Today is Friday, April 24, 2015. My name is Fran Prokop and I am at the home of Joseph Lyznicki, a dual veteran of the Korean Conflict. He was in both the Marine Corps Reserve and then the Army during the Korean Conflict. He lives in the same community and is a friend of mine. He learned of the Veterans History Project through me and has kindly consented to participate in this interview. Here is his story:

**When and where were you born?**
I was born in Berwyn, Illinois on December 25, 1930.

**What were your parents’ occupations?**
My Dad was a carpenter; my Mother was a homemaker.

**Did you have sisters and brothers?**
Yes, I did. I had two brothers and one sister.

**Were either of your brothers or sister in the military?**
Yes, both brothers were. My older brother, Eugene, was in the U.S. Navy, 1941-45. My other brother was in the United States Air Force, retired as a Lieutenant Colonel.

**Wow, so he was a “lifer.”**
Twenty-seven years.

**Do you know if they were interviewed?**
No, they’re dead now.

**What did you do before entering the service?**
I was a chemist. I was going to college, received my Bachelor’s Degree. And before that I had served two years in the Marine Corps Reserve.

**Was that while you were going to college?**
Yes.
And how did that come about? How did you get in the Reserves?
Well, I heard about they needed people in the Reserves and so I enlisted and received the rank of Corporal. I was an 81 mm. Mortar gunner.

Did you go anywhere or do anything – did you ever leave?
I went for training to Camp LeJeune, North Caroline. And I also went to Parris Island, South Carolina. And then I did amphibious training in Virginia.

And did you ever put this training to use?
No.

But you knew it.
But I did it.

So you were in for two years. Do you have those dates by chance?

What happened then – I know the Korean War began in June of 1950 –
Okay, I finished my degree and I started working as a chemist until I got drafted to go to Korea.

Did you choose – well, once you’re drafted they generally put you in the Army –
That’s what they do. They wanted me to go to Officer’s Training because I had my Bachelor’s Degree. And I would have to enlist for four years and I said no.

Okay.
So I took my chances as an enlisted person.

How about your departure for training camp and your early days of training. Where did you go and how did you get there – by what mode of transportation?
I did my basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. They sent me to Leadership School – at Fort Leonard Wood. And then I was sent to Korea –

Wait a minute – was that along with your basic training or after you had basic training –
After.

Was that considered like advanced training?
Right, that was advanced training.

But in your basic training you went through the regular routine – marching and –
Right. I was attached to the 4th Armored Division.

So your specialized training was leadership school.
Right.

And what did you learn there? Was it strictly classroom teaching?
Right, and mastering different kinds of weapons – and it would have been an extension in the Leadership School for another year or so and I didn’t want it.

Right. You just wanted to serve your time.
Right. So that’s why they sent me to Korea.

What was your rank then?
When I went overseas – I went over as a PFC because I had some military service before and then – you want to know what rank I got in Korea?

What’s the highest rank you achieved?
In Korea I received the rank of Sergeant – that was a Staff Sergeant. That’s higher than a regular Sergeant.
Oh, yeah.
How did you adapt to military life, like the physical regimen, barracks, food – social – everything – were you married at that time?
No.

How old were you?
I was 23.

That was when you went into the Korean War – 23 and you were single.
Yes.

So how did you adapt –
It was kind of rough, but – I had trouble adapting because of the fact that I was never away from home for so long – and I made friends very easily, and I adapted to what they told me to do and I accepted my responsibility.

I guess that’s key –
Not much I could do.

How about the food – did you like the food? Not like the food?
No, I have an eating problem. I have a stomach problem so I can’t tolerate onions, nor gravy or any cream sauces.

Really?
And I had trouble with that.

Yeah, I guess. Were you allowed to ever – like did you bring your own food eventually or how did you handle that?
No, when I was in Korea we had to eat C-rations. So I would exchange my C-rations for something that I could eat. So if I had, like, hamburger with a lot of gravy in it, I would change the can for peaches.
Oh, I see, so you exchanged –  
Yeah, ’cuz we had the C-rations.

Okay, you served strictly in Korea. You never told me how you got to – going back to your travel when first drafter, how did you get to Fort Leonard Wood, by train?  
Yes, they sent us by train – that was from Fort Sheridan – yes, that was the processing.

And you spent all of your basic training there –  
At Fort Leonard Wood –  
And advanced school at Fort Leonard Wood.  
Um-hmm.

How long did all that take?  
Well, January, February, March, April – and four and a half months.

Okay, say January to May.  
Yeah.

And then in May they sent you to Korea?  
Then I had my orders to report to depart for Korea.

And how did you get to Korea?  
By ship – the U.S.S. Anderson – a troop ship.

How was the crossing?  
Bad. Very bad.

Will you describe it? That was your first crossing of the ocean too, wasn’t it?  
Yes. Many, many, men were very sick.
You went over the Pacific Ocean, of course. They were so sick; it was terrible.

So you were sea sick as well? Yes, I was.

Did they give you anything? They tried; they gave me some Demerol or something; it was just terrible. Anyway, that was over with; we finally got there.

How long did it take – this crossing? I think it took about seven days.

Yeah, it’s not fun when you’re sick. No.

Okay, so where did you land in Korea? Puson.

And then what happened? They put me on a truck; they sent me to another camp and was there for a couple of days. During that interim the war – the Armistice was signed.

Oh, really. So I was there when the Armistice was signed and then they shipped me over to attach to the Engineer Division.

Wait a minute – how long was this war? The Korean War didn’t last – It started in 1950 and ended in ’53.
And when did you go into the Army – because you were in the Marines from ’48 to ’50 – and you went into the Army in January of ’53.

January of 1953.

Oh, you didn’t go in until 1953! I didn’t realize that – yeah! Right.

And I got discharged in ’54 – December of ’54.

So you were in line two full years.

Just about.

January ’53 to December ’54. So, just sort of tell me, after the Armistice was signed, what were your duties?

Okay. After processing at another camp they finally sent me to the 18th Group Engineers. Sent me then to a smaller unit called the 73rd Engineers, which was part of the 18th Group. And then I was attached to the engineer battalion, which was the 73rd Headquarters Company. After being there for approximately two weeks, they decided to put me in the Section called S-3. S-3 is considered to be the Operations, part of Headquarters Company, the Engineer Battalion. And the S-3 then decided that they were controlling the bridges, the roads, everything else for all the other companies – since we were the Headquarters Company.

So I worked in S-3 and then they finally needed somebody to work with Troop Information/Education. Since I had experience as a previous teacher, which my degree was in teaching, they put me in the section called TIE – Troop Information/Education. So I did different things in there until I finally decided – I realized there were several service personnel who couldn’t read and write.

Really?

Yes, and I had a friend, he got a “Dear John” from his wife, and I had to read it to him because he couldn’t read.
How old were these guys?
Twenty-five.

Where were they from? Were they from the South?
Louisiana. Yeah.

Wow!
So I petitioned my Commanding Officer – asked him if I could start teaching some of the Gis. My Master Sergeant only had a 4th Grade education.

You’re kidding!
And he had trouble with words. So I started helping these people out. Finally, the general from – General Maxwell Taylor, from 8th Army came down to us, and I asked him if I could start a school.

Yeah, sure. Wow, I am amazed!
So I started a school – they built me a tent – the carpenters built me some benches, and I started teaching the Gis in my Company how to read and write.

That is so interesting! Did you ever ask them why? Did they go to school and just not get it or did they just not go to school?
No, they just never finished school and they went into the Army and that was their career.

Never finished school.
So General Maxwell Taylor said to me, “Quote, we’re gonna now make it mandatory that anybody who re-enlists is going to have at least an 8th grade education.”

My God.
And so I used to have to sign their slips that they did pass 4th grade and 8th grade.
Wow! I can’t believe that! This is 1950s, right?
1953; 1953.

Wow! It’s amazing to look back and think that our country was not – literate.
So I had my own school there –

Did you have a name for this school?
I just called it 'MY SCHOOL.'

And how many students?
Well, I started off with five, and then the other companies found out that they were doing the same thing, so they would send them to me until actually I had about 20 people.

Twenty men.
And these were Gis –

They were all men, right, no women?
Right. And so my Commanding Officer, whom I represented in S-3, was a Major, and he said I should become a Corporal.

Um-hmm.
My Commanding Officer of the Headquarters Company said you can’t be commissioned again – a higher grade until you’ve been here at least six months.

Okay.
My Commanding Officer, who I worked under, said “I am a Major and he’s working for me as an S-3 and I signed the papers for him to be a Corporal.” So I was a Corporal for about three months and then he decided, since I’m teaching Sergeants, I should at least have my own rank, so, my Major got back to my Company Commander and said “Sir, you are talking to a Major, you’re only a Lieutenant, so he’s standing right here, I want Joe Lyznicki to become a Sergeant.” So I became a Staff Sergeant.
Oh, wow.
I was teaching all sergeants –

I think that’s only right.
And I was only a little PFC and then a Corporal.

Right, right, but you had the education and they didn’t.
Right.

Well, good thing you were there. I’m sure they appreciated it.
So they did make it mandatory and now it’s required that they have to have an 8th grade education.

I think now everybody has to have a high school diploma.
Now, they do. Not then –

To even get into the service.
Right. Before anybody could enlist they said you have to have at least an 8th grade education.

It’s hard to believe that they went in at that time with not even an 8th grade education.
So during the interim I was not in combat anymore but we were going through screenings – an awful lot of the other men, since the Armistice was signed, so we had to go through other things – building bridges and roads and so on. It was part of my duties besides teaching school.

When did you teach them – they weren’t regular classes – just like taught them an hour or couple of hours –
No.
I mean, if you had other duties –
I set up a schedule, like Monday, Wednesday, Friday from 2-5. And then eventually the Koreans found out and they wanted to learn to speak English. So I began to speak a little Korean and I started teaching the Koreans English.

Oh, wow!
So that worked out pretty nice because I got to know an awful lot of good Koreans.

These are South Koreans?
Yeah, and then I got to know a lot about their customs –

So you learned about the culture and everything –
Yeah, the culture and the families, which was interesting.

Did you ever see combat?
No.

Did you see men who came back from combat and talked to them?
Because when I was over there a lot of these guys were – hadn’t seen combat. So that’s why I had talked to quite a few of them, and as I said before we went through the process of screening for a lot of the – whether or not they were prisoners of war or whether they were – we had a lot of Chinese that were prisoners, so we had to clear them. And plus we had to clear a lot of the minefields.

You had to do that?
Yes, we did.

How did you go about clearing the minefield?
Well, we went on hands and knees with a bayonet –
They didn’t have any --
Not at that time.

– like they have today, you know?.
No, now they have different detectors.

They have drones even that can go over there –
Right. Yeah, the hardest part that I hated was the winters; they were so extremely cold.
And we slept in tents.

You had the same problem with food there – you said you had C-rations, so –
Well, yes, I had the C-rations and eventually we got a kitchen, a tent, and I got to be
friends with the cook – because I would teach him how to read and write so he would
take care of me.

How about friendships formed and camaraderie – you got to know a lot of guys
intimately –
Oh, I had a lot of very close friends.

Do you ever keep in touch with any of them?
Yes, I did. We used to have a reunion at least once a year.

Oh, how nice. And where was this reunion generally?
The reunion was at my house. I lived in Alsip and then I moved to Country Club Hills,

So these guys from all over the country came over to your house?
They would come to my house. The farthest was possibly from California.

And how many men would you say came to your house?
I would say at least twelve.
Wow! That’s interesting.
Yeah, my first wife, she enjoyed – she got to know them and their wives. Actually they wouldn’t stay at my house, I had too many children –

No, they wouldn’t expect to -- The point is they still came
It was nice; we talked, and eventually they started dying off and then you lost interest.

But that was nice – how long did you have this going on?
I did that for about 7 or 8 years. And then the fella who replaced me was from Hobart, Indiana. His father was Mr. Welsh Trucking Company – and Welsh Trucking Company wanted to give me a job and I said no, I wanted to teach school – because I had smartened up.

So while you were in Korea, how did you stay in touch with family and friends back home. What was your communication – was it just strictly letters?
Letters.

Just letters; never any phone calls or anything.
No, there was no way to make a phone call. There was no phones out there to make it – like they have now.

Right, yeah.
My sister would write me and my mom would write me and I would write them and I had a girlfriend.

How about packages –
They would send me packages.

How long would you say the average mail took at that time –
About ten days.
Ten days, both ways, going and coming.  
Yes. And I would buy things, when I would go to Japan and I would send them to them.

Did you go for R & R?  
Yes.

How often did that happen?  
They made you take it every six months. I didn’t want to go. First when I went to Yokohama, Tokyo and the second one I went to Kobe, Kyoto.

Did you have like a week there or something?  
Seven days – it was a seven-day R & R.

Other than clearing minefields or teaching – you were pretty busy – what were your recreational or off-duty pursuits – like did they have sports of any kind? Did the guys play ball.  
Well, we would set up different sports like volley ball, we set up nets; we played horse-shoes; we played basketball and a bunch of us guys would set up baseball.

Oh, all right.  
We did those things.

And who did you play against, each other?  
Right. And then we started playing Headquarters against Company A, Company B, Company C – and since we were Headquarters we were considered to be the smart guys.

So you were there until your time was up; you knew when you were going home; you knew you’d be leaving in December.  
I thought I’d get home earlier but they had trouble getting a replacement for me.
What did they do with the school after you left?
They closed it.

Oh, that’s too bad. No one else wanted to do it.
Nobody wanted to do it.

That’s a shame. I’m sure the guys missed you too.
Yeah. They had a nice tent. They had a big sign up there and everything, all the benches and chairs. I don’t know what they ever did with that.

It’s a shame; that’s too bad. So, how did you return home, by ship again? Same way you went?
Yes.

And how was the voyage going home? Better than going?
Um, it was better.

Again it took about seven days?
Seven days. And I landed in Seattle.

And where did you go from there?
I had to spend, I think, a week in Seattle and then they put us on a train and we went to Fort Sheridan.

So you were mustered out from Fort Sheridan.
Yeah, they put me up for several days in Fort Sheridan. I had several duties to perform because I had a Staff Sergeant rating. They wanted me to do guard duty there on Christmas Day, and I said, no, if I have the rank then I will find a corporal to be in charge. I went to the Commanding Officer of Fort Sheridan and he said you’re in charge. So I did it. I put a corporal in charge and I came home for Christmas.
Why not? You know – you had the rank.
I got discharged the 28th of December, 1954.

And how was your reception by family and friends?
Very good; Mom was very happy and my girlfriend was happy.

And did your Mom live –
My Mom and Dad lived in Argo-Summit; that’s where I lived.

How was your readjustment to civilian life?
It was fine. I had no problem.

And what did you do?
I went back to work at Corn Products Refining Company –

Oh, right at Argo – corn starch –
As a chemist – since I was working there before I went.

Oh, that is where you came from.
And they gave me all the credit while I was away in service. They gave me an advancement in pay and an advancement in position. However, I got married and I decided I still would like to teach school. So after I got married I got a job teaching in Blue Island High school.

What did you teach?
Chemistry and biology. And then I became a senior principal.

How long did you teach?
I taught till – let’s see, 1964, then I became Senior Principal until 1970 –

Does that mean you weren’t teaching if you were senior principal?
No, I was in administration. Then from 1970 I went to Argo, as a Junior High Principal, and from there I went to Calumet Park as Principal.

**Is that a high school?**
It’s a junior high and from Calumet Park I ended up in Glenwood, and I was Principal in Glenwood. After then I decided I want to go back to teaching so I taught school again.

**And where did you teach?**
At Glenwood: I taught junior high, until I retired from teaching in 1987. My wife had developed cancer so I retired.

**You did have contact with fellow veterans over the years –**
Yes, I did.

**Are you a member of veterans’ organizations?**
I belong to the American Legion, right now, 58 years.

**Wow – good for you.**
And I belong to the VFW for about 35 years.

**Do you belong to our VFW here in Carillon?**
Yes, I transferred here.

**So how did your wartime experience affect your life?**
I think it helped me develop a sense of responsibility and understanding of knowing that there are other problems that people do have. I lived in a little, small community of Argo, Illinois and all of a sudden I found out that there were people in other cities and other states that had different kinds of problem. As I stated education was a big one.

**Right.**
They couldn’t read or write. I never believed that that was an American trait – I thought everybody knew how to read and write.

Yeah, I did too; I’m surprised.
It’s not so.

I guess. So, your life lessons learned from military service.
I feel that I developed a little bit of sense of responsibility and understanding, and, I think, caring. I got married afterwards and we had two children within two years and then ended up with eight children.

You never mentioned your medals – I see that on your sheet you have medals. Could you just tell me what they are so I can include them here.
Korean Service Medal, United Nations Service Medal, and National Defense and the Korean President’s Medal. I never did take my GI Bill though and I’m sorry I never did.

Oh, yes. But you already had your schooling.
I was entitled to it –

Sure you were; could use it to buy a house or something –
I never went back to college either on the GI Bill.

Yeah, you could have gotten a higher degree.
I tried but they said you had to use it within two years or enlist, enroll in the school or something and I had two children – I had responsibilities and I wanted to put off going to school until I stopped having kids. But you can’t do that. You had to go within a certain period of time.

Well, that was too bad but you already did have your Bachelor’s Degree –
Yeah, but I wanted to get my Master’s and my Ph.D. So I had to pay for it.
Oh, you did go on to get them.
Yes, I got them. A Master’s Degree in Chemistry and a Master’s in Administration.

All right. Is there anything else that you would like to include.
No, I don’t think so.

I think you had a very interesting career – everyone I talk to has a different experience; they really do.
I think what made me want to teach school in Korea was when I had to read a “Dear John” letter, and I didn’t know how to do it. Because here this guy is in Korea, expecting a letter from his wife. The other letters were nice and then all of a sudden he got this one that said she no longer wants him to come home; that she’s found somebody else. And so I tried to postpone it, and I read between the lines and never came to the fact that she was leaving –

Oh, my gosh.
because he couldn’t read the letter. And then he’d ask me to sit and write a letter for him and he’d tell me what to write in the letter. And I’d write the letter and I’d send her the letter, and I kept thinking in my mind, “I’m being deceitful”.

Right, exactly.
So I waited for the opportune time to tell him and he almost wanted to commit suicide. He didn’t want to go back.

It’s difficult, under those circumstances, especially –
Well, you know, we go through a lot of problems and if there was some way he could have solved the problem, if he was back there maybe he could have –

Yes.
But he couldn’t get home.

No, they’re not gonna let him get home either.
So I think that’s one of my incentives for wanting to take the time to teach, and it worked out all right.

Well, very good. Really, it’s been very enlightening, Joe, it’s very interesting to hear you tell your story and I thank you for this interview and I thank you for your service to our country.

I’ll tell you this little scenario; I think it’s important. If you have a friend and you make a friend, they’re lasting friends. I made many good friends in Korea. One of the things I learned, if I’m a friend to you, you’ll be a friend to me. And I didn’t have a good pair of shoes; I didn’t have socks, but I knew the Staff Sergeant who was in charge of supplies, but I would help him with his forms, to fill out by writing things and I would get a new pair of boots and a new pair of socks.

The cook couldn’t read too well, but I helped him read and write, so no one else would get fresh eggs, but I would get fresh eggs. And that’s the truth. I mean it. I helped them and they would help me. The other GIs would say, “How come you had eggs for breakfast?” and I would say, “Because I’m special.” They didn’t like it. But because I helped them, they would help me.

How many men were in your immediate area?

We had 200 men. Each company has approximately 200 men. And I was in Head-Quarters Company so we possibly had a little bit more – Company A, Company B, company C and Company D – there were four companies plus Headquarters. The 73rd Engineers was part of the 18th Group, all under 8th Army.

Okay, well you did your share, believe me. You may not have seen combat, but you certainly did a lot of good there – with what you did.

I made a lot of Korean friends too –

That was good both ways – for our American guys and for the Koreans. Well, I hope you get a chance to go back to Korea, if you want to.

Bob Magnuson went with his son.
Right, he went. He told me all about that.
He took his son and he said to me are you gonna go, and I said no, not really. He said they paid for everything.

Yeah, they did; that was the 50th Anniversary deal.
Right. No, that’s all right. I like to remember the things that were – of course he said it was changed.

Oh, I'm sure. Okay, so is that it? Again, I tell you thank you for this interview and thank you for service to our country. I appreciate it.
Well, thank you.

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