & LCVP

USS Bayfield

USS Cavalier

USS LST QM-59

USS Meniffee

USNS Beaudoin

Clymer, Bayfield, Cavalier, and Meniffee were all either APA or AKA type ships. Buckner and Beaudoin were troop transport ships.

Froze fingers in the battle of the Chosin Reservoir while the Marines evacuated 100,000 Koreans.

Lives on Detroit Harbor with his wife Marion, and is active in Post affairs.

See John Gay interview, following.

Sgt Earl R. Davison



VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Earl R. Davison

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

October 6, 2010

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library
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This is John Gay speaking with Earl Davison at his home on South Shore Drive on Washington Island, Wisconsin. We're going to ask Earl about some of his experiences in the military, and we can get started by finding out what he was doing when he entered the service.

Entering Military Service

Before I enlisted, I was what was called an office boy for a rug company back in my home town of Hightstown, New Jersey. I delivered the mail around the plant. I was only 17 years old. I was still 17 when I decided to enlist in the Marine Corps in January, 1948. I had to have my parents' permission to enlist because I wasn't 18 yet.

I signed up in Trenton, New Jersey, returned to my home, and a few days later the Marine Corps had me report to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where I was examined physically and mentally and I was sworn in that date, January 23, 1948 down in Philadelphia. {Another enlistee and I were to the train station and boarded a train headed for Paris Island, South Carolina. That's where I took my boot /recruit training, which lasted about three months.

Then I went up to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina where I was sent to a clerical/financial training school barracks. I was there for about three months. From there I was transferred to Camp Pendleton, California to the Fifth Marine Regiment of the First Marine Division. After a week or a little more, they decided they had enough clerks. So I was sent down to the supply depot at Camp Pendleton, California. I was there for over two years.

Either the day that the Korean War started, or the day after, I was transferred to Whidbey Island, Washington naval air station/ammunition depot in Puget Sound. I was there exactly one month.

The following is superseded by Earl's notes:

[[Of course the war had started, so I went right back to the division. And I went into the headquarters company, headquarters battalion, division headquarters. I stayed there just a few weeks before we shipped out for Kobe, Japan.

We were in Kobe a few days, maybe a week. We left there and landed at Inchon on September 16, 1950.]]

Earl's notes on the above.

From Whidbey Island I was transferred back to the First Division at Camp Pendleton where I was assigned to Headquarters Company, Headquarters Battalion, division Headquarters. I was there just a few weeks before we shipped out for Kobe, Japan. We were in Kobe/Osaka a few days while we reloaded the assault and troop ships for the invasion at Inchon, South Korea. We left Japan and the invasion was begun September 15, 1950. My unit went ashore September 16th.

Deployed Assignment

You were right at the very beginning of it.

No, I wasn't. The First Marine Brigade was sent Pusan Perimeter I think in July. The Brigade was primarily composed of the Fifth Marine Regiment reinforced which was then pulled out in time to be the lead unit in the invasion at Inchon.

You were there pretty early in the conflict.

The following three paragraphs have been corrected and amplified by Earl's notes which follow these paragraphs.

[Early enough.

So we fought up through ... I didn't fight. I was in the division headquarters. I was supposed to be a non-combatant, although when we got to Kimpo airfield about the third day after we got ashore, we did receive mortars from some North Koreans who had not been chased out of the place when the Division went through. But then we went up into Seoul and liberated Seoul – the Division liberated Seoul. I also believe the U.S. Seventh Army Division was in there. They came in, not at the same time our Division landed, but shortly thereafter. So we combined with them quite a bit while we were over there.

After the Seoul campaign and the city was liberated, President Rhee and General MacArthur came and made their big appearances at the old palace. Then we were shipped out and sent around to the east coast of Korea to a place called Wonson. That was in North Korea. We were not to land there for ten days because the North Koreans had let loose a bunch of sea mines that drifted into Wonson Harbor. And it took ten days for the Coast Guard mine-clearing ships to clear it out enough that we could land.

A funny thing was, Bob Hope got ashore before we did! Because one of the ROK divisions had come up along the east coast and cleared the way. He was supposed to meet up with us, but he had been there and gone before we got ashore.]

Earl's Notes:

Early enough, as mentioned above I landed September 16th and Headquarters followed the infantry and artillery regiments up through Inchon and Kimpo airfield to the Han River. Since I was assigned to Div. Hq., I was basically a non-combatant but when we set up at Kimpo about the third day ashore we did receive incoming mortar fire from some of the enemy who had escaped being wiped out when the division went through. The division then fought across the Han River, into and liberated Seoul. The U.S. Seventh Army Division was there also and the two divisions served near each other as they did in WWII.

After the Seoul campaign and the city was liberated, President Rhee and General MacArthur came and made their appearances at the old palace. Then the First Marine Division shipped out from Inchon and sailed around to the east coast of North Korea to a place named Wonsan. We were destined to not land there for ten days because the North Koreans had let loose a bunch of sea mines that drifted into Wonsan Harbor. It took ten days for the U.S. Coast Guard and Navy mine clearing ships to clear the harbor out enough for us to land.

The funny thing that happened was Bob Hope got ashore before we did! One of the ROK divisions had come up along the East coast and cleared the area. Hope was supposed to meet up with us, but he had been there and gone before we got ashore. **End of Earl's Notes**

How did they clear the mines? What sort of operation was that?

They destroyed them as they went along.

Did they shoot at them?

Something like that. They were wooden boats so they wouldn't set them off.

But the ten days we sailed up and down the Sea of Japan we saw a few mines. Some of the gunners on the ships did blow some up. It was a little hairy at night because you knew they were out there when you went to bed. When you went into your rack at night you weren't too sure that something wouldn't happen that night.

Are they set off by a magnet or something like that; they cling to the boat?

No. I think they're a pressure thing, that when a boat hits it they break something off those tips that stick up out of the mines. I believe that's it.

I believe I've seen them try to knock those off.

I've never been that close to one, thank God. I didn't want to be.

I don't blame you. Going back a bit, what was boot camp like? That wasn't a fun trip, was it?

At Paris Island, South Carolina? Well, it wasn't that bad. It was hard getting used to military life to begin with: saying "Yes, sir" to anyone above you, which was just about everyone at that time – the dog, the cat and everybody else – cleaning up, learning to do things. Fortunately my mother had taught me how to iron things so I could take care of my uniform all right. The funny thing, I did get away without shaving for two days. But then the drill sergeant came by and saw peach fuzz on my chin and said, "You shave." So every day for almost the rest of my life I've been shaving.

Boot camp, everyone feels like that is a life changing experience. By the time I got to Paris Island in 1948, the parade ground had been paved. For the Marines who were there in World War II, it was a sand pit and they had to parade in that sand. That must have been a little tougher on them, I'm sure, with probably some sand fleas and chiggers in there, too.

Plus tough walking.

Yes, very tough walking, when you've got your gear on and your pack and your boon-dockers. Of course we wore leggings at that time – all the way through the Korean War we wore leggings. The Marine Corps didn't give them up right away.

They have harder training in the boot camps today, both at Paris Island and in San Diego. They have an exercise called the Crucible.

My grandson went through that.

Mine, too, at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego. That exercise is 42 hours, I think, with no sleep. It's a tough course. When I went through Paris Island there was the WWII obstacle course; we marched back and forth to the rifle range and sometimes into the salt marshes.

Then the final march is 25 miles carrying 140#'s.

During the crucible.

It's unbelievable. He said, "We took breaks."

You had to. You bet.

So you were in Korea for how long?

I was there from September 16, 1950 to October 6, 1951 – not quite thirteen months.

Returning to the States, Discharge and Return to Civilian Life

Then you were off to where?

Well, then I came back to Japan again – Kobe and Osaka – then back to the U.S. at Naval Station Treasure Island, California. I had just a couple of months left to go. I was given a leave of thirty days when I got back, so I went home to New Jersey, arriving sometime around Thanksgiving in 1951. I had hoped that I would be stationed somewhere on the East Coast, close to home. Didn't happen. My last duty station was Treasure Island until January 22, 1952 doing clerical work processing other returning Marines. That's really the only time I ever did any of the clerical work that I was trained for. That was the end of my Marine Corps days of service, I had originally enlisted for three years in 1948 but my enlistment was up about a month after the Chosin Reservoir campaign and President Truman had ordered a one service extension on everyone at that time so I wound up with four years.

How big is Treasure Island?

It's not a real big island, and it's not in service any more. The Navy abandoned it quite a few years ago.

That's in the Golden Gate area?

It's in the Bay area. A bridge abutment was on Treasure Island, and we could get up and take a bus either into San Francisco, or over to Oakland. Most of the time I went to 'Frisco when I got time off.

I was discharged then and came home. I got to work right away. I went to work for Sears Roebuck, as a matter of fact. Then a test opened up for the New Jersey State Police, and I took that test. Out of 3,000 of us, 300 passed the written test. So those 300 were sent for medical and physical testing. And out of that, 30 guys were accepted for the State Police force. I was in the next ten, so I went to a group called the New Jersey-Pennsylvania Interstate Police force. I worked there for a little over a year and they finally passed the Korean GI Bill. I moved to Milwaukee and went to school.

How did you come to choose Milwaukee? What was the reason for that?

The school of engineering did not require a foreign language, and I had not taken one in high school. I got my associate degree there – two years.

You didn't learn any foreign language in South Carolina? (both chuckle)

I learned a little Korean while I was there, but not enough to keep me going.

And you love kimchi, do you?

I've tried it a couple of times. In September, 2000 Marion and I went to Seoul to help celebrate the anniversary of the liberation of Seoul. So we got to eat kimchi there.

What was that like, being there in 2000?

For that, we were very well welcomed. We had tags on us, of course, saying we were a veterans group there for the liberation celebration. People on the street would come up and thank us – some of the younger people, and some of the older people who had been around at that time. But a lot of the younger people in shops, on the street or just standing on a bus corner or something – we were very welcome.

I was talking to Don Kiefer this morning, interviewing him. He was sent right after the treaty was signed to end World War II in Japan, to Korea to begin training them to govern themselves. I asked if they had welcomed him, and he said they were too timid. They'd been governed for a whole generation by the Japanese...

Thirty-five years.

He said they were too reluctant to do that. They were still kind of whipped. So you had a nice experience – you and Marion.

We had a nice experience when we made that trip over there.

How did that come about?

Well, the trip we went on was not the one provided by the South Korean government, although they were very generous to us when we were there. There are trips like that, and I understand they're still going on.

This was a trip that two old Marine gunnery sergeants from St. Louis had put together. They had advertised in several of the Marine veteran magazines that I get. So that's how we signed up for it. We paid our own way over there and everything. But the Korean government did put on one great big dinner for us one of the last nights we were there. We each got a special medal.

About a week or two, did that take?

No, just about a week.

Lasting Thoughts

Well, what was your experience like in the military? Did you feel like you got a reinforcing of your character, or did you learn anything?

Well, yes. You learn a lot of things in the military, of course. I think it reinforced my character. It made me a better person for it. It made me see things a little bit different than you do when you're just a kid.

I think people pretty universally say they're glad it happened because they came out a better person. Then, after you got out of school ...

I went into heating and air conditioning, working for different companies.

And you stayed in the Wisconsin area?

Yes, except for four years when I was transferred to Minneapolis-St. Paul when I was transferred to run a division up there of American Standard. Then I came back down to Milwaukee and spent 42 years working in that trade, basically.

Well, I think that pretty well gives us an idea of how you spent your time in the military. You stayed out of trouble?

There were a few opportunities but I managed to stay out. I was in the brig, but I was on the outside of the cages. When I was up at Whidbey Island part of our duties

involved being brig-chasers up there escorting the prisoners to meals or sick bay. You carried a sawed-off shotgun with buckshot in it to escort them. We never had any really bad characters, just guys who had gotten themselves into a little bit of trouble: AWOL, too much drinking mostly.

Thanks, Earl for your time.

[It should be noted that Earl was in Korea at the time of the battle of the Chosin Reservoir, November 27, 1950 to December 11 when the Marines successfully fought through to Hungnam Harbor. Earl had three fingers frozen during that action, which was fought in temperatures 30 degrees below zero, The Marines, the Seventh Army Division and a force of the British Royal Marine Commandos, numbering in total about 15,000 men, were surrounded by 120,000 Chinese troops, and trapped in four main groups. The 15,000 allied troops took 12,000 casualties, including 3000 killed, 6000 wounded, plus thousands of severe frostbite victims, but they fought their way to Hungnam port and successfully delivered more than 100,000 Korean evacuees from the enemy. The Chinese lost 45,000 men. The tents the allies used for sick bay were much too small to hold all the wounded, so the less critical were stored outside and covered with canvas and straw. Blood plasma froze and couldn't be used, surgeons had to use gloves during operations, and morphine syrettes could not be used unless kept warm in one's mouth. Seventeen Medals of Honor, 70 Navy Crosses, and many Distinguished Service Crosses were awarded for the campaign, the most for any single battle in US military history. Once all were evacuated to South Korea, Hungnam Harbor was blown up. Much of this material was mentioned in a publication called *The Chosin Few* in the April-June 2010 issue.]