

This interview is being conducted on Thursday, March 9, 2017 and I am at the home of Robert Harry Bolan. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Mr. Bolan and his wife, Dee. Robert served both in the Navy during WWII and in the Army, later – we'll get into the dates. Mr. Bolan learned of the Veterans' History Project through me and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans' History Project. Here is his story:

Robert, when and where were you born?

I was born in Joliet, Illinois in St. Joseph's Hospital.

And the date?

May 13, 1928.

What were your parents' occupations at the time?

My mother did not work. My mother had five children; I was the only boy. But my Dad worked for the Western United Gas & Electric – the gas company actually – the natural gas - he was a supervisor.

So you had four sisters?

Four sisters, yes.

And were you the oldest or the youngest?

No. I had a sister who was 17 months younger than me. She died of Alzheimer's. then I had a sister who was 42, and she had, as a child had rheumatic fever, and at 42 she had heart surgery and she died. But she had one son and he was very successful. I had a sister who was nine years older than me; she died when she was 83. I had a sister who was couple years older than me and she died in her 60s.

None of these ladies were ever in the service, were they?

No.

And you had no other family members serving in the military?

No.

What did you do before entering the service?

I went to school?

Where?

Joliet Catholic High.

Did you graduate?

No, not then. Let me tell you a little story; this will help.

Sure.

I finished my Junior year of high school, okay, and I did not like school.

Okay.

So I went to my father and said, Dad, this was in '45, and I said, "Dad, would you sign for me to go in the service?" And he said "I don't want to." And I said "Well, would you please do that. I don't like school and I want to go in the Navy." And he signed and that's how I got in the Navy.

Okay, so you enlisted.

Yes, I enlisted.

And World War II still going on at that time?

Yes, oh sure. In 1945 and it ended.

Do you remember what month it was that you enlisted?

Mr. Bolan has provided his DD-214 with dates, it says September 1945 – Naval Service – it says October 19, 1945 – oh, I'm sorry, it says 9-13-45, you enlisted.

Okay.

What happened right after you enlisted?

Well, then I went to Great Lakes for my basic training.

Why did you choose the Navy?

Because at that time some of the guys I knew were joining the Navy and wanted to be in service. I wanted to be in service –

Sure – friends. So, how did you get to Great Lakes?

They took us there.

By train?

On a train would be fine, or bus. I forget.

How much time did you spend at Great Lakes?

I'm trying to think – of training – probably two or three months of training.

And what did that training consist of? What did you do?

Well, they taught you – the thing they taught you mostly was discipline –

Oh, yeah, everyone says that.

Discipline is what they taught you. And we did a lot of working out, running and we worked out every day, and marching and learn how to speak to officers.

And how about classroom training – did you have any classes in basic?

I'm sure we did learn something about ships, but I was never on a ship.

You didn't do any kind of gun training or anything?

No. I think we had a little bit with a .22 rifle – a small amount.

So after your basic training ended, then where did you go?

Then I went to Arlington, Virginia.

And what did you do there?

What I did in Arlington was, across the street there was an Officers – where all the officers records were –

Personnel records?

Yeah, personnel records. And I was over there; and I could type –

Oh, okay, they loved guys who could type, ha. Ha.

I could type and I could do bookwork – and I just did typing and filing, you know, just bookwork.

Office work. Okay, how long did you do that in Arlington, Virginia?

I was not even in one year, and the reason was, at this particular time, I don't know the dates; it would have been after the war was over, they let people like me that had only been in a certain amount of time, that did not want to stay in, they let me out.

Did you want to get out?

Yeah, I wanted out.

Why did you want to get out?

Because I didn't really like it.

Okay, well, that's a good reason.

I didn't really like the service.

Okay. So you were there less than a year.

Yes, like 11 months and 12 days – less than a year.

So, they had a program that they allowed to leave since the war was over already

Yeah.

And you left; so you were in less than one year. So, how did you get back home?

Well, I probably took a train.

So they discharged you from Arlington, Virginia.

Actually, I think they discharged me from Baltimore, Maryland. I spent a lot of time in Washington because Arlington was right next door.

Yeah. Robert has three different papers here – separation from Naval Service – copies of his DD-214s.

Now I'm out of the Navy; I went back to finish my Senior year of high school.

Okay, finish high school.

There were two or three other fellas, I forget what they call it, but I did get a diploma from Joliet Catholic High.

Actually, you were only 17 years old when you went in so now you couldn't be more than 18 or 19 –

Yeah.

After you got your diploma, did you get a job or what happened?

See, I started in 1950 working in a chemical plant called Blockson Chemical – that would have been early in 1950. In the meantime I was drafted –

Oh, okay.

I think I was drafted December 8, 1950 when I was working for B-L-O-C-K-S-O-N Chemical; it was brothers – they owned it at that time.

Okay, so you got drafted; you got a letter and you got drafted into the Army.

I got a letter and I was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

So the Korean War was on at that time.

That's correct.

And did you have repeated basic training again?

Well, first of all, in the Army, you know, we lived in barracks. And again I learned a lot about discipline.

Right, ha, ha.

And I did quite a bit of shooting with different weapons.

So you had weapons training.

And I was quite good at it because I started hunting when I was about 14 years old. And I was probably one of the best shots in the group. There were people that got drafted that never had a weapon in their hands –

Right.

So I was quite good at that. But anyway, let's see, I really only got five weeks of training – and that was walking, marching, discipline, know what I mean –

Um-hmm.

And the reason why I got five weeks was because I had been in the Navy and they felt my brain was disciplined to do certain things that they told me to do because discipline is so important.

Right, right.

So I got let out – I came home –

Home on a brief furlough.

Yeah, furlough, well, it was before I went to Korea.

Right, so you came home before you went overseas.

Yeah, I come home; we got married.

Oh, you got married then; that's sort of important, you know, ha, ha.

We got married on February 8, 1951.

Oh, you went in in December of 1950 and you got married in February of 1951 – so that's just two months later. So it was not a year, my mistake.

And then I was probably home a week and a half or two weeks, and then I got on a train and they sent me to Chicago, and then from there, let me think –

Where were you going?

I was set to go to Korea. Then from Chicago I went to California.

How did you get there – by train again?

By Train.

Do you remember what base in California?

No really.

An Army base in California, okay. How long did you stay there?

Just roughly –

Probably a couple of weeks; not very long. And then they put us on a ship – the U.S.S. WALKER – it was like a merchant ship. They put us on a ship sending us to Japan.

How did the crossing go? That's exactly what we want to hear.

I was on a ship and I really got seasick – really seasick; the food was lousy. Anyway, the merchants knew that I was knowledgeable about typing and things like that, and they put me right in the office.

They always get you, ha, ha, the ship's office.

So I had decent food –

Right, it makes a difference. So the crossing was bad – did you run into any storms on the sea?

No, nothing great.

So it was just you personally not feeling good while traveling.

Yeah, I was just seasick.

How long of a trip was it, do you remember, couple of weeks?

To get there you mean – at least a couple of weeks.

So finally we get there –

I got to Yokohama, Japan. And then from Yokohama they put us in different groups to go to different places in Korea. So I went all the way from one end of Japan to the other, and I wish I could remember – from the end of it, I went through where the atomic bomb was dropped –

Hiroshima and Nagasaki –

And this was all on the train. Yeah, yeah, I went through all of that –

By train –

Went completely through Japan and we went to this place, and this is where we were issued a rifle and then we knew what we were pretty much going to be doing at that time.

Then they put us on a boat – the toilets are so little because they got little butts all those people – we had a terrible time but anyway, we went to Pusan, Korea. Okay. And then from Pusan, we got on a train and went to Seoul, Korea, and then I was assigned – we were assigned to an outfit. I was assigned to the 25th Division, 27th Regiment called the “Wolfhounds” – that was the regiment. They were looking for somebody – this Captain saw that I could do bookwork, okay, so he said, “ I’ll tell you what I’m gonna do. I’ll send you to the front lines for three or four months so you know what’s going on there.” So they put me in Item – I Company – and I would have been in a Platoon and a Company and down to a Squad. And from there we were an outfit; we were an outfit, okay -- 25th Division, 27th Regiment, “Wolfhounds”. WE were an outfit and we cross the Han River, which was above Seoul, and we went as far north as we could possibly go. And, see, Korea is just a hill after hill, after hill, after hill. You were on a hill and there were different outfits. You might have the Marines over here and you might have some South Koreans someplace – different services – and we had a line all the way across. We had our line that covered that part of Korea for the enemy.

And what we basically did is that we would go on patrol every day and then we would stop at night and we would dig a foxhole and we would protect that area –

That you crossed that day –

I might mention that by the time I got over there, the North Koreans were not real strong at that time; that's when the Chinese come in. The Chinese took over then – you don't have to talk about this, but they didn't want to be there. They didn't even know why they were there –

The Chinese?

The Chinese. But anyway they were who we fought and that's who we tried to kill.

You mean you fought the Chinese as a part of the North Korean Army?

Oh, yes.

Oh, really; I didn't know that. I'm not that familiar –

There would be a North Korean outfit and a Chinese outfit; they could be different outfits at different times.

But they worked together, the North Koreans and the Chinese?

Somewhat – somewhat, yeah.

So you were on active duty patrol –

For about four months and I – some of the things we did was – at night we would go and pick up our dead soldiers and bring them in to -- there was a man who was responsible for all the dead and we would turn the bodies over to him. And we would go – and we carried the bodies by hand to a certain place – to the guy who took care of the dead and it was just back and forth fighting in foxholes; we'd go up north and then we'd get hit and get knocked down south. And then we'd go back, fight our way back, and like I said, it was just a matter of digging foxholes. And sometimes we'd get a Reserve – when you go on Reserve for like a week – that's where you don't have to fight – and you get hot chow – other than that we got C-Rations – out of boxes – and we ate out of boxes.

So you went behind the lines for one week to rest, like R & R –

It was a typical thing; you go behind the lines, which was Reserve.

And then you'd go back to the front again.

And then sometimes you would block for another outfit, you know, in case they hit them, you were there to fight.

So you were on the front lines. You actually were on the front lines.

Oh, yes. And then after about four months –

What was your rank at that time?

They decided that I'd had enough of the front lines and I was sent back and I was in – actually it was a big camp and it was like a base – where I was in with – who I reported to

was the Master Sergeant. But it was like a big, big tent – and there was officers – and what we did was –

Wait – before you start that, I want to go back to where you were for four months. What were your emotions relating to combat? How did you feel about witnessing casualties or destruction?

Well, I was a little bit afraid, when you'd go out at night in the dark to get someone because you thought about getting shot.

Of course.

I was a little bit afraid then, but I was quite good with a weapon –

Did you actually kill some North Koreans?

Oh, yeah, I killed plenty of them. And then I also was with the – sometimes I was with South Korean units, and we had machine guns, and he would carry the machine gun and I would fire it.

Wow! What kind of gun was it – do you know the caliber –

No, I don't know; it was a machine gun.

But your entire unit was out there; you weren't out there alone.

No no, I wasn't alone, part of the line.

And they all did the same thing you did – the front line, uh-huh.

Yeah, protecting what we had.

How about burning villages and things like that – burning with napalm or anything like that – at that time – or was that in Viet Nam?

No, see, they had – the only thing we did with – the Chinese would dig in – big holes underground –

Like tunnels –

And we would - they were down and under, like tunnels, and we'd take hand grenades – white phosphorus hand grenades – which is very, very deadly. We'd use them, so when we'd get to where there was – they were in a hole, we'd throw hand grenades in there. And also we directed – we were with the Air Force that flew these jets – pilots going to the front lines and we'd direct them to fire on the enemy.

So they would bomb them and strafe them?

Both, both, guns and bombs, yeah, they did both. We would be in the front line with the pilots, to make sure that they got the right people.

Right, exactly, you had to direct them to where to shoot, where the targets were –

Right. Right.

So that they wouldn't have "friendly fire" – drop it on you.

Again, I ask, did you see destruction of homes or villages or things like that – the native population.

Oh, yeah, yeah, I would see – we would go in, while we were on patrol, we would go into I guess you would call them huts – that was their home – they lived in huts and I was very protective. No one shoots anyone that's not the enemy –

Oh, you were protective of the native population.

Maybe you don't want to hear this –

No, that's okay.

I'm going – we'd go into this hut and there'd be maybe an old man or a husband and maybe some kids, and I had one of these gun-happy bastards – and he was gonna shoot someone – and I told him "I'll stick that gun right up your ass if you aim at that man again."

Yeah.

We do not kill innocent people, not as long as Bob Bolan is here.

Good for you.

I couldn't do that; I couldn't kill an innocent person.

But that's how it is in combat.

We'd go in these huts, and stuff like that, and that's when I was in the front lines.

Sure, of course.

And that's just the way I was. I was very protective of people that were – there were tons of civilians, you know; we'd see tons of civilians, and we got hauled by trucks, many times, we'd get hauled up to a certain area, you know –

Dropped off.

Yeah, dropped off at a certain area –

That's how it was. You have a very good memory of it.

But then I was sent back to this area, like a big camp, and there were offices – like a big office in a tent and we had officers and even Generals would come there. And the people that were in charge would come there and we had an outfit that would go out at night and scout, and we would get their reports on where the enemy was. And I did all the typing and kept track of all this – and I did all the bookwork –

Collected all the information –

But there was, you know, maybe three other guys just like me. But I reported to a First Sergeant –

That was all the intelligence coming in –

Yeah, Intelligence, that's what I was in; that's exactly right. And then they would capture prisoners and there was a place way down in Pusan where there was a prisoner camp and they would be shipped down there. We would have people responsible for that.

And then, I just want to tell you one little story – the Korean women, see the way we got – they washed our clothes like in creeks and rivers and stuff like that. I had a situation where I was over picking up my clothes and this woman had these children with her and this one child got out and got into the deep water and was drowning. I just dove in and got him out.

How old of a boy was he – do you think?

Oh, about 4 or 5 --

Oh, little kid.

Yeah, he was real little. His mother hugged me so much –

She was thankful, sure.

I'm almost crying about it now – but I was always a good swimmer. I was a life guard and the Boy Scouts and stuff like that.

Sure, well, you did a good deed.

But anyway that story is true.

That's fine; that's a wonderful story.

I saved his life; and then she hugged me and was so pleased.

You did a very good job; she washed your clothes forever. Ha, ha.

How long were at this office tent where Intelligence came in?

Well, I was there a year, in Korea. Dates I don't remember.

I don't need dates; just approximate times.

Well, I was in Korea for a year, four months in the front lines and the rest of the time in this office-tent, Intelligence unit.

Is there a name for it or just Intelligence Unit.

Yeah, Intelligence. Of course we were married and I was in the service.

Right, you were a married man already.

And certainly I didn't want to stay in service; I wanted to get out. Actually I had to serve 21 months in the Army. But once I come back to the States, then they sent me –

Wait, how did you get back to the States when your year was up?

A ship.

Was it a Liberty Ship?

Yep, yeah, Sergeant Analock (phonetic) was the name, I can remember and I did not get seasick. And from there we went to a camp and they eventually sent us to a camp at Rockford.

But when you came back by ship, where did you land in the U.S.? Was it California someplace?

California. And then they flew us from California to a camp I can't remember, because I was only there like over night and they came and picked me up and took me home.

Oh, they came and got you by car?

Yeah, they released me and I went on leave. And after that I was sent to St. Louis –

So you weren't discharged yet?

No, but they didn't send me to an Army Camp like I started out in. they sent me to a camp where it was – it had to do with bookwork for the Army, in St. Louis –

Oh, like a Depository or something?

That could have been officers and enlisted men – this particular office. I was in a camp and I had a real nice – in fact we were staying in WAVES barracks; I t was really nice and then I could go home every weekend on a train.

Oh, and how long did that last?

Until I got out.

Maybe six months?

Probably six months, something like that, I could come home on weekends.

How about people that you met during the service – did you keep in touch with any body in particular?

DEE: Bob Simpson.

Bob Simpson?

Yeah, Bob Simpson.

He was one of your friends?

I met Bob – Bob was from Kankakee (IL) I met Bob because he had a jacket and on the back it said "Kankakee, Illinois." I met him before we went to Korea.

Was he your buddy?

For awhile and then he went to a different platoon. I have to tell you this story.

When I rotated, that means that you're going home. So when I rotated, they pick you up in trucks and Bob, at that time, Bob was up towards the front lines but he was cooking – and my mother-in-law had sent many, many boxes and one of them had jelly beans and she was – he got the jelly beans and he was eating them and it showed my name “Robert Bolan” – and he asked this man – “Whatever happened to Robert Bolan?” It had been so long since – he said, “Oh, he got killed!”

Oh, WOW!

So anyway, we're going home, this truck pulls up and there was Simpson; he says, “Jesus Christ, I thought you were dead!” I said, “Do I look like I'm dead?” And then we just got closer and closer and our families got together – he died about 3 or 4 months ago – family friends –

How nice, you stayed friends after that.

And how that happened I really don't know –

Who knows! Information gets turned around. You mentioned packages – while you were in Korea on the front lines, and even when you were in the office tent, how were your communications from home? How did you stay in touch with friends and family members – with your wife?

Writing.

Just letters and packages?

My grandparents all died while I was in Korea and my Dad – I got to talk to my Dad on the phone, and he said, “Bob you can come home for Grandpa Bolan's funeral. The Red Cross will let you come home.” And I said, “Do I have to come back?” And he said, “Yes, you have to go back.” And I said, “Well, then, I don't want to go home.” Because when I go home I want to stay home – wasn't gonna go and come back – it don't make sense. I just didn't want any – I didn't want to get shot at or anything any more.

Yeah, right.

Because even when we were in – (Turned tape) the tents, and we had sand bags all around our beds so that they couldn't shoot into the tents – so they couldn't kill us.. And that was even in the back of the lines.

Right, right – that was behind the lines.

But –

So how long do you think it took a letter or a package to get from home to you in Korea. When you got a letter what was the postmark?

What do you think Mom, ten days? Postage was free.

Oh, yeah, I knew that.

She wrote to me; she still got all my letters.

Oh, that's nice.

She still got my letters.

Very nice. When you were in Korea, when you were in the back lines, when you were with the Intelligence Unit, did you have any off-duty time? Did you have any recreation when you were off duty?

See, we got an R & R when we went to Japan for five days, and then, see, I – first of all I did smoke, but I would not drink and I followed – we even took a brewery, and I wouldn't drink. I followed all the rules because I did not want to die.

Right.

The guys I was with, they were guys from another outfit – in fact I had a guy run out of money from another outfit, and I had plenty of money because I didn't spend any money, and I gave him some money and believe it or not, he sent it back to me.

Wow!

He was in a different outfit, but no, this was just kinda hot tubs and a nice hotel; we had steaks and they just treated us like a million dollars, you know, and then we went back to Korea.

That was pretty rough.

That's how that worked.

After R & R to go back there.

Five days we got.

Did you do that more than once?

No, one time.

Just one time only.

That's all I got was one R & R.

What happened – oh, you went home on weekends from St. Louis, and how did you finally get discharged?

I got discharged from down there.

Your time was up and they just discharged you?

I went to a camp there, and I can't remember what it was, but I did get discharged from down there. And then I come home; I was out.

You were out of service. And you didn't go into the Reserves?

They gave me a hundred bucks or something like that – discharge money.

I came home and – did I move in with your Mom and Dad – No, I went home first, with my Mom and Dad. And then, of course, we got together

Right, you were married.

As soon as we could, you know that. We stayed together and then I got out.

How was your readjustment to civilian life?

Well, I liked where I worked. See, okay, I'm gonna get back to that Blockson Chemical – what I did – I was like – I filled bags of chemicals – see, they made chemicals and fertilizers, sulphuric acid, hydrochloric acid; they made many different chemicals and fertilizers, and about four years later, a company by the name of OLIN CHEMICALS bought them out.

I heard of that name.

See, I worked 40 years; I worked - 19 years I was in the Union and then I went with the company; they took me – I ended up – I was filling fire extinguishers and stuff like that. So then they took me into Safety, I was in the head office and I ended up as Safety Manager.

Okay.

I was manager of the Safety Program at Olin – I got out in 1990. I was retired –

Retired in 1990.

But that was, you know, I started out as a laborer and I ended up as a Manager, so I did quite well.

Yes, you did. Have you had contact with fellow veterans over the years besides Bob Simpson, or was he the only guy you saw.

Yeah, at first I did –

Did they have reunions that you could go to once a year?

Yeah, we went to one reunion; was that – that was in St. Louis, wasn't it, the reunion.

Where was it?

Dee: Not St. Louis; It was in Virginia.

Virginia, okay. Did you see – were you in contact with other veterans?

I was – in fact Bob Simpson went with us.

Oh, you went together to this reunion, right.

Dee: Danny Steinberg, yeah.

Dan Steinberg, okay. Bob has a display case here up on the wall with medals. Can you tell me what those medals are if we go up there and look at them?

I'll try.

Okay, well, let's go up there – we'll talk loud; I can't move this around. Bob has the Victory Medal from the Navy and he also has an album that I'll look at later on.

What are these – bars and medals – you got stripes –

See, some of that – inaudible – sometimes if you look you'll see officers and people that they take pictures of like in movies and stuff like that you'll see that – inaudible

I was very proud of that. Some of that is –

What are these lightning things?

That's my outfit – the 25th Division; that was the Wolfhounds.

And the two stripes?

That what – I was a Corporal,

What about those bars?

They were all good conduct and American Theater and some of it's Korean stuff.

And what about that rifle?

That's what I said – that Combat Infantry.

Oh, along with those rifles crossed over there.

Yeah.

Were you a Sharpshooter? Did they consider you a Sharpshooter – marksman?

Well, I mean, I was not – I know what you're talking about. We had people that were just doing that, you know, but I was very good.

Okay, well, that's why they had you on the front lines because you were good.

But I was very good with the weapons because, like I told you, I had – I started hunting when I was 14 years old – and then I did shoot different guns, and machine guns. I don't want you to think I'm bragging or something.

Oh, no, no, but was that ever considered like advanced training – when you were in basic training, because you were a good shooter? Did you have advanced training in shooting, or no?

See, I did some of the training of shooters in basic training and I did some of my shooting – in basic training there were people that never had a weapon in their hands –

Right –

And we had targets, and I could knock the hell out of them – only because I shot a lot. Several times I'd have guys say, "For Christ sake, watch Bolan!"

Yeah, how to shoot, right, exactly.

But here's a guy – we had a guy from Ireland and he never touched a weapon in his life and I can understand that.

He was from Ireland but he was in the American Army?

Yeah, well, he moved to the United States, but he was from Ireland.

Sure, uh-huh.

But he never touched a weapon –

If you're a hunter and go hunting when you're a kid with your Dad or something, then you know.

I started when I was 14 years old.

Sure, my husband was a hunter so I know; I'm familiar with that.

I belong to a duck club down there – Peoria for about 35 years – and – so I was always good at that.

Okay, let's go back to -- when you came home you returned right back to your old job that he had at Blockson –

Yeah; they were so glad – they didn't like when I went in, but the guy that was my boss, he was so glad to see me come back because he liked that I was doing a good job.

Good.

But I kept advancing and I finally ended up reporting to the Plant Manager.

Do you have a membership today in Veterans' Organizations?

Yeah, I spent a little time with the VFW, but the American Legion - I've been a member ever since 1946 because that's when I was in the Navy. Actually I joined – I wasn't even old enough to drink when I was in the Navy. And there was an American Legion right across from – are you familiar with Joliet at all?

Oh, yes, now I am.

Do you know where the YMCA was? Right across the street from there was the Legion at one time. But I belonged to that Legion and then I belonged to the Legion down near Peoria. I now belong to a Legion in Joliet.

Okay.

I belong to the Illinois Rifle Association.

Did you go to shooting meets or anything like that? Competitions?

No, no, just the Illinois Rifle Association – an outfit of service people.

Do you belong to the National Rifle Association too – the NRA?

Yeah.

Now, after all this, what would say – how did your wartime experience affect your life? How do you think it affected you, in general?

Well, what do you think, Mom – I mean –

You knew him before he went in and you knew him after he came out, so –

Dee: When he came out I looked at him and I thought – what have I done?

Who did I marry? Ha, ha.

Dee: Right. He was so thin; he even had worms and he was in terrible shape --

Really? Oh -- physically

What was it I had when I was in Korea?

Dee: Malaria.

Oh, you had malaria, you didn't mention that.

Yeah, I did – I had malaria.

That's pretty debilitating – malaria is.

They flew me in a helicopter – let me explain this – they flew me to a hospital in back of the lines –

In Korea?

In Korea, but I felt so guilty because here I got a guy next to me with his legs shot off and I got malaria. I felt guilty about that, but guilty my ass, you could die. I said, I'm not gonna die. But here's what I tell people, I have to tell you this –

Go ahead.

I pray a lot, okay? Personally pray a lot –

I'm Catholic –

But I didn't -- the reason that I never got shot was because God knew that Dee was gonna get Parkinson's and God knew that I was going to have to take care of her and he left it so that I wouldn't die.

So God protected you.

Yeah –

To come back and take care of Dee.

I believe that too.

I believe it too.

I pray a lot.

I do too. I do too.

And I pray for people to get better, but I don't know, as far as the service is concerned, once a month there they have a service dinner and stuff like that – I can talk service to anybody –

Right, right.

Is there any other thing that I can do – this is difficult for me because I don't know what to do . See, I've got some pictures, but –

I'll take a look at them but let me finish asking you –

A lot of pictures of me and the guys that I was in service with and stuff like that –

Well, that's okay –

And some articles that were written –

Yeah, I'd like to see them, but right now I want to finish up with you, we've only got a couple of questions – what are the life lessons you learned from your military service – for you yourself – what did you learn?

Well, I learned how to protect my family – I learned that – that's one thing I learned from being in service.

Well, that discipline, right?

Yeah, I'm trying to think –

Just what did it mean to you yourself being in the service?

I was very proud. I love this country and I'm very proud that I was in service and I'm proud to tell someone that I was in service. And I'm proud to go to those dinners that they have because Bob Bolan – let me show you something, real quick –

Okay, we're going to look at some photographs.

Bob has shown me an article that was printed in the Joliet Herald News dated July 22, 1951. He was in the Army at that time – July 1951. The title is,

“Things Always Came Out Right!

“A Joliet father received a Father's Day letter from his son which reads

As follows: Dear Dad:

“ I'm a long way from you but you know that in my heart you are here With me. If I were to look all over this world, I would never find a Father As wonderful as you. I know through the many years under your Advice (when I listened), THINGS ALWAYS CAME OUT RIGHT! I'm Sure none of us kids were ever refused anything we needed, even When you did without. To put it in words I can only say you're a

**Wonderful Father and I wish you a very happy Father's Day, Dad.
Your loving son, Bob."**

The caption below reads, "This letter was written by Corporal Robert Bolan, now with the U.S. Armed Forces in Korea, to his Father, Harry Bolan. The Senior Bolan is a Supervisor for the Public Service Company. Corporal Bolan, a graduate of Joliet Catholic High School, Entered the Army last November and arrived in Korea March 19. His simple, yet moving letter, expresses the sincere affection and Respect of an average American boy for his Father. So long as Young men like Cpl. Bolan are taking up their responsibilities in the World and carrying on in the tradition that has made America great, There need be little fear for this country's future."

How wonderful – it makes me choke up, really –

I'm looking through a photo album that Bob has with many, many photos and Korean money and everything else, but what I found, and will read into the record, and take a photo of it to send along, is a Safe Conduct Pass, issued by the Korean People's Army – the Chinese Peoples Volunteer Forces, Korea. It says,

"The Bearer, regardless of his military rank or nationality, is hereby unconditionally guaranteed free from personal injury, maltreatment or abuse. He will receive medical treatment if necessary and may retain all personal possessions."

This is a fragile piece of paper – wow! – this looks like – I opened it up, written in English and Korean or Chinese – I'm going to read this too – it says "Let the warmongers do their own fighting" – that's the title. In a Christmas party arranged by one of the Chinese Volunteer Units, an American prisoner named Glasgow said, 'We are Christians. Yet, today, our hands are smeared with Korean blood; we have slaughtered peaceful civilians and bombed old people and children.' Oh my God. 'We have committed crimes and who made us do it? It was Truman.' This is propaganda. 'They care about nothing but money; they manufacture bombs to kill people and make a profit out of this business. But why should we come here and fight? Let the Warmongers do their own fighting! We can be cheated only once. Our eyes have been opened now. Never can I forget the kind of treatment I have received from the Chinese' – yes, this is propaganda that they must have dropped from planes – and the back is all in Chinese characters – Safe Conduct Pass. I'll get a photo of this document for the record.

Bob and his wife, Dee, mentioned that they went to the 50th Anniversary – they went back to Korea in 1987 - fifty people went back – but what was the occasion? Did you just want to go back with a group?

**It was an invitation from one of the – it had to be from the 25th Division – that invited us.
We flew over.**

You flew to Korea.

And then we stayed in Korea, of course everything now is all beautiful – the homes and then from there we went to China –

Dee: Before we went to China we had a General in our group and he gave us access to things the regular people wouldn't have – like going up to the 38th Parallel, and we went in that room where they signed –

The Armistice – or something –

Yeah, right.

Dee; And believe it or not, they were still shouting propaganda then – all over.

Right.

Dee: So we didn't go past where he showed us.

Bob: They were so good to us; we had a dance and everything.

Dee: The Korean people were unbelievable.

Bob: They appreciated what we did.

Oh, yeah, they do appreciate it, I know.

Dee: And the little children were so happy to see us, and they wanted our picture – and they have a place like we have in Salem, Illinois, showing what Korea was like. Because now it's big office buildings –

Right, modernized.

Dee: right.

When you were at the 38th Parallel, was there a bridge there and North Korea is on the other side of this bridge – is that a dividing line?

Dee: Yeah, it was – I can't remember – it was a wooden bridge, yeah.

Bob: A wooden bridge, year.

And then you could hear voices on the other side – still shouting propaganda –

Dee: Right, still constant – right – and they discovered a tunnel that they never knew was there – where they planned to bring them all in through this tunnel.

But they found it though.

Dee: The tunnel was still there.

Wow!

Dee: But that was a wonderful trip.

So you went there, not at the invitation of the Korean Government –

No.

Because I talked to another veteran who was there and he said the Koreans actually invited all the troops that took part – I don't know how they got their names – but the servicemen who were there – and they paid for the whole trip and everything. This man went to Korea with his son, and they were holding the 50th Anniversary remembrance or something.

Bob: No, we just – it was through ours –

One of your organizations.

Lots of papers and forms.

The Koreans are very friendly, today; they're thankful to Americans today for all the servicemen – all the work that America did there and all the servicemen stationed there. Okay, is there anything else you'd like to add to your story. This is not the end. If you think of something after I'm gone – I have to type this up and give you a draft copy first, you can proofread it and make any changes – if there's anything you want to add, I'll certainly be happy to add it afterwards. I'll come back.

Did we do okay?

Yes, you did wonderful – it was a great story, very good.

I wanted to but I just couldn't remember –

You remember a lot; you have a very good memory; very good memory.

Thank you.

Both of you; you were helpful too with little tidbits here and there. I thank you very much, both of you – I thank you for your service to our country and I thank you for doing this interview.

Bob: Thank you for doing it.

Dee: This is wonderful.

It's a great program. I'm happy that you decided to participate in it. Thank you.

Robert Harry Bolan

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