

This interview is being conducted on Tuesday, October 1, 2019 at the home of Leonard A. Jalovec. My name is Fran Prokop and I'm speaking with Leonard, who served in the U.S. Air Force and is a veteran of the Korean Conflict. Leonard 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:

Leonard, when and where were you born?

I was born 1-29-33 in Argo, Illinois.

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

I had five brothers and one sister.

What did you do before entering the service?

I worked in many different factories.

How old were you when you entered?

19.

What were you doing – just general factory work?

Just factory work and that's why I went in service. I had do nothin' jobs and stuff like that, and I figured maybe I can make something of myself by going in.

Did you have other family members serving in the military?

My brother Eddie was in the Marines?

Was he an older brother?

Yeah.

And was he in the Korean War also?

No, he was drafted.

How about you? How did you enter service – were you drafted or did you enlist?

I enlisted – Air Force you always enlist.

If you're drafted you usually go into the Army.

My brother had a choice, either Army or Marines.

And why did you choose that specific branch of service?

Well, I was thinking of the Navy, and they said that you have to jump off a thing and swim in the water; I can't swim. So I figure I can run faster than I can swim.

Okay, ha, ha; that's a good reason.

And I liked the Air Force – pretty interesting.

How did you enlist – did you go downtown?

I went to downtown Chicago.

How was your departure for training camp and early days of training?

How did you get there?

Uh, train – we went from Chicago to San Antonio, Texas.

What base were you at?

Lackland Air Force Base.

And how was it? Can you describe like a day of basic training – what they had you do – what time did you get up?

It was very surprising because all I did was run around and do what I wanted to do. And when I went in, it's a whole different ballgame. You enlist and they tell you what to do – and there ain't no ifs, ands or buts about it.

So you enlisted; so what did they tell you to do?

Whatever they told me to do, I did.

Well, did you have calisthenics? Did you have classroom teaching?

Oh, yeah; we got up every morning at a certain time; had roll call; then they send you to school to find out what you were really –

Aptitude –

Aptitude tests and stuff like that.

When did you go into service and get out?

February 1 of '52 to February '56.

So you have four full years of service –

Four full years of active duty, four years inactive.

Oh, you were in the Reserves after?

For four years after.

Continue on – you had school and testing – what else did you have to do? In basic training.

We had to keep the barracks clean; you had to shine your shoes; you had to do all that kind of stuff.

How about going on maneuvers –

Maneuvers – we marched all over; you never went noplac by yourself. You went to school; in school you marched. You went to mess hall you marched. No matter where you went when you were on duty, you did what –

How long were these marches that you went on?

I don't remember.

Did you go on bivouacs, where you stayed out –

We were supposed to go on a bivouac but it was such a rainfall that they called it off. Now -- The Air Force was easy compared to the Army – the Marines and them, no matter what was going on , you'd have went.

Did you have any specialized training –

I went to cook and baker's school – at Sheppard Air Force Base.

That's what I'm getting at – at Lackland you strictly had basic training.

I had eight weeks of basic training and that was when you got your schooling – and figured you out just as much as they tried to figure them out.

Was this your first time away from home?

Yeah.

How did you feel about that – how did it affect you?

It was different; it was different, and like I said, when they told you to do things that you thought you shouldn't have done, I said if my father or mother would have told me to do it I wouldn't have done it. But here a 19-year-old guy's telling me what to do.

Well, give me a for instance, what was it that he told you to do?

Well, one time I had to clean the grease trap. I had to take a grease trap apart and look for silverware in there.

Oh.

He said stick your hand in the grease trap and see if there's any silverware in there – and I'm going – this guy's as old as I am. If my father told me to do that I would say the hell with it.

But he had stripes, I suppose.

Oh, yeah, a sergeant.

Ha, ha, yeah, and you better listen! Well, if not that, you'd be cleaning the latrine or something.

Well, I've done that too.

Okay, so there you are.

I had a lot of different jobs.

So after the eight weeks of training, where did you go?

I went to Sheppard Air Force Base.

And where is that?

Wichita Falls, Texas.

And what did you do there?

I went to cook and baker's school.

How long did that last?

I think it was eight weeks. I think I got a certificate here.

So you learned to cook for large quantities of people.

Yeah.

In general how did you adapt to military life – to the physical regimen and living in a barracks and things like that?

That didn't bother me at all and you met a lot of nice people. In fact I had one guy call me up a couple of months ago; his daughter – I haven't heard from him in 50 years – his daughter went on the computer and got my name – and called me!

Isn't that nice!

He lives in Southern Indiana – and I just was flabbergasted.

Who was that? What's his name?

Jesse Dunlap – he was in with me.

In the Air Force.

Yeah.

So are you gonna keep in touch with him?

Well, I am, but I'm 86. I have problems, so I don't know –

Well, you can keep in touch on the computer.

Oh, yeah – no, I'm a computer illiterate –

Well, your wife will then. So, now after eight weeks of school was over, then what happened?

Then I went back to Lackland – wait no – I went to Topeka, Kansas. That was Forbes Air Force Base.

Was that your regular duty station?

Yeah.

Did you stay there?

I was there for two and a half years.

Tell me what you did there – what were your duties.

Well, I was a truck driver for a living and I wanted to go into the motor pool, but because of my schooling there, they put me in the mess hall. But, in the mess hall, with my rank and being Airman 2nd Class, which is a Corporal, the Sergeants did all the big work – you know what I'm saying? To make the roast, and the turkeys and all that. My job was fry eggs in the morning and make coffee, make pancake batter and stuff like that. But as far as cooking a big meal like for Christmas and stuff, four years I've never done it.

Really?

In fact, me and other guys were gonna write our Congressman because, I'm serious when I say this, because we felt that we didn't have the opportunities we really wanted. Like I said, I really wanted to go into the motor pool.

Well, why didn't they put you there?

No, because of my schooling they thought it would be better for –

Did you finish high school?

No.

That's why, probably.

Maybe. But the Sergeants made all the big meals. I fried eggs in the morning; I worked in the Officers' Mess, fried eggs there and stuff like that, but as far as anything else, I never made a big meal. And also, I had – they put me on – the guy got killed in a car wreck – I went to be a pallbearer.

Then one time when I was in Korea they sent –

Well, wait, we didn't get to Korea. What happened after the 2 ½ years.

Then they sent me to Korea for a year.

How did you get to Korea?

On a boat. I come home on an airplane.

Do you remember the name of the ship that you went on?

R.R. Anderson.

How was your crossing?

It was about 8-10 days.

Did you encounter any bad storms or hurricanes during that time?

No. We stopped in Honolulu for a day.

So no trouble in crossing on the ship.

No, no.

Where did you land in Korea?

Well, we landed in Yokohama, Japan.

Okay.

And then I flew from Yokohama to Osan, Korea.

Were you in Yokohama for any amount of time?

No. We got off the ship, went to the airport, got on a plane and we were gone.

Was the war over by the time you got there?

No, it was in the lull; 1954 and '55 I was in Korea.

The war was almost over.

Well, they weren't fighting; no, we weren't fighting.

Where did you stay in Korea? Barracks –

Quonset huts.

Was it an American base there?

Oh, uh, I was stationed in Osan, but I was in Kimpo too.

What were your duties there?

Well, it was the same thing. I never really prepared the big meals but I worked in the Mess Hall making coffee, toast, frying eggs, bacon and all that kind of stuff. I did all the lower cooking duties.

And what did you say about writing to your Congressman?

Nobody did; we talked about it.

So you spoke about it but you never actually did it.

No, no, we were afraid to.

Why was that?

Because that could get back to the service and then you could be court martialed or something –

You were just asking –

We, we – I mean there was 6 or 7 of us guys – we should have been in something different. We did a lot of K.P. duty too.

How long were you there – in Korea?

From October of '54 to October of '55.

Did your duties include regular hours, 9 to 5, for cooking?

Well, it varied. One time, like when we were stationed in Kansas; I would start at like noon – in the afternoon and work till 7 o'clock or 8 o'clock at night. Then I would get up at 3:30 and work till noon; then I would be off a day.

I see – depending on what meals you cooked. When you were in Korea, did you ever witness any kind of combat?

I went on train guard where I had a gun and I guarded two trucks on a flatbed train.

So you never went out on any patrols or anything like that?

No. but this was – me being a cook, they said you're going on this train and guard these two trucks. And then they said if somebody comes on there, don't shoot 'em. And I says, No offense, what am I doing here? I mean – yeah – I had all different kinds of – I enjoyed my service; don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining, but I felt I should have been put in something else. I could have felt I was –

I don't think you made your complaints loud enough to the people who might have done something about it.

Well, you couldn't really complain to anybody. You would go to a Sergeant, and he would say, you better not say anything –

Well, he put you off –

And then it goes to the Lieutenant, and the Lieutenant says, you know what – you're causing trouble. So, I just did all – what they told me to do --

When you're a young kid you don't really make waves.

I was smart enough to do what I was told to do.

How about friendships formed there – did you meet a lot of guys –

Oh, yeah.

That you still keep in touch with today.

I had one when we went to visit my daughter in Massachusetts – he lived in Pennsylvania, and we stopped and visited him one day –

What's his name?

Rex Aaron.

And he was with you in Korea or in the States?

No, in Kansas. Jesse and him both were in Kansas.

So you never really witnessed any destruction or any bombings or anything like that – the war was basically almost over.

Yeah.

So you were mostly in the –

In my area in my assigned job.

And you went back and forth between these two bases?

No. I was at one for awhile and then I went to the other one.

While you were in Korea for that year, did you go off on R&R – did you do any traveling any place else?

I never went to Japan, no. I had a chance to go and never went. I just stayed the whole year in Korea.

While you were there, in your after hours duties, did they have any kind of organized sports for the men – like organized baseball or basketball – or teams?

I really don't remember, truthfully. And I was so small and tiny – I wouldn't have got involved anyhow.

How did you stay in touch with family and friends – how were communications from home?

They all wrote letters.

Just strictly letters

Yeah

– no phone calls.

No.

How about when you were in Kansas –

Oh, yeah, I talked to my Mom all the time, and if I got a three-day pass I would go home – because I had a car.

But when you were in Korea it was strictly letters for that year.

And how long would it take a letter from home to reach you in Korea?

I don't think it was that long – maybe 2 or 3 days.

Really?

Yeah.

They came by Air Force Mail –

APO - right.

I'm surprised – 2 or 3 days to Korea. I guess because it was a regular base and they had normal deliveries.

Yeah, we were stationed in the same place all the time.

When you talk to the guys in WWII, sometimes it took two weeks.

Oh, yeah, it was weeks and months.

Other than your cooking, there were no off-duty pursuits – did you play cards or go bowling after your duties – any other recreation?

Well, we had a recreation area where they had pool tables and stuff like that.

You could go to the PX – we were on a very big Air Force Base –

Do you remember the name of the base?

I think it was Osan, Korea – but what the base name was, I don't remember.

So your times was up and I'm sure you were counting the days –

We were F-I-G-M-O -- figmo means "I finally got my orders."

Ha, ha.

That's what everybody would say – I'm figmo – I finally got my orders.

And you flew back home?

Yes.

Where did you fly to?

I flew from Korea to – what island was that – it was a little island – but anyhow they had – a guy had an emergency furlough, so they bumped me and I had to stay on it and get another plane later.

It was a Pacific island? How long did you have to stay there?

Just overnight – you went out the next day?

Oh, yeah; the plane wouldn't go either; that was one reason. Something happened to the plane; we had to stay an extra day on the island – I keep saying Guadalcanal, but I don't think so.

Where did you land in the states – when you got home?

California.

Did you go to an Air Force Base?

Yeah – we're talking 65 years ago – I don't remember.

But you had to be discharged from the base.

No, I wasn't discharged then. I came back, went on furlough and then I went to McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas. And I was there for three months and then I got discharged.

Did you have your car with you – how did you get home?

Drove home in my car.

So that was in February of '56.

Yeah.

How was your reception by family and friends when you got home?

Oh, it's always good.

Did you ever use the G.I. Bill?

I have hearing aids; I have all my medications –

Well, that's from the VA – I'm talking about the GI Bill for schooling.

No, no, never done nothing like that. Should have, but didn't.

So what did you do when you got home? How was your readjustment to civilian life?

I went and got a job in a factory and started that crap all over again.

Did you stay at that factory or did you switch jobs?

No, no, no –

Did you continue being a truck driver or what –

Well, my uncle was in the trucking business and I got a job driving for him; that's how I got started.

Did you continue driving trucks?

Thirty-seven years.

So where did you retire from?

Certified Grocers.

You drove one of the big trucks?

Yeah.

Any contact with fellow veterans over the years?

Well, like I said, Rex and talked to what's her name on the phone – but none of the other people – no.

Today are you a member of any veterans organizations?

No.

There's a VFW here in Carillon – you don't belong to it?

No.

Now reflecting back, how do think that your military experience affected your life?

For the better.

Would you do it again?

Yes. I enjoyed it – even with all the B S, I enjoyed it.

Well, it does give you some purpose –

Well, it made a man out of me; like I said at 19 I had no inclination what I wanted to do with my life. And by going in it made a man out of me. Like I said, with all these things and different experiences – it made you be more respectful to people and stuff.

Obey – discipline, rules and regulations –

Yes. Right.

That's generally – most people do feel that way. Anything special that you learned – like any life lessons you learned from military service?

Like you said – being respectful to people.

Did you say you had some medals or honors that you received?

I should have the Korean Medal because I was in Korea, but I don't know if it's on my –

I didn't see it on the DD-214.

No, that's what I said – I was gonna find out why I didn't get any medals – because I should have. I should have got Good Conduct –

Yeah; you can still inquire about that stuff; it's never too late. You really should look into that; people do that. I'm sure they have those records and you probably should get those.

I was in Cook and Baking School for five months – I didn't realize that.

But there is no medals on there.

At least you should have gotten the Good Conduct Medal.

And Korea, because I was there for a year.

Well, if I were you, and you're interested in it, I would pursue it. you go to the VA – you call the VA – start there. Let them see the records – they could follow the line. I would do it.

That's all I had. Is there anything else you want to add to the story – as far as any anecdotes that you want to tell – anything unusual or strange that happened to you while you were there. Any kinds of incidents that happened – did you ever see any celebrities that came or anything like that?

No, no. One time we had a rumor that Debbie Reynolds was coming – but it never happened.

Did you ever see the shows – you were there during the winter –

No, we never had no shows –

No shows for the Christmas Holidays or anything like that?

No, no.

You're entitled to those medals; you should pursue it. People always get their medals later in life if they didn't get them for some reason.

See, here, this is what all my schooling was –

Oh, yeah, electronics – oh, look, you got the National Defense Service Medal – that's what you got.

Yeah, I never even noticed that before. I don't know if that's considered the Korean Medal or not.

No, that's not – that's just National Defense – and you got an Honorable Discharge you should get a Good Conduct Medal and a Korean Medal just for being there. Well, that's all I have, so I thank you very much for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.

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After the interview I spoke to Leonard Jalovec and gathered additional information. He continued his service for four years in the Reserves on inactive duty; his unit was never called up and he never had any additional training. He also stated that the island he landed on when returning home was Wake Island – not Guadalcanal.