

Edward J. O'Neill

Born

Died:

Period of Service Viet Nam
Army

Sources: Himself

See attached interview for the military archives of the Library of Congress.



ED O'NEILL

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Edward J. O'Neill

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

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We're sitting at Ed O'Neill's home on Jackson Harbor Road, Washington Island, Wisconsin on September 22, 2011. Ed is going to tell us about what he was doing when he went into the service, how he got there, where he went and various aspects of his military career. So, Ed, you said you were in New York City.

Right.

I was born and raised in New York City. When I became 18 I signed up for selective service, signed all the paperwork. I didn't think much about it. I turned around. I was in a dead-end job. I was getting in and out of trouble.

There was a thing where you didn't volunteer to be in the service, but you pushed up your draft notice. Most people were getting a draft notice – this was before Vietnam hit. They would be waiting three or four years before they got it, so you'd be 22 or 23, maybe 24. So I went and pushed up my draft. But I didn't think it would be that fast!

The notice came with a token. It said, "Report to Whitehall Street in New York City." It was right in downtown Manhattan, right near the customs clearing house. And they sent you – so there would be no excuses – they sent you a token so you could get in the subway. But only one-way! You only got one token.

So I went down there – it was early in the morning. I packed – they told you what to pack and I packed what they said. I came down with a little ditty bag and went in. You'd go from one bench to another bench, and you'd go through this whole thing. They'd treat you pretty good. I expected ... But they treated us really good.

The next thing we know it's 4:00 in the afternoon. I'd been through all the doctors, one thing and another, a background check – they checked whether you'd been arrested, convictions and things like that. You had to take three or four different tests, I remember that – general IQ tests.

By 5:00 in the afternoon I'm standing there with my hand in the air, saying I will faithfully defend the United States – the whole thing. They loaded us on buses. Two-and-a-half hours later we landed up at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Fort Dix was fairly nice!

In effect, what you did was simply go into the Army, even though you didn't volunteer as an RA.

Right. It was a two-year draft, rather than a three-year enlistment.

So we went to Fort Dix. They ran you around. You took more tests. The first thing they did was you went in line and got all your uniform stuff. Now this is December, so it's pretty cold. And the only thing they gave us was field jackets. That's what we had. So we got our gear.

There were maybe five buses filled with guys when we left Whitehall Street going. There were a lot of people being drafted in New York – there were eight million people there.

So we were there and we were in a big classroom – a couple hundred of us, at least. And they said, "Some of you will be taking basic training here." And I thought that was great – I'm a couple of hours from the city so on weekends I could go up – get a pass and go up. And then they said, "The rest of you will be going to another fort for basic training." Well, I ended up – two days later ... How the government charters

planes, I don't know – but they loaded us on and took us to McGuire Air Force Base, which is attached to Dix, and the flew us in non-government, private contractor planes to Fort Benning, Georgia, to the air base at Fort Benning.

Well, that was a life-changing experience! I had been all over the northeast for one thing or another. But I'd never been south of Washington D.C. This was Georgia, and it was 1959. It was a different world! And I always referred to it ... The first person we met there, they broke us into squads, platoons – I think there were 44 guys in a platoon. We had one master sergeant, two SFC's and a staff sergeant. No corporals, no nothing – just these four guys.

My guy was Sergeant Bacote. The guy impressed me so much. He was the most laid back guy I ever knew, except when we were doing something wrong. His famous quotation was, "You gots to be more careful next time." Anything you did wrong: "You gots to be more careful next time."

It was good. But on the base they had a canteen – a bar. And you could go there is you were 18, and I was 18. But they only served 3.2 beers – near beer: it was near what you wanted to drink, but it was only 3.2.

Anyway, we were there and it was a life-changing experience for me. I was a tough New York City born and bred kid. I'd been through the best of it. But these people were completely different. They were constantly saying, "Give me 20. Give me 20." I had no problem with it. Chin-ups before you went for breakfast. Everything was PT. But it was good. It got you in shape.

I was in a lot of trouble when I was growing up, so when I got into the service there was no more of that. They changed my whole attitude. They changed the whole direction of my life.

That's interesting.

I would not be where I am today if it wasn't for the Army and a good wife.

So we were there and going through basic. And Georgia, while we were there, Fort Benning – Sand Hill Reservation. The first thing you did when you got to Sand Hill Reservation, you went over a set of railroad tracks and there were these two big Sherman tanks. Anyway, we go there – older barracks, not like Fort Dix – we were there; they had one-story barracks with heat. It was nice. Everything was pine trees and sand. That's why they called it Sand Hill. And that sand got in everything! And they were looking at everything – even in fatigues. If your brass wasn't squared away you heard about it.

But they were good. You went through the first two weeks of basic, and they said, "Guess what! You guys, because you got here so close to the holidays, we're going to give you leave for two weeks so you can go home for Christmas." And the first thing they made you do when you hit Fort Benning was that you had to sit down and write a letter to your mother and father telling them how well you were treated! You were supposed to tell them about all the good food. And the food was good! That was good. I loved SOS – I still love it.

Anyway, we took leave. I took a bus. A bunch of us – three platoons – were New York City guys. They brought in buses for us. We paid for the ticket and they took us to New York. It was \$35 in those days because there was no central highway – it was all

back roads through the mountains up to New York. It was the worst trip I ever had on a bus, and I still don't like to ride buses to this day for that reason.

Anyway, we got to New York and my folks were happy to see me.

My family only came to this country in the 1920's. My mother was an immigrant, my father was an immigrant. All my relatives were immigrants; all from Ireland. My father was from Wicklow and my mother was from Bally James Duff, and all their friends were the same. But when I got home there was something about it. And this is what got me: everybody came to our house for Christmas – everybody. People we hadn't seen in years: relatives from Jersey, upstate New York. The reason – all the men were so proud – I was the first male in the family that served the country that they came to. They were awestruck that I would serve this country. Because they had just come out of a war in Ireland. They all came here because of the trouble. They all came here because they were in trouble. And they were all giving me life lessons. But they were all proud that I was the first male from the family to join the Army. A lot did after me, but I was the first one.

Anyway, as a present my mother and father gave me a ticket on Eastern Airlines to go from LaGuardia Airport to Atlanta, Georgia. So I was able to fly back, which meant I had an extra day at home. I flew back and then took a bus from Atlanta down to Benning – which was really good. And it was not easy for them to come up with the money. Planes were expensive then.

How far is Atlanta from Fort Benning?

Maybe 100 – 150 miles. We're in the southwest corner; they're more in the northwest corner.

So we were there and I went through the rest of the training. When we got back it was just after the first of January – somewhere around the 3rd or 4th – and we had to go through the rest of our basic training. And being a wise-ass kid from New York I had a mouth and was always getting into trouble – nothing bad, just mouthing off. Well, Sergeant Baker one time ... And I was in good shape – I belonged to the 'golden gloves' – he said to me, "You think you're so hot. Let me teach you something. Give me 20." So I gave him 20. He said, "Now do it with one hand." I couldn't do it! I'd already given him 20 and I couldn't do it. And he said, "Let me show you, kid." And he got down and did 20 one-handed push-ups. And I considered him an old man! He has to be in his 30's or 40's.

How perspective changes!

But the south was different. I'd had a couple of passes – it was something like four weeks before we got a pass to Columbus, Georgia which is across from Phenix City, Alabama.

Sin City.

That's right. And it earned its reputation. There wasn't a weekend that went by that they didn't find a serviceman floating in the Chattahoochee River for some reason or another.

You've got to remember, this is just turning 1960. We had an integrated Army. Everything seemed to be working all right. And I was from New York. It didn't phase me to talk to black people – which we called colored people at the time. So I was talking to some guys in the platoon. One guy was from Alabama and he was going to give us a lift downtown. I got in the car: me, two black guys and another white guy. We were coming out of the Fort on Victory Highway. We got about three miles down and a siren goes off. It was the cops. I wondered what the problem was – we weren't speeding or anything. The guy said we couldn't ride together. Well, my mouth up and causes a problem. It turns out they called this disturbing the peace. But the guy was nice. He said we didn't know because we weren't from the south, so he wasn't going to give us a ticket. But the two black guys – they got a ticket! But they left us standing on the side of the road.

And I found out three things that southerners didn't like. They did not like northerners. They definitely did not like Catholics – and I was a Catholic. And they didn't like anybody in the Army.

You hit all three buttons.

I hit all three buttons, from the first time I was down there. We got off the bus in Atlanta, and there was no bathroom in the bus. So I'm going to the first bathroom I see and it said, "colored people only." So I'm in there taking care of business and this black guy comes up to me and said, "Excuse me, but you're not allowed to use this. This is ours, not yours. Get out!" So we were there.

So I went through basic and about the third or fourth week they told me about all the tests. You remember all those stupid tests?

I've got to tell you a story. When we were kids, my folks took us down south on a tour of the south. We stopped in a little town and there was a platform for the railroad station. And there was a sign that said, "water," and another one that said, "colored water." And I thought this was interesting – they had colored water! So I had to run the faucet to see what it looked like!

It was funny in those days. I never had problems, but they were really upset.

So they said, "Your MOS will be ... whatever the number was. You will be in demolition." I said, "Boy, that's a good trade to learn! When you get out you can blow things up. You could always work for the City of New York – we're always knocking down buildings!"

I had an incident. I was just a kid – a little over 18; 19 by then. We were pulling targets for another group. It was a close combat range. Normally – you know how the targets go up and down and everybody's in the trench: you pull the targets up and mark them, pull them down; pull them up and mark them, whatever. This was a little different. Everybody had their own little sand hole, which was covered. There was cement in the back of it to make sure nothing went through. You had a stick with a half-figure on it and

you put that up. He's supposed to be shooting at an enemy, I guess. We had never been through it, but we were there. And I was a smoker. And it was raining. I'm down there, my cigarettes are wet. They didn't mind if you smoked. They encouraged you to smoke. So I'm there, I've got cigarettes. My matches are soaked and I can't get a light. I don't have my lighter. I said, "Son of a gun." So I yelled out to the guy on my right, "You got a match?" And they said yes. So I called up – we had headphones – I called up to the front and said, "Tell me when they go to cease fire because I'm going to run over and get a match." The [company] master sergeant is up there [on the firing line].

So I lit the cigarette and went running back. And he's screaming – you could hear him – "What the hell are you doing!"

And later he was yelling in my ear. I said, "Yes, sergeant, but it was an emergency." He wanted to know what the emergency was. I told him I needed a match. So he spent the next two hours while we were there – and he was on the Third Army rifle and pistol team; he was excellent [shot] – he took an M1 and would hit the top of the mound enough to drive the dirt and mud down into where I was. I had that for two hours. Then he pulled us up and sat me down with a dunce cap on. He yelled, "Do you know the paperwork I would have had to do if you got killed! If you got even shot do you know what I would have to have gone through! I'm almost going to retire today because of you!" And I said to myself, "Good!"

So, anyway, the day before we were going to leave and people had their orders – people were going to Fort Campbell, Kentucky; a couple more someplace in Alabama where they had the military police, which I would have liked to have been because you could have gotten into the police department then. So I get my orders. I'm going to Fort Sam Houston. They're going to make me a medic – a bedpan jockey.

That's where I was. I was at Fort Sam.

Well, we flew to Fort Sam.

Did they have the heliport there?

Yes.

We went to Fort Sam – this is in 1960. And we got there, and there is a difference like between night and day: Yes, Please, Thank you – no screaming, no hollering. But it was intense. I was a 910, then I went to 911. I ended up as 91120.

Did you go onto Camp Bullis for field maneuvers?

We went somewhere for field maneuvers. I'm not sure.

But I loved it down there. It was the greatest place – the cowboys and that. San Antonio is basically a military town. Six Air Force bases surrounded it. Remember – if you wanted to go home you could go and wait on a MATS line and get a lift anywhere in the country the plane was going to go. But you could always be bumped.

And we had some really tremendous teachers. They were not military gung-ho people. These were people for whom medicine was their life. They taught us, and the

taught us well. I was supposed to be there four weeks and I ended up there twelve weeks. But I got sick in the middle and ended up not being with my group. Eventually everybody in my group went to Germany. But because I got sick with double pneumonia – I don't know how I got double pneumonia in Texas in the summer, but I did.

What I loved was on the weekends. Every third or fourth weekend we'd go down to Mexico – Laredo! And I didn't drink at the time. I could take a beer, but no hard liquor or anything. I since them have changed – I've become educated.

Anyway we were down there at Fort Sam. And we could go to the old fort. I've got pictures of the Alamo, of peacocks – remember the peacocks at Old Fort Sam? And the tower – the clock tower. And this tremendous parade field – the quadrangle; it was beautiful. And everybody was so nice. Plus there were all those WACS for basis AIS. For the medical corps also, there were nurses. But there were all the WACS. And you had the Sixth Air Force Base. It was great.

Well, I got sick while we were on maneuvers, which is what you had been talking about. It put me in the hospital. I ended up with double pneumonia and the college kissing disease, mononucleosis. So I was in there. The first thing they did – of course, I had passed out when they took me in there. I had a 104^o fever. I was hooked up to IV's when I woke up. And the nurse came over to me when I woke up and said, "Son" – there was an older woman; must have been 25 – "Son, would you like to see a priest. I know you're a Catholic." And I said, "I have no intention of needing a priest right now. I just need to get better." So they filled me up with antibiotics and about two weeks later I was discharged; they used to keep you in the hospital for a long time.

But I missed my group! My group had gone on to Germany. I could have gone to Ireland and seen my relatives, which I couldn't do for 45 years after that. Anyway, where did they decide to send me back to? Fort Benning!

So I ended up back at Fort Benning attached to a field medical unit. It wasn't bad duty, but it was a field unit. So you were out – everybody went on a 5-mile march. Of course you had a medic. Of course the medics had these 65-pound packs – you remember those big rubber packs? They weighed a ton! And of course they had little packs, but if you were going out overnight you had to have the big thing. And they only made two of you go – every unit had two. And you weren't allowed to be – they used to tell you that they didn't want you palling around with the enlisted people; you had a job to do and your job was to take care of them, so stay with the cadre rather than the enlisted, even though I was only a PFC. I made PFC at Benning.

So we were there and I'd gone back to Columbus. Of course this time I knew what to look for and what not to look for. The place hadn't changed. I went over to Phoenix City and the place was still a cesspool. I had a complete different version of the south. There was no Any Griffith. It was no Mayberry. And the black people in the south accepted this! It annoyed the hell out of me being from New York, but they accepted this. And they would get offended if you did something and it was for them. You were told!

I've got to tell you, when I left Camp Chaffee I was to go down to Fort Sam. And one of the guys from my unit at Fort Chaffee – we both lived in Chicago. I had a car and I drove him down to Fort Sam. He was black, and we had to sleep in the car on the way down. So I know what you're talking about.

Texas wasn't as bad for race problems, except if you were a Mexican. I noticed there was a big difference there, but not that much. The guy who was in charge – Lopez – at Fort Sam. I guess he was Hispanic at some point in his career, like I was Irish – somewhere down the line my family was from Ireland. But I didn't see really a problem there compared to what was in Georgia.

I was there for two months. I didn't mind so much going in the field because I like to walk, anyway – and the marches and bivouac; they didn't bother me that much. But I would get assigned every now and then to the Rangers who were training down there. This was before the Green Beret – John Wayne and all that stuff came along, there were the Army Rangers. They were a tough group. Most of them were officers. They all had this 'give me respect' attitude: I'm a Ranger; give me respect. I thought: Who do you think you are? What are you talking about? I mean I'm in this little kayak traveling with you down the Chattahoochee; I'm walking through the swamp with you. I don't see anybody putting any bells on my shoulders. Well, that didn't go over that big! Let's just say that me and Article 15's became very close. I didn't hit anybody or anything. It was just my mouth.

So I said I had to get out of there and I went up to talk to the administration. They said if I wanted to be reassigned I could just put in for reassignment and asked where I wanted to go. I said I wanted to go to New York! They said, "Well, there's no New York, no Chicago – there's nothing north of Georgia, so figure out where you want to go." And they said I could go overseas. So I said I'd like to go to Germany. But they said it was too short. I think Germany was 18 months. But they said I could go to Asia since it was only a 13 month tour. So I thought: Japan! That wouldn't be bad. Well, it wasn't Japan. It was just a little bit west of Japan, called Korea.

Well, we got to Korea. I think it was the end of November or the beginning of December in 1960. I go there, and when I got there – first of all, they give you a month's leave before you go overseas. So I took leave and went back to New York. My father and mother said if I stayed a few more weeks with them, they would arrange to fly me back. One of my buddies was flying back to the west coast. He was a Marine. And his family got him a flight. He was Italian – they were first generation Italian. Anyway, they got him a cheap flight – and this is why I wouldn't do it – to go. I think it was \$99 to go from New York to San Francisco. That was a cheap flight in 1960! The problem was it was not a direct flight. It stopped in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh – now, this is in a plane; up and down, up and down. There were four stops to get to Chicago! It took him 26 hours!

So when my mother and father asked if I wanted to do that I said no. When I went home, when I was going to go on leave after Benning, I packed up all my stuff to Fort Ord, California – to Oakland: Military Ocean Terminal: MOTS. So when I went back up to New York I had a month's pay in my pocket. But I decided I was going to see the country. I went out there with the thumb, a crew-cut and was a nice-looking kid. I got picked up from outside the Sand Hill Reservation at Fort Benning all the way up to the George Washington Bridge – one ride after the other. I'd just put out my thumb and somebody would stop to ask where I was going. I wasn't wearing my uniform. I had it with me, but I wasn't wearing it. And I had no problems.

So I told my folks I wanted to take a bus. I didn't want to fly. I hated buses by that time! So I took the bus to Philadelphia. Just to make them happy I left two weeks in

advance. New York really wasn't offering me anything at the time. The people I grew up with – all the Irish and Italian kids – this is the three categories of life they ended up in: they either ended up as a priest or Christian Brother, they ended up as a cop – only one guy from my group ended up in the fire department, and the rest of them ended up dying as junkies with needles in their arms. That was it. That was your life expectancy in New York at the time where I grew up.

So I left early. I hitchhiked practically across the country. Everybody would pick you up. It wasn't like today. And everybody had a story. As long as you could listen and talk to them, they'd drive you wherever you wanted to go. They would buy you dinner or lunch. You didn't have to go into your pocket for anything. So I had \$220 when I hit Fort Ord.

On the way there one of the guys I was at Benning with said Korea was no joke. He said you're really going to be wild and cold. You better get something to arm yourself with. So, as we went through Salt Lake City I went into a Walgreen's Drug Store and bought a .38 revolver.

In Walgreen's?

In a Walgreen's Drug Store, a .38 revolver. It was like \$46; stag handles, six-shot, 2" barrel. It was a beautiful Smith & Wesson. And I bought two 50-round boxes. I put that in my ditty bag. When I got to California I had that with me. You got your stuff; you were three days through the Repo Depot. I packed all of that in the bottom of my duffel bag. I had read everything and never saw any regulations against private weapons. But this guy told me I would find that the ammunition they had over there, if anything goes wrong, is from World War II; they never changed anything and you be lucky to get one in seven rounds that would go off.

So I went over on a ship. I think it was either the Breckenridge or the Mitchell. I went over on one and came back on the other. So I went on and now I'm a PFC, so I have rank. Compared to everybody else I have rank! And I'm the man. I'm living!

So I got on the boat and asked if there was a dispensary; a hospital on the ship. They said this was a ship and they had enough naval people and didn't need me. I said, "With all these Army guys getting sick you didn't need anybody?" So they said they'd let me volunteer and they put me on guard duty for the whole trip across just because I opened my mouth! Every time I opened my mouth I got in trouble!

Anyway, if you were on those ships it was 'officer's country' above a certain level. It reminded me of the people from the story a long time ago, *Titanic*, before all this stuff about the Titanic. And they had the difference between the people in steerage and first class. We were like in third class steerage. I remember my bunk was right over the fantail. So every time there were rough seas the tail would come out of the water and the whole thing would shake.

Anyway we go through, we're on the boat, 'officer's country' is up there. I had a guard station on one of the stairwells to make sure none of us riff-raff got up to the top. But all of these officers had their wives and kids with them. I thought they couldn't be going to Korea! When I went to Korea I had heard there were no civilians allowed in that country. Their husbands would go to Korea, and their wives, sons and daughters would

stay in Japan. Of course you'd always meet the girls. And the young girls always thought it was nice to harass you: "Why don't you come up here?"

Anyway, we went from there, stopped in Yokahama to discharge all the dependents. There were a lot of dependents! We had one day in Yokahama. It was a typical Army or Navy town. It was wide open. It almost reminded you of Phoenix City, Alabama. They loaded us back on and we ended up in Inchon.

So we get off at Inchon. They put a cargo mat down the side of the ship. You were only about 30' above the water. They had the LCM's down there and you would go down in the LCM's and they'd take you up to the beach. Well, it wasn't a beach, it was a pier. And on the pier there must have been 40 deuce-and-a-half. So, now, it's got to be the end of November and it's cold in Korea. Nobody told us this. We left San Francisco and it was nice! So the best we had on was a field jacket. They told you to switch your gear, get into fatigues, or you could go in khaki's. November in khaki's is not a good thing! So I had fatigues on. We went there and they loaded us off there. They brought our gear in – the gear came down the cargo nets. They laid out the gear and you went to pick out your gear. Then you got on a deuce-and-a-half – they told you which one to get on. Then we're all waiting. They had us sitting in the deuce-and-a-half for hours while they continued to unload the ship.

So along comes 'Dolly donut,' the Red Cross – we used to call them 'Dolly donuts.' And they're handing out donuts; no coffee, but I didn't drink coffee at the time anyway – just donuts. Well those donuts were hard as a rock. They were still frozen!

So they finally took us to the depot in Inchon – their repo-depot – and they tell you where you're going to be assigned. I was assigned to the 65th medical group, which was in Moo Jung Dung, which is a little bit east of Seoul – not much – today it's all part of Seoul City. They just came and picked me up in something like years ago when I loved to watch *MASH* because I could relate to so much of the stuff. They came to get me in a three-quarter-ton. We threw our stuff in there – there were two of us going. I had rank so I got to sit in the jump seat. The other guy was a private. He got to ride in the back. So we went, and the guy is talking to us as we race through Seoul.

Seoul was still mostly shacks from after the war. It was not really built up. We went through Yong Do Po. Everybody's heard of Yong Do Po. First we went to the 121 hospital. 121st was an emergency hospital for the Army, and was just south of Seoul, just before you got to Kimpo K-14. Then we went to Seoul and he was showing us all this stuff. He'd been there for four months; he was a veteran. His name was Larry Miller. We became friends. He was from Valley, Nebraska. On my way home when I left Korea I stopped to see him because he got discharged before I did. He had seniority.

So, anyway, he took us over by the racetrack district. Just before our compound, about a mile down the road, there was the U.N. compound – this was a U.N. action. And it was a wide-open place – gambling and everything was there. We got to the 65th. It was a hospital – it was a convalescent hospital. Most of the people in Korea when I was there weren't being shot – of course there always was that – but they were mostly catching hepatitis from being with the natives, even the native food. They wouldn't send you home with hepatitis. They would get you better. You would lose 40 to 60 pounds, and then you would go to this convalescent hospital where they would constantly feed you and get you back in shape so you could go back to your line unit. Remember, there were about 200,000 in Korea when I was there.

I didn't realize that many were there.

There's 50,000 there now and this was 1960 and they hadn't drawn down yet. Everybody was there. As a matter of fact Henry Nelson was there. He was on a line unit. I didn't know him, but he was there.

There were two ambulance companies there: the 560th and the 561st. I got to the 560th. That was the one that was basically all over the peninsula. There were 165 assigned to my unit – an ambulance company. But we did all the field dispensary work. So there were only 30 or 40 people in the unit at any one time. The rest of them were all TDY. So when I got there – you had to be in a unit at least four weeks before they'd let you go TDY. They wanted to make sure you knew your stuff, and they wanted to make sure you weren't going to hurt anybody. They wanted to make sure how your head was because you're on your own power when you're out there. You remember the VD cards? You remember the checks? There was a lot.

I smoked. I didn't drink. Do you remember you could get a carton of cigarettes for \$1? It was \$1 for a quart of whiskey and 25¢ for the mixer. But I didn't drink. I was always the guy who was going to drive somebody. If we were out someplace I'd drive. We were smart enough for that.

After a month I got assigned to a unit down in Taegu. Then I came back for a couple of weeks. You got to be out for a month or two months, depending on whether the unit wanted to keep you. They didn't want anybody out in the field for more than two months because you became too socialized to the unit: Everybody would ask if you had penicillin, if you had any of this or that – there was a black market. There was too much stuff for young people to be involved with, and the officers would drive you crazy: "Sir, you've got to report this;" "No, I don't want it on my record, just give me the shot." And we had bicillin. Penicillin was already diluted. Bicillin you had to dilute before you gave anyone an injection. It was like molasses, it was so thick trying to shoot it into somebody.

I had a great time. I loved it. I loved going to places and meeting new people. I loved it.

I did not love Seoul. I had come down from the north, in the Freedom Village near the DMZ. This guy had gotten shot in an exercise. We got him stabilized and were rushing him to bring him to the 121st. He was serious, but they didn't want to use a helicopter. We used helicopters for everything, but for some reason we weren't going to use a helicopter. So we're driving the guy: I'm in the back with the guy and Larry Miller was in the front. And you remember those tin boxes they called ambulances? And these were old roads. There were no highways. These were just roads – dirt roads.

They were just paneled vehicles, weren't they?

Right.

At that time there was a military junta that taken over from Syngman Rhee, and the guy, General whoever was in charge. We had seen him before go by. And he goes by in their jeeps: They'd have one in the front, two on the side and he'd be in the spot in the back. But they'd take up the whole road, especially in Seoul. And every jeep was

mounted with a .30 or .50 caliber. So we're coming down and they cut us off. Larry pulls up and I said, "Don't you stop. Just go right through them. Don't you dare stop." So Larry puts the pedal to the metal and these guys are turning their machine guns on him. I said, "I don't give a shit. We're Americans and we're worth a lot more than them." So we go right through. We had horns that weren't like sirens, but we got through them. We all got written up – an Article 15: disrespectful to the country and all this stuff. I said, "Is the guy still alive we brought there? Then don't tell me all this shit." I was still a New Yorker at heart! Don't tell me any shit. This guy is alive today because of what we did. They said, "You could have been a specialist fourth class already." I said, "What do I care!"

You had twelve months.

Yes. I had that attitude.

So we were there. I can't say enough about how it changed my attitude. We saw how people lived. We would do a lot with the orphanages. We had a lot of extra food. We had so much extra nobody was eating it and we were throwing stuff away every day because we couldn't use it. So I said to put it in something and we'd take it over to the orphanage. These kids were abandoned. Some of them were from the war – the older ones. But most of them were Asian.

There were surprises.

There were surprises.

So we would take the extra food. And one of the places we worked with was run by the Maryknoll missionaries out of New York State. Me and my buddy, Andy Emrisko -- I'm still friends with him in Cleveland and the rest of them – we'd take turns going over there. The officers would ask where we were going and we'd say we were going over to the missionaries. Well, we went there for a couple of hours and then went down to the village and had a good time. You took care of business first, but you had a good time. The villages: the mamasan's, the papasan's, the josans, babysans_ -- what we call in the middle of the winter, I was up on the line and it was colder than hell and we had wool parkas on, the mickey-mouse boots. You were warm. But you saw people with horsehair hats – the old men were wearing horsehair hats. They froze. They took a lot. But they took advantage of us and we took advantage of them. It was just a give-and-take.

But in the summer of 1961 – I had gotten there in the end of 1960 – in the summer of 1961 I qualified for R&R in Japan. Meanwhile we had these Hong Kong tailors. I actually had overcoats made for \$20. I had three-piece suits that were better than Brooks Brothers ever had. I used to walk around with my Edwao shoes on wearing a suit. And we would have a great time. We would walk through the hospital with stethoscopes around our neck just to bedevil the doctors, because one of the doctors wasn't a draftee.

We always had a good time. Other than when you were on guard duty there was no real military discipline. You had a lot of respect. We saluted once a day, but that was it. Because if you had to salute an officer going from one hut to another in the hospital,

you'd spend all day with your arm in a sling. So it was a once-a-day thing. And it worked out for us.

We had MATS flights on Wednesday. We'd bring people who were being transferred from our hospital, from 121 to K14, and they'd get on a MATS plane and flown to Japan, and then to the U.S. Well, we got to fly on that sometime for extra staff depending on how bad the people were. And everything in the plane was slings. So you laid the litters in the slings. It was great. I went to Japan a few times. I was assigned to that unit for a month.

So what did you do? Did you have to pick up civilians as well?

No. This was all military – all GI's who had a serious injury or illness that we'd have to get them back to the States. And they had MATS plans with four engines. Nice. And they had these big cargo doors on the side.

C130's?

No. The C130 was later on. We rode in C130's, but MATS airplanes were like civilian aircraft. They were four-engine, they stood high off the ground, and the people were brought up into them in a lift. And they were loaded two abreast. There was a little walkway and you got to take care of them. Most of them were hooked up to plasma, saline or something else. And you had to constantly watch them because the pressure in these planes was not as good as it is today. You had guys who were in serious medical condition. There were doctors, nurses as well as us on the planes. We would discharge them in Tachikawa, and the following day we'd catch a ride back to Korea to do it over again. And you did that once a week: You left on a Wednesday and came back on a Friday.

Well, Thursday was a free day unless they had work for you. And from Tachikawa to Tokyo was not more than 35 minutes on their subway! As long as you weren't on the off-hours.

But I took an R&R in Japan. The difference between the Japanese people and the Korean people ... The wars, if you look at it and say the War ended in 1945 and I was there in 1961, and Japan was being built up. The people were fairly nice. I wrote extensively about this. Anyway, during that trip I was comparing. Korea ended in 1953, and I was there in 1961. That was eight years. And there was nothing. There was no comparison between the Japanese and Koreans as to where they had been. It was like it was two different centuries.

So I was on R&R and told everybody I wanted to go to Hiroshima. Do you remember Brook Army? Did you go on the burn wards?

I never did.

The burn wards were on the 7th, 8th and 9th floors. Well, those people were the survivors of Hiroshima. Those were the people that we learned to treat burn victims with – not only radiation burns, but the rest of the burns. There were people there when I was there as the 'bedpan jockey,' and these people would put up with enormous pain and

never a word out of them. They were never crying. They were just stoic, these Japanese people.

Anyway, I always said if I ever got over there I wanted to see Hiroshima. So on my own R&R I went to Tokyo – I got involved with the communist rallies. They used to warn you: Don't go downtown because there was a communist rally. These were the union rallies. So we used to go there and watch them!

Anyway, you always wore civvies – it was the thing to do. And the subways, they were really still good, but they used to pack you in.

I heard about that.

They had pushers to push you in.

Anyway, I went up to Nagoya, north of Tokyo just before you get to Mount Fuji. It's a caldera. That's how Mount Fuji was formed. There's a lake there. I spent four or five days up there. It was a beautiful place. And everything was arranged through the USO. They tell you what bus or train to take, they lay a map out for you. And at that time – because Japan was an occupied country – everything was in English. Today it's not. But everything that was written in Japanese was written somewhere below it written in English. How would you know it said Tachikawa, but if you read it you knew what it was. And that's the way it was.

So when I was there I hooked up with some ugly Americans. They were from the Midwest someplace. They were there and they wanted to sightsee but they didn't understand the language. I started to explain and for two days they took care of me while I took them around – showed them the Ginza and all the other stuff. They took care of me. I stayed in the USO hotels – something 'service' hotels. Everything was in English. I stayed in one in Japan ... I'd been in some dumps in Georgia, but nothing compared to this. It had little windows – the windows were so small so nobody could break in and you could not get out. There was no bathroom in the hotel rooms. It was down the hall with a slit in the floor and two things for your feet.

So then I went up to this Nagoya, up in the mountains. This hotel I stayed at was fantastic. As a matter of fact, I found a Catholic shrine up there. There was steam in the floor – it was over rising volcanic ... like hot sulphur springs. You would end up with a bath everyday. They'd give you a bath with a rubdown and everything. It was living like a king! This was equivalent to the Walford-Astoria! It was fabulous.

I spent a week up there with them. Then I came back and got to Tachikawa. I picked up QD4 and went down to Iwakuni. Iwakuni is a Marine base on the Inland Sea about 60 miles south of Hiroshima. Since [Japan had a good] train system, the USO – Army services or whatever – hook you up so you can fly with the Marine Corps or anybody else. QD4 is the old flying boxcar with the relief tube out the back. I have pictures of that. Anyway, I go down there. You get off there and you have papers that say where you're going and what you're doing. They were very nice to me. I slept in the barracks overnight. You make up your bunk. I had a great time.

Next day I wanted to catch the train and they drove me into town. I got the train and went to Hiroshima. A Marine guy came with me because he wanted to go there anyway. So both of us take off for Hiroshima. And you've got your little B4 bag and

you're walking around like an officer with your name on the bag – everybody gives you respect.

So we get there. This is a Marine and we're coming out. Hiroshima – you're on a regular train, but then it goes underground when you get to the city. And it comes up. Now you remember the city – there was nothing left of it. So when you come out at the Peace Park, they call it, you come upstairs out of the subway and there's the building where the bomb went off. And there's all these different monuments in Japanese and they're very nice. Of course, being with a Marine, he has to let go one of these: "Hello all you blast victims!" So everybody looked.

But Hiroshima was the only place I felt uncomfortable in all of Japan. It was the only place I felt people were looking at me with disdain: look what you did. But the city was completely rebuilt.

Have you seen a picture of it lately? It looks like Las Vegas.

You've got to see the pictures I've got of Hiroshima. You'd go on top of the department stores and they'd have bands up on the roofs. They'd be playing music for you all afternoon. You could leave your kids up there and everything. Japanese kids get away with murder until they're about six years old. And they have all this stuff for the kids and all that while everybody was shopping. It was beautiful.

I went to the ABC – spent a couple of days there. I stayed in a hotel. I went back to Iwakuni. I had only a day-and-a-half to get back there. That wasn't my ten days – they had called an alert. They did that all the time: What was the alert for? Who knows? But I spent a week with the Marines because on an alert everybody has to report to the nearest base.

It was four or five days and they dropped the alert, and I went back to the unit.

I can remember the stuff I remember about Korea. They would steal anything. There were slicky boys everywhere. I don't steal from anybody. There were real problems when they would try to break into the dispensaries. Let's face it. You could not shoot a gun at any of these people or you'd go to jail for twenty years. So they would break in. I would go after them with a bat or whatever. Because they wanted to get the medical supplies. It was a bad thing. It's not that they needed it. It's not that we didn't give them a lot. It's that they would steal it and then sell it for five times the price. That was not right.

They had the gypsy cabs which were stolen jeeps. They would use the empty 55 gallon drums, these people in Korea, and they would remake the jeep into what we called a gypsy cabs with all this stuff on it – wings – all made up out of bent up 55 gallon cans. The stolen deuce-and-a-half's, they would make that into a bus. And you knew when you went on the bus. There was the select-a-switch for all the hydraulics. The guy would have it in drive and drive it along. Unbelievable! They stole everything. Any piece of garbage you would throw away they would make into something and sell it. That's really entrepreneurship. But the slicky boys bothered me.

There was another revolution while we were there. There were problems in the city or something else with it. All I know is they took a lot of the Korean soldiers off the line and left a big hole. We got an alert. We'd go to the ammo dump – there's not a lot of ammo in a military place in the hospital. We'd get carbines, .45's. That was basically

it. So we got all the stuff – I was on the base at the time. It's not like a line unit where you pick up ammo and know it's going to work. Here, the stuff is marked '1943.' It's wet! So we had a range and took it there to test fire. I went through three banana clips before I got one to fire once. Our rifles were good – the carbines were good. The ammo just sucked. So I picked up my .38 and put it in my pants. I said, "I don't know about you guys, but I know I've got 100 rounds that's going to work!" I had to be close to somebody to use it, but I had 100 rounds that would work.

So I called up one of my friends who were working a line unit. He brought us ammo from one of the line outfits. He traded – as we all did – and he brought us three boxes, the wooden boxes, of fresh .30 caliber carbine ammunition. No .45 ammunition, but carbine ammunition.

Where did he get it?

Right off the line. It's all there; everything could be picked up. He probably traded some penicillin for it. But he rolled into the unit, opened the back and there were the three big boxes. So we knew we could defend ourselves. You didn't want a lot of shooting, but we knew we could defend ourselves.

But the Ginza is probably the best shopping place I've ever been to. The people were absolutely fantastic – the Japanese people. Then you'd run into the occasional war survivor from the Second World War. And his leg is missing and he's on the platform trying to beg for money. They only do it where the Americans are. They would not do it where the Japanese are because they won't give it to them. It was not honorable – you don't beg. They took care of their own.

When we came back we got extended. Kennedy was president, I think, and he extended everybody. I ended up with two months and 15 days extension on my tour.

So you were in 24 months, plus 2 months?

Yes. I should have been out December 1, 1961. I didn't get out until February 15, 1962. That's when I got discharged. In Oakland.

When we were coming back it was really cold. Everybody takes what they want. I went over there with one duffel bag. I must have took back three footlockers worth of stuff while I was there – including a Samurai sword; everybody had one; short-timers calendar – you filled it in, it was a silhouette of a girl. We had a whole ton of stuff.

So I got on – it was either the Breckenridge – we got on in Korea, did not stop in Japan. We went straight to Pearl Harbor. I got liberty in Pearl Harbor, but I didn't have any money – I lost all my money on the ship.

I still didn't drink. I tried sake a couple of times. I had the Kobe beef. I ate well in Japan. I watched really what I ate in Korea because I saw so many people with hepatitis. And people die from hepatitis. If they didn't get to you fast enough you were going to go. I saw guys go from 160-180 pounds back to almost 120 pounds in a month. I don't think they ever got over it. I think a lot of it had to do with when you were on the dispensaries. The MI people used to use the ambulances to transport the infiltrators all the time. There are more tunnels in North Korea coming into the south than there is coming across the Mexican border. And you'd find them all the time.

I had one guy come across an area controlled by the Korean Army. They said I needed to bring the ambulance and we find the guy. He's got a lot of bullet wounds in him and they wanted him out of the Korean hands and into American hands of the military intelligence. So we were going to use the ambulance to transport him. We picked the guy up, and there's a lot of lead in this guy. And as we were ripping off his clothes to help him we found all these greenbacks: 5's, singles, 10's. Twenty was the highest denomination. They slipped through coming south with American money to destabilize the South Korean government.

And how they do that is, in the Army you were given scrip. Your greenbacks were taken away when you got there and you were given scrip money. And every six or eight months or so – I did it twice when I was there – they would exchange scrip. They would change it. The money was different denominations, different sizes. It was all paper money. And they would change the denominations, change the colors every time, every six months or so, so that they couldn't manufacture it. If they were hoarding it, it wouldn't be worth anything because you wouldn't exchange it once they do it. And the Koreans would bring you \$1,000 worth of scrip and ask you to change it. Well, you had to have a reason if you had more than \$250 when you wanted to change it. You had to have a good reason why you were changing \$1,000 of old scrip for new scrip.

But these were actual greenbacks. One of the guys who was in military intelligence told me ... you remember in the 1950's and 1960's they were saying to send money to your relatives in communist countries? They traced back that money that the guy was crawling through the border with, coming south, to money that was donated five years previous and sent to communist countries – the Balkans and wherever. So you were sending it to your relatives and it was intercepted by the government. They kept the money and when they could use the money to destabilize something they would do it. And believe me, whatever scrip was worth the American dollar was worth twice.

Remember silver certificates? That's what they had.

Anyway, to come back to when we were in Korea, the Korean Army was being developed at the time. They were all conscripts. None were volunteers. They were all conscripts. And the Koreans also had Korean Army attached to the U.S. Army. They were called Katusas. All the American units would have so many Katusas, and they would actually be in your barracks and everything – no segregation or anything. They worked with you. That's how they learned. I believe that's how they got to be as far advanced as they are. Because, from what I heard from friends of mine who were in Vietnam, the Roc Marines were devastating. They were true out-and-out Marines.

Anyway, these people would work with us. They had some medical training. They were Katusas. They lived in your barracks. There was maybe for every company there might have been maybe three dozen who were there. Basically they wanted to learn what you knew. They were also great interpreters. They could speak English and they knew everything about you. They could tell you everything. But they were great guys. And I noticed they were all kung fu champs. I had one guy who worked with me on two assignments. He could turn around, jump in the air and kick your bag off the top of your locker. He was that good.

Where did you land in the States after going to Pearl Harbor?

I came back to Oakland. I got discharged in Oakland on February 15, 1962. Then I hitched all the way across the country to New York.

With your duffel bag?

No. I shipped that. Do you remember a thing called ‘Railway Express?’ You took it down to the Railway Express, they’d put labels on it and ship it. The only thing I noticed that they did – because I’d had that gun for years – I did not pack the gun. I carried the gun. When I was on the ship I had the gun. Everywhere I went I had that gun with me. Everybody laughed at me: “What do you have that for?” And when the coup happened and they went down to get that ammo out and it didn’t work, they all said, “Now we know why.”

I came back with a completely different attitude.

I’ll bet you did.

I was a punk when I went into the service – a wise-ass punk. I was not a punk when I came out. I’m still a wise-ass guy. But I was not a punk. I believe the worst thing they ever did for this country was to do away with the draft.

You know, you’re not the first guy who has said that. As I do these interviews, a number of us are saying that’s what we ought to be doing now.

Do something. You don’t have to go fight a war, but you ought to do something for your country. This stuff of “me, me, me.” One thing we learned was to share. One thing we learned was to help other people. When they had the floods over there, we were working with people to try to save lives when they were being washed away.

When we were at the main 65th Medical Group, the times that I was there, we were always doing something. We were always doing something for orphans or Project Mike, or the USO – to help people who can’t do it. They stole, but they stole because that’s all they could do. Didn’t stop me from beating them if I caught them. Because people who steal – there are no Robin Hoods. They’re not doing it to help; they’re doing it to make money on it, and to use the money for their own purposes.

Well I think we’ve taken enough of your time, and we thank you. You’ve done a great job. Just for the record, you came out and eventually became a member of the postal department?

I came out, went back to work at Brooks Bros. I met my wife in college – from the Island. She was in New York; her father was from the Island. I was her boss.

Now she’s your boss!

Yes! She married me for revenge! I swear she did. We’ve been together 45 years in October. I got everything I have today, basically, because of the Army and my wife.

The Army gave me character. I have a lot of friends who were with me lose their arms. I had a lot of friends who ended up as priests and cops. My buddies – two of them from the Marine Corps – one of them ended up as the second highest police officer in the city of New York.

Well, Ed, thanks very much for your time. For the record you would end up in the postal department as the head of safety and health for the northeast region?

Actually it was the Mid-Atlantic at the time. It was good.

Thanks, Ed. We appreciate it, and I know the Post will as well.