

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 Carolina. 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?**

I went in the Marine Corps Reserve 1948 – discharged 1950 March.

**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 4<sup>th</sup> 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?**

Pusan.

**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 18<sup>th</sup> Group Engineers. Sent me then to a smaller unit called the 73<sup>rd</sup> Engineers, which was part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Group. And then I was attached to the engineer battalion, which was the 73<sup>rd</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> grade education."

**My God.**

And so I used to have to sign their slips that they did pass 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 8<sup>th</sup> grade education.

**It's hard to believe that they went in at that time with not even an 8<sup>th</sup> 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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 Headquarters 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 73<sup>rd</sup> Engineers was part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Group, all under 8<sup>th</sup> 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 50<sup>th</sup> 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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