Interview with Edward L. Smith

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, the 25th of July 2008. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today it's our privilege to talk with Ed Smith about his Korean War experiences. Ed, thank you very much for agreeing to do this.

Smith: You're welcome.

DePue: I should say that this is going to be just, I think, the first of a couple or more interviews, because Ed is also a Vietnam War veteran. We want to focus today's interview session on your experiences in the Korean War. But we always start with the basics, so when and where were you born?

Smith: I was born 5 September, 1934, in Springfield, Illinois.

DePue: And did you grow up in the Springfield area?

Smith: I went to school in Springfield, spent my summers on a farm over in Whitehall/Roodhouse area. Went to Iles School, went to Harvard Park School, went to Concordia Lutheran School, and went to Feitshans High School.

DePue: Did you grow up a Lutheran then?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. I would assume, as Concordia, that would be Missouri Synod Lutheran.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: What did your father do for work?

Smith: My father was in the trades up through the end of the Depression, and then he got a job at Weaver Manufacturing in 1940 and stayed there until 1971.

DePue: Okay. When you say trades, what do you mean by that?

Smith: He was a laborer, a roofer, a hod carrier[1], et cetera.

DePue: Whatever he could get work at then.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Well, those were tough times. Do you remember much about your very young childhood, growing up during the Depression?

Smith: Yes, I do.

DePue: Anything in particular you remember?

Smith: I remember that I didn't see much of my parents, because my mother had found a job at an obscure watch company in Springfield, and she worked there. One of her jobs was putting the luminous items on the dials. She was there until about 1941, and then she went to work at Park Sherman[2], which was, at one time, another very large company in Springfield.

DePue: What were your parents' names?

Smith: My father was Kenneth Smith, and my mother was Ruth Smith. Her maiden name was Farrar.

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[1] A laborer employed in carrying supplies to bricklayers, stonemasons, cement finishers, or plasterers on the job.

[2] Park Sherman was an important Springfield company for several decades ending with the sale of the company to a New Jersey firm in 1960. They mass-produced smoking accessories, particularly lighters, as well as a multitude of office, novelty, and other items.

DePue: Farrar, how do you spell that?

Smith: F-A-R-R-A-R.

DePue: You were still pretty young in 1941. Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Smith: Very vividly. I remember it.

DePue: What in particular do you remember about that?

Smith: I remember the radio broadcasts, and I remember following the news that the Japanese attacked. I remember the President's [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] speech; we sat down to listen to the President talk about the day of infamy.

DePue: Obviously it must have been a pretty vivid memory for you, to remember this long afterwards, and being so young. What were you, about seven at the time?

Smith: Give or take, yes.

DePue: What was your thought when you heard about this?

Smith: I didn't really understand part of it. I just understood that the United States had been attacked by the Japanese, and that many Americans had been killed, and there was no reason given for it. I didn't understand. I knew that there was a war going on in Europe, by virtue of the newspapers, and the newsreels, occasionally, at the movie theater. But I didn't think we were going to be in a war.

DePue: Well, obviously things changed dramatically after that. Did you pay close attention to the war news afterwards?

Smith: I paid very close attention. I had two uncles who had enlisted before the war. They had been in the CCC, [Civilian Conservation Corps] and went from the CCC to the military, about 1939, 1940. So I followed the one who was in Europe; I followed the war in Europe based upon him. I followed the war in the Pacific based upon an uncle that was in the Pacific.

DePue: Since they joined as early as 1939, did they get into some of the earlier action, like North Africa for the one who was in Europe?

Smith: Yes. He did.

DePue: What division was he in, do you remember?

Smith: I don't. I know he ended up in the 3rd.

DePue: 3rd Division?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. And the one in the Pacific: did he see any action at Guadalcanal?

Smith: No. He didn't. He was in the Solomons at that time.

DePue: Okay. But you had good reason then, to follow very closely.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was the mood of the country that you recall at the time?

Smith: Since so many men left the neighborhood that I lived in—I lived on the south side of Springfield at that time, on Renfrow Street, which is straight south of Iles School between Fifteenth and Sixteenth running north and south—most of the men were gone. It was women and children. I did a lot of errand running during the war; I knew how to get cigarettes from the local cigarette supplier, and so the ladies would call me and give me their money, and I would go pick up cigarettes for them.

DePue: Were cigarettes rationed at the time?

Smith: Yeah. Cigarettes were rationed. Butter was rationed; meat was rationed; shoes were rationed.

DePue: Did you have an appreciation, at the time, that times were tough because the war was going on?

Smith: Since times had always been tough in my household, it didn't change. Actually, it got better, because my parents were both working steady.

DePue: By that time, where were your parents working?

Smith: My mother was still working; she went to Park Sherman, which was on the south side of Springfield. My father was still at Weaver Manufacturing.

DePue: Okay. And he had been there already for a few years before that.

Smith: Right.

DePue: Okay. Any sense that you picked up about the camaraderie, or the sense that this was the right war to be fighting?

Smith: There was so much propaganda, and I call it that now, about the dirty Japs and the Nazis and the Italians, that everybody was united in it. And then Saturday afternoon theater, when they would show a newsreel, it would show Hitler or Tojo or one of them; everybody would boo and carry on.

DePue: What were you going to the movies to see then?

Smith: Oh, normally, Johnny Weissmuller, or Tex Ritter, or one of those people.

DePue: So it's these Saturday matinees that you're going to?

Smith: Saturday matinees, and then there was always a serial involving Buck Rogers or someone that way.

DePue: Towards the end of the war then, do you also remember victory in Europe?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Big celebration in Springfield then?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Can you describe the celebration?

Smith: People were outside; people were shooting off homemade fireworks. In our area it was carbide we used to make fireworks. Makes a resounding explosion, especially in an empty paint can. So people were shooting off homemade fireworks; people were out in the streets talking, hoping that their loved ones were going to make it home shortly.

DePue: How about dropping the atomic bomb in August?

Smith: I don't remember any news about dropping the atomic bomb. I remember the news of the war in the Pacific ending, Japan surrendering. Did not hear about the atomic bombs, or much, I would say, for probably another six to eight months after the war.

DePue: It's probably important to remember, even when the war ended you were how old?

Smith: Well, yeah, 1944, 1945, I was ten, eleven years old.

DePue: Yeah. So you're still very young at that age.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Where did you go to high school again?

Smith: Oh, I started high school at Feitshans.

DePue: Okay. And you finished out at…?

Smith: Dodd. I left school.

DePue: Okay. Well, let's talk about that. What was it that caused you to make the decision to drop out of high school then?

Smith: I have no idea. I left home: no money, no clothes, no nothing. Started hitchhiking south; ended up in Paducah, Kentucky. Then down the Tennessee River into

Tennessee. Stayed in Tennessee up through the spring, picking strawberries and doing other things like that. People would take me in. I learned hobo signs about: stay away from this house, or this house is fine. I learned that it was okay to walk up to some doors and walk on the door, and say, "Could I do something, work something for a sandwich, or something?" Learned where the soup kitchens were, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, different things like that. Got picked up by the police occasionally, and they'd keep me one or two days and turn me loose.

DePue: Picked up on vagrancy charges?

Smith: Just picked up. I have no charges whatsoever.

DePue: I want to ask you a couple of questions here, and maybe you don't want to answer these in detail, or you can't. Were there some troubles at home that caused you to leave?

Smith: Not that I know of. I've reflected back, especially in the last few years, and have not found a reason.

DePue: Is it because you've forgotten?

Smith: It may be repressed.

DePue: Okay. So do you remember the age that you were when you left?

Smith: When I first left, I was fourteen. I started high school at fourteen and was doing well: I was [on the] student council, band, involved in activities. And late spring, right before school ended, I left.

DePue: And again, you don't recall now why you left?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. It obviously brings up a lot of very specific questions from anybody who's going to listen to this later on. Do you think that somewhere later on down the road, you just blotted this information out?

Smith: It could be. Especially in the last few years I've tried to figure it out, and have been unable to come to a reason.

DePue: Was there a time when your parents were explaining this to you, that you had a dialogue with your parents years later about it?

Smith: No.

DePue: Do you know how your parents reacted to your leaving home?

Smith: No. I didn't even think about that until a few years ago.

DePue: Okay. And they're both deceased, I assume?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Tell us again about the locations you went to, and how far afield that you got?

Smith: Well, I went down into Paducah first, and then on down the Tennessee River and into Tennessee, and then I ended up in Memphis. From Memphis, I decided to go back home, and I hitchhiked back home. Different families would help me along the way, give me a place to sleep or do whatever.

DePue: About what time then—what dates, roughly did you make the decision to head back to home?

Smith: Probably summer.

DePue: Of what year?

Smith: Of ’49.

DePue: Forty-nine. Okay. Before even Korea had started.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: How would you describe yourself today, looking back at that time period?

Smith: I didn’t fear anything. I enjoyed meeting people. I enjoyed traveling. I enjoyed doing things. That’s about all I can say. I enjoyed life.

DePue: Now, you mentioned to me, when we talked initially, that you have kind of divided up your life in periods of time when you have different distinct personalities, if you will.

Smith: That’s correct.

DePue: That is something that I want to try to weave through here, if that’s okay with you, as we go through this.

Smith: Okay.

DePue: You came back. You recall the beginning of the Korean War in June of 1950?

Smith: Yes. I joined the Illinois National Guard at the age of fifteen.

DePue: So you were on the road for roughly a year, it sounds like?

Smith: Well, I was on the road twice.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: The second time I was on the road, I traveled out to west Texas. I worked on the oil fields, worked at a restaurant as a short-order cook, dishwasher, did the dance floor at night when the place closed, buffed the floor, cleaned the place up.

DePue: How old were you at that time?

Smith: Fifteen.

DePue: So did you join the Guard after you came back from West Texas, or even before that?

Smith: I joined it after I came back from Texas.

DePue: My guess is that you weren't old enough to be joining the Guard at that time.

Smith: No, I lied about my age. I didn't look old enough; I looked probably like I was ten. They needed people, and so they swore me in.

DePue: This would have been 1948, '49 timeframe?

Smith: When was it….1949.

DePue: Because I know there was a couple of years after the Second World War where there wasn't much of a National Guard at all. Everybody had been deployed during the War, and of course they came back and were just released from active duty. So that sounds about right.

Smith: I joined 22 November of 1949.

DePue: Okay. So, let's see. 1934, 1949—fifteen years old. And they didn't ask too many hard questions then?

Smith: No.

DePue: What unit did you join?

Smith: Company C, 106th Tank Battalion at Camp Lincoln.

DePue: Right there at Camp Lincoln, which is in Springfield.

Smith: 44th Division.

DePue: Okay. Can you describe your initial training in the National Guard?

Smith: Well, it consisted of a few nights' and a few weekends' familiarization with the tanks and the equipment, and preparation to go to summer camp. Summer camp: dirty, dusty, grimy, tank trails with dust three feet deep.

DePue: Where were summer camps?

Smith: Summer camp was at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin.

DePue: Been there many times. Did your parents approve of your going into the National Guard? Did they sign papers allowing you to do this?

Smith: There was no need to sign any. I just went down and said I was seventeen, and they enlisted me.

DePue: Okay. Did your parents know that you were in the Guard?

Smith: Yes, after I joined.

DePue: They found out after the fact.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: How long after the fact?

Smith: Probably the same week.

DePue: Okay. And they didn't march down to the recruiting offer and say, "He's not seventeen".

Smith: No. Anything to keep me home, I think.

DePue: Okay. So how would you describe your relationship with your parents at that time?

Smith: I think my relationship was good.

DePue: Is that another one of the things that you don't have a real clear memory of, though?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. So you were in the Guard for a year or two when you heard about the war in Korea, right?

Smith: Correct.

DePue: What was your reaction when you heard about the North Koreans invading the South in June of 1950?

Smith: I knew that the Americans were then involved in a war, and that they thought it was going to be a quick thing; they would bring the troops from Japan and Hawaii and engulf Korea and smash the North Koreans, and the war would be over shortly.

DePue: So does that mean at that time you didn't think that it would involve you.

Smith: No.

DePue: Okay. Were you paying attention to what was going on in Korea for the next few months?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: As you heard about the news of the Pusan Perimeter and Task Force Smith being decimated, and some pretty nasty fighting for the Americans, what were your thoughts at that time?

Smith: I tried to get in the active military. I wanted to be there.

DePue: Why?

Smith: I don't know.

DePue: Okay. Was it a continuation of that sense of adventure that had put you on the road in the first place?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Do you recall about what timeframe that you would have been attempting to go active?

Smith: Well, I was still sixteen. The active Army recruiters just said, Goodbye; bring a birth certificate and bring parents' permission.

DePue: So they were being a little bit more careful in the recruiting process.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And they didn't believe you that you were seventeen.

Smith: No.

DePue: Okay. That's interesting. But I know you eventually got in. What led to your eventually being able to enlist?

Smith: Well, I came back from my last trip. I joined a crew selling magazine subscriptions door-to-door, into northern Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa. We got taken off the road in Iowa by the crew leaders being arrested for some reason, and so the crew was given bus fare to go home. That was in August of 1951, and in September I turned seventeen, and a few days later I joined the Army.

DePue: Again, I want to have a clear understanding of how much you were aware of what was going on in Korea during this whole time. After the Pusan Perimeter, the United States, the UN forces, had pushed their way all the way to the northern

border of North Korea, close to the Yalu River, and then had been rolled back when the Chinese horde came flooding in. Were you aware of all of that?

Smith: Yes, and [General] MacArthur's statements about bombing them into oblivion, and going as far north as we could across the Yalu River and into China. Was aware of what happened with MacArthur and [President] Truman.

DePue: MacArthur's being relieved.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was your thought about that?

Smith: I didn't think it was right.

DePue: Was that in the general mood of the country at the time, as well?

Smith: I believe it was [that] MacArthur was a hero from World War II in the minds of the people. Not necessarily in the history afterwards, but in Korea, he was considered "the man." And there was talk of him becoming president.

DePue: And in your mind, he would have made a good president?

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. When did you actually enlist in the regulars?

Smith: September 1951.

DePue: What motivated you at that time to enlist?

Smith: Wanting to be in Korea.

DePue: Because it was an important war to fight?

Smith: Because I wanted to be there.

DePue: So was it more for adventure?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Well, let me bring this up. This is somewhat of a delicate question. How tall were you at the time?

Smith: Five, five.

DePue: So you were a little bit on the smaller side.

Smith: One hundred fifteen pounds.

DePue: Okay. Was there any difficulty because you were a little bit on the light side?

Smith: No.

DePue: Did you go through basic training then?

Smith: I went through some basic, and then went right into advanced training at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky.

DePue: Where did you attend basic training?

Smith: Same, at Camp Breckenridge.

DePue: You say it was a shortened basic training?

Smith: Yes, because of my experience in the Guard.

DePue: Okay. When you joined, what was your intent, in terms of what you wanted to do in the Army?

Smith: Make a career.

DePue: Any particular branch or specialty that you were looking at?

Smith: The infantry.

DePue: Why the infantry?

Smith: They had to go everywhere.

DePue: They're the ones who get to do all the nasty fighting, though, right?

Smith: Right. The fighting is only so much of it.

DePue: Well, you said they got to go everywhere. Was there an element of adventure, in terms of traveling the world as well, that motivated you?

Smith: Yes. That's correct.

DePue: But clearly, it sounds like you wanted to go to Korea as soon as possible.

Smith: Yes. Yes I did. I volunteered for it.

DePue: Okay. How would you describe yourself in this phase of your life? Again, you'd indicated before that there was a different personality by this stage of your life.

Smith: I was still very adventuresome. I took weekends and sometimes came back home, hitchhiked back home for a weekend, which got me home for a few hours, and then turned around and hitchhiked back. I sometimes would go across the river into

Illinois to Old Shawneetown, across the ferry. It was a place with lots of women and lots of places to drink.

DePue: And did you participate in all the activities in Old Shawneetown?

Smith: I participated. Yes I did.

DePue: Okay. Tell us then about the path you took to get to Korea.

Smith: I went to airborne school, and then received orders for Korea. Received orders to go to Fort Lawton, Washington, in April of 1952. I took a train to Seattle and then to Fort Lawton. Then at the pier that we were supposed to leave from, for some reason my name came out of a hat, and I was put on a bus and sent to Vancouver, British Columbia, and got on a Canadian Pacific airliner, and flew the northern route to Japan, up across into Alaska, and then stopped to refuel, and to Shemya in the Aleutian islands and stopped and refueled, and on to Midway, and then on to Japan.

DePue: So you missed the boat ride over.

Smith: I missed the boat ride over.

DePue: Everybody I talk to about the boat ride has strong memories about that experience.

Smith: I'm sure. I had strong memories about mine.

DePue: It sounds like a better way of getting to Japan than the boat ride.

Smith: There were just seven military people on the airplane.

DePue: Any idea why you ended up going that way?

Smith: Haven't the foggiest notion.

DePue: Did it make you curious at the time?

Smith: No. I just thought, “Hey, this is great”.

DePue: So you were just following orders at that time.

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: Where did you land in Japan?

Smith: Landed at Tokyo, and spent a couple of days there at a Repo Depot, replacement depot, and got orders to go to the 2nd Division. At that time, the 2nd Division had someone in Japan at the replacement depot, and I was assigned to the 38th Infantry. The 38th at that point had just moved from, or was in route from Pusan to Koje-do. So there were half a dozen of us put on a mail boat, and we went from Japan to

Koje-do on a mail boat. And I was assigned to A Company 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry.

DePue: What was your specific assignment in A Company?

Smith: Rifleman.

DePue: In the lines? In platoon?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Why Koje-do? Well, first of all, tell us where Koje-do is.

Smith: Koje-do is off the southern coast of Korea, a chain of islands there. Some of the islands were being used for prisoner of war camps for Chinese and North Korean prisoners. Koje-do was the main place; Cheju-do, which was near there, was also being used as a prisoner processing point.

DePue: *Do*, I believe, stands for island?

Smith: Island.

DePue: Was there something going on in these prison camps at the time?

Smith: Well, at the time I got there, the prisoners pretty well ran the island. Every day we took a detail out to dump honey buckets from each compound, was taken and went down to the coast and dumped it, and it was put on boats and taken back to the mainland to be used as fertilizer.

DePue: Honey buckets being…

Smith: Human feces.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: Half barrels that were used in the latrines.

DePue: Were you going on to these prisoner of war compounds to get these?

Smith: No. We met the prisoners at the sally port, which is an entrance to a prison of any kind, to allow prisoners to come part way out without being all the way out, or allow people to come part way in without being all the way in.

DePue: Now, you had indicated that the prisoners were pretty well running the island at the time but they were confined to these compounds?

Smith: They were confined to the compounds, but they were sending messages. They had people out with semaphores, flags, giving messages back and forth from one compound to the other. Tried to avoid work details being close to each other to keep

them from talking. The prisoners ran the inside of the camp, and we never went in. They only came out under heavy guard.

DePue: What was the cause of all of the difficulties inside the camp?

Smith: Don't know. From later history, I found out that the North Koreans and the Chinese had high-ranking officers who were allowed to surrender, and were sent back there to organize the camps. And they organized them very well. And the incident that caused all the problems was the then-commander of the island, the American commander in charge, went to—

DePue: That would be General Dean, I think. Or, excuse me, General Francis Dodd.

Smith: Yeah. He went to compound 76 to discuss prisoner grievances. While he was discussing them he was in the sally port, and a work detail came back in. The work detail just surrounded him and his aide and pushed them right into the compound. So they became prisoners.

DePue: So an American general, who is commanding the forces that are guarding the prison camp, is taken captive and kept captive inside the prison camp.

Smith: That is correct.

DePue: Now, my reading has told me that one of the big grievances that the North Koreans and the Chinese had was, that the U.N. forces were insisting that prisoners have the right to remain in the South, that they wouldn't have to be repatriated. Were you aware of that?

Smith: Yes. I was also aware that that was what was holding up the peace talks.

DePue: The peace talks that had started back in the middle of 1951, I believe.

Smith: Correct.

DePue: And this is a year after that.

Smith: That's correct. That's two years after that.

DePue: Well, it took two years before the armistice was signed, at least.

Smith: Took three years. June of '52 is when I was on Koje-do, so that's two years after the war started.

DePue: What was your thought about the repatriation question? You and your buddies?

Smith: We thought everybody should be able to go where they wanted to go.

DePue: How did you understand, or think about, the fact that the prisoners were running their own camps?

Smith: Well, it was going on when we got there, and we were told to just go with the flow. Now, I'm at the bottom of the pecking order, of the chain, and we were told, Guard the prisoners. Don't shoot unless it's absolutely necessary. Don't fire into the compounds unless you're ordered to.

DePue: Can you describe a typical compound at that time?

Smith: They were barbed wire enclosures with two sets of barbed wire running around them, and there were upwards of 5,000 prisoners within one camp. They were in tents, Army squad tents was what they were called, and they had wooden floors and wooden sides so they could roll the canvas up and let the air come through. Most of them were never opened up. The prisoners did different crafts and different things inside that we could see them doing.

DePue: If there was disagreement among the Chinese and the North Koreans about some wanting to stay behind and some wanting to be repatriated, who seemed to have the upper hand in those two groups?

Smith: Well, the prisoners did. They were already being processed on the island when they captured the general.

DePue: Processed meaning…?

Smith: They were being interviewed to determine whether or not they wanted to stay in the South.

DePue: Was that one of the issues that the prisoners had?

Smith: Yes. They did not want to be processed. They just wanted all to be taken back North.

DePue: And if Americans aren't even going on these compounds, I'm guessing that conditions within the compounds were not good, especially between these two groups?

Smith: No. Prisoners were killing prisoners. They were executing prisoners. There were fights, battles within the compounds.

DePue: Again, did it make sense to you that the Americans were standing on the outside, and didn't just come in and take over these compounds and re-establish order?

Smith: No, it didn't. It did not. The feeling that we had was, we've got guns; let's use them.

DePue: I know that eventually, this led to the 38th—I guess would "storming" be the appropriate term?

Smith: Yes. Us and the 187th Airborne.

DePue: Again, from my own readings, it was compounds 85 and 96 that the 38th moved against. Do you recall that incident?

Smith: I don't recall which compounds we went in.

DePue: Do you recall the incident, though, of actually—

Smith: Yes. Cutting the wire, bringing a tank up, and moving in with the tank.

DePue: I'd like to have you describe that in as much detail as you can recall.

Smith: I think we were divided into teams, and our company, or actually our battalion, was assigned a compound. Our company was one of the companies that went in. We went in; we had gas masks on our faces; we had rifles with bayonets fixed. Our orders were, if any prisoner attempted to strike an American, to bayonet them, hit them with a rifle butt, whatever. Shooting was a last resort. Ammunition was issued, but ammunition was not in the rifles; we did not put ammunition in the rifles. I guess the powers-that-be felt that there were enough of us to subdue them. We used shock grenades; we used tear gas. The prisoners had homemade gas masks that they had made out of ponchos and cellophane, so that they could see through it. Then they took a first-aid pack and put that at the mouth where they could breathe through that. A very crude thing, but it worked. But with the tank growling and our people chanting, the prisoners started falling back right away.

DePue: Were any of the prisoners armed in some way?

Smith: Yes. They had what we call lances that were made out of the side poles for a tent: eight foot long, a steel tip on the end, which they sharpened to a point. They had barbed-wire flails, where they had cut barbed wire out of the fences and made flails. They would try and throw the tear gas grenades back at us, or the smoke grenades back at us. But they didn't resist too long.

DePue: Just a few minutes.

Smith: Yep. Maybe fifteen minutes total.

DePue: What happened after the Americans regained control of the compound then?

Smith: Well, prior to regaining control of the compound, the 187th and the 2nd Engineers on another engineer battalion were brought in, and they constructed new compounds that were 500-man compounds. So when we seized control of the compound, the prisoners were processed; those that didn't want to go back North were moved into certain compounds, and those that wanted to go back North were moved into other compounds.

DePue: Do you have a sense of the percentage that went in each direction?

Smith: I'd say 25% wanted to stay south.

DePue: Were these North Koreans or Chinese or a mixture of both in these camps?

Smith: Both. Both.

DePue: Okay. Any sense of whether it was the North Koreans or the Chinese that were electing to stay in the South?

Smith: Both.

DePue: Were you involved in the processing at all?

Smith: No.

DePue: Who did they bring in to do that?

Smith: They had prisoner-of-war teams of interpreters –military police, military government people –were all involved in that.

DePue: Were there South Korean officials involved as well?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were there people checking on the medical condition at the same time?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Because I would assume that part of the problem –if the prisoners have taken over the compound –there's no medical aid that's going in there at all.

Smith: They had their own medics, and they were given medicine when they asked for it. When we went there, they were given anything they asked for.

DePue: Food, water, clothing.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Again, it just amazes me that the prisoners were in charge as much as they were.

Smith: Well, what's even more amazing is that the colonel that was sent in to take over after the camp commander was captured –within three days they released the aide to the general, and they set up field phones, communications wire in, and they negotiated –and three days later he gave in to all of their demands, everything that they wanted.

DePue: Did the Communists then play that up in propaganda?

Smith: Well, they played their loudspeakers and their music. I have no idea what they were saying.

DePue: You mean, they had loudspeakers, and they were playing music within the compounds?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. You're still very young, a brand-new kid in the military, you go to Korea to fight, and you end up on this Koje-do Island doing this.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What's your thought at that time?

Smith: It's a mixed-up world. (phone rings)

DePue: Should we let that go ahead and ring, or do you want to get that?

Smith: Yes. It won't answer; that's the last ring it'll make.

DePue: Okay. How long did your unit then stay in Koje-do?

Smith: We were there into August.

DePue: And then what happened?

Smith: Part of us moved by LST[3] to Inchon, and then by train to, I believe, Pyeongchang, or somewhere in that vicinity. And then off to reserve position.

DePue: So the rest of the division was in reserve at the time?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. I know that wasn't too much later, was it July that the 2nd Division swapped with the 45th Division on the front lines? Maybe it was a little later than that.

Smith: I can't tell you. I know that after we got back and were in reserve, I had a friend in the 45th, and I was given a couple of days off to go see him. I hitchhiked across Korea to see my friend in the 45th Division.

DePue: I forgot to ask you earlier, when you arrived in Cheju-do—or excuse me, Koje-do, and then again when you got to mainland Korea itself, what were your first impressions about the country?

Smith: About what I expected for a country that had been at war. The ruins of buildings on mainland Korea. There were smokestacks standing out in the middle of nowhere, with no building there. Most of the roads were poor. We were told about the landings at Inchon that had been made during the war. We were told about how the tides were at Inchon and we were going in there by LST, and that we would not

[3] American tank landing ship

have to fight our way in, that the South and the U.S. occupied the area. But it looked like it had been through hell.

DePue: Anything that in particular stayed with you? Sights or smells of Korea when you arrived?

Smith: Well, the odors were horrendous, from all the human feces being collected and spread. Cooking odors were different. People were living in shacks made out of C-ration cases. Since the cases are somewhat waterproofed, people just opened them up and put them together and made little shacks out of them, and collected whatever tin they could, or whatever else they could, and were living in them.

DePue: Well, you'd grown up yourself in pretty hard times in the United States, and then essentially decided to adopt the life of a hobo.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: How did what you were seeing in Korea compare to that kind of an experience?

Smith: Well, some of them lived better than I did in some of my travels.

DePue: You said you were even hitchhiking across Korea to get to the reserve area where the 45th Division was?

Smith: 45th was on the line.

DePue: So you hitchhiked up to the front line?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: I would assume you had a chance to encounter quite a few Koreans on that route.

Smith: Not many. Not many during that era.

DePue: Does that mean you were close enough to the front line that most of the area had been evacuated?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Describe the terrain.

Smith: Mountainous. Some areas were heavily vegetated; other areas, vegetation was all gone from combat, from artillery and from fighting. But it was hard-fought to get up from the bottom of a hill to the top of a hill. You couldn’t just go straight up; you had to walk back and forth to get to the top.

DePue: Was your buddy surprised to see you?

Smith: No.

DePue: He knew you were coming?

Smith: No.

DePue: But it didn't surprise him, because…

Smith: It didn't seem to.

DePue: What did he tell you about what combat was like when you found him?

Smith: I don't even remember what we discussed, honestly. I just know we hadn't seen each other since we left Camp Breckenridge.

DePue: Do you remember his name?

Smith: No, but it will come to me.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: I searched for him for years, and finally found him after he died.

DePue: Then, obviously, you returned back to the 38th Regiment. Tell me about when the 38th moved up to the line itself.

Smith: The division was on line at the end of August, and in September, we moved up in the area of Baldy –T-Bone, Pork Chop, Baldy –into that area. That's where I got wounded. I had my 18th birthday on Old Baldy.

DePue: You say the division went up in August, but your—

Smith: Part of the division went up in August.

DePue: Were they rotating a regiment at the time?

Smith: Yes. We went up and relieved, I believe, the 23rd. I'm not sure.

DePue: This is again, you said August, September –several months before that time –there had been pretty hot action in Old Baldy area.

Smith: Yes. There were two Baldies; there was Old Baldy and Chink Baldy, Chink Baldy being down in the valley. Pork Chop over here and T-Bone over here, or vice-versa.

DePue: They were forward of Old Baldy and Chink Baldy?

Smith: Chink Baldy was in front; Pork Chop and T-Bone were just about on line with Baldy, a little bit behind it.

DePue: Okay. Now, I think a lot of people –because we don't know much about the Korean War –jump to the conclusion that there was one continuous line that divided North

between South by the time that you got there. Was that the case? How would you describe the front line?

Smith: There were like three different front lines. Jamestown was one, and I can't remember what the others were. But there were areas where there was no combat going on; there were areas that the ground was not being contested all of the time. It went from unit to unit, and sometimes the line was only covered by fire; it was not covered by man, it was covered by artillery fire and by small arms fire. So there were gaps between units, sometimes, that were quite large.

DePue: So in the area where you were, was it more of a series of strong points, and then controlled by fire between those?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: You must have known that, going up to Old Baldy, that [area] was very hotly contested when you were going up there.

Smith: Yes. And it became more so, again, when we were up there.

DePue: Okay. Describe your first day on the front then.

Smith: We went up and moved into positions, and sixty to seventy percent of the bunkers and firing positions were trash. The bunkers had no overhead cover; they'd been through combat so many times, and the unit that we relieved did not put then back in shape. So the first thing that we started doing was rebuilding the bunkers and the firing positions.

DePue: Can you describe a typical bunker?

Smith: A typical bunker, let's say a machinegun bunker, inside would be about, oh, fifteen by fifteen.

DePue: Feet.

Smith: Feet. It would have heavy beams across the top, sandbags across the top, the perforated metal like they made landing fields out of. Sometimes you'd have that on top. Canvas, if you could, to help waterproof it, and dirt. Then there would be firing positions for the machineguns; depending on where you were, you'd be able to fire to the front, to the left, and the right. So normally there were two machineguns in a bunker, and then there was a couple riflemen to help protect the machineguns who were outside of the bunker.

DePue: Were these typically squad-sized bunkers?

Smith: No. They were just part of a squad.

DePue: Okay. And again, you were a typical infantryman in a rifle squad at the time?

Smith: I was in a machinegun squad. I moved to it.

DePue: Oh, okay. When did that happen then?

Smith: When we were reserve after we came from Koje-do.

DePue: Okay. So the entire time you're in combat, you're in the machinegun platoon?

Smith: Squad.

DePue: Squad. Of a rifle platoon?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. What's in a machinegun squad?

Smith: Well, at that time, we had normally four thirty-caliber air-cooled machineguns. Sometimes we had one or two water-cooled machineguns. And somewhere along the line, we picked up a fifty caliber, which was not typical TO&E.

DePue: Table of organization and equipment.

Smith: Correct.

DePue: But that wasn't all that uncommon, that units or individuals would procure other weapons?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Were you able to get the ammunition for the fifty cal?

Smith: Oh, yes. As long as we'd go back and pick it up and get it up there.

DePue: Well, between the water-cooled and the air-cooled thirty cal, which one was a better weapon?

Smith: The air-cooled, because it was much easier to take off of a tripod and use in your hands if you needed to, whereas a water-cooled had to have that water jacket and have water coming into it from a reservoir.

DePue: Did your particular squad then get divided up among the other squads in the platoon?

Smith: We were in different places in the platoon. We covered, normally, the flanks either by fire or by position in fire.

DePue: Do you recall, and can you describe, your first memory of combat?

Smith: I was back having hot chow; the rest of the squad, my part of the squad, had already eaten and went back up the hill. I was the last one to go down, and had hot chow and was sitting drinking coffee. There were about fifteen or twenty of us scattered well out drinking coffee, and we heard some incoming that went on over us and behind us, and then we heard some outgoing going over our head awful close, and then incoming came right in on top of us. I woke up, and I was covered with dirt; my mouth and nose were full of dirt, my eyes were full of dirt. I hurt all over. I sat up and started trying to figure out what had happened and where I was. The first sergeant came over and asked me how I was, if I was hurt bad, and I told him I didn't think so, and he said, Well, get on up the hill, because we're going to get hit; this is just the prelude to the enemy coming, is essentially what he said. By then it was dusk, September, so I went on up the hill and into position and told the guys in my bunker that the first sergeant said that we were going to get hit, and to get ready. By then, the platoon sergeant was coming around making sure everybody was in position. It wasn't but a couple hours later, we continued to get artillery fire, and then the artillery fire stopped and mortar fire started coming in.

DePue: Enemy artillery fire.

Smith: Enemy artillery and then enemy mortar fire. Started hearing whistles and bugles and loudspeaker, making noise. Somebody talking on a loudspeaker.

DePue: In English or Chinese?

Smith: Both.

DePue: What were they saying in English?

Smith: 38th Infantry, welcome to the real world. We're going to drive you off of this hill. You'll wish you had never been there. Go ahead and surrender now. Take it easy. We'll treat you right.

DePue: The troops' reaction to that?

Smith: None.

DePue: It didn't unnerve you?

Smith: No.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: We were probably fifty to sixty percent green troops in the company, in the battalion. The summer and spring and early fall had been spent in rebuilding and training. We were welcoming them to come to get it over with. Come on up and let's get it over with.

DePue: So you were eager to get it on.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What in particular were you doing? Were you manning one of the machineguns, or—?

Smith: At that point, I was guarding the machineguns. I was in a firing position outside the bunker to help guard the machineguns.

DePue: What weapon would you have had?

Smith: I had an M-1 rifle.

DePue: But you don't have any overhead cover.

Smith: No.

DePue: What time of the day would this have been again?

Smith: About 8:30, 9:00 o'clock at night.

DePue: Okay. I'm going to stop interrupting and let you continue with the description of the action.

Smith: Okay. We started detonating some of the controlled munitions we had in the wire. They got through the minefield and had got through the concertina (wire), and were right up in our faces. I was firing to protect the machine guns, because they essentially could only see their field of fire. The trench line was behind their bunker, so the enemy could come up and get in that trench line, possibly, and get in behind, so I was on one side of them to prevent that from happening. I was firing, and I fired my last round in my rifle. At that time, the M-1 rifle, when you fire your last night, the clip is ejected, and it makes a very distinct sound, a very loud sound. And so as I fired my last round, I brought my rifle down to my hip, reached for another clip of ammo to put in it, I was hit in the face with a rifle butt. And the next thing I know, I'm fighting this person, rifle to rifle. I lost a couple of teeth and a cut lip and a smashed nose, a bayonet through my foot. I killed him with my bayonet; as I was trying to my bayonet out of him, and as he fell forward, his bayonet went through my foot. I was then pinned to the ground with him dying on my leg and his bayonet through my foot. Luckily just then a platoon sergeant or somebody came along checking to find out why I wasn't firing, and pulled the guy off of me, and elected to pull the bayonet out of my foot.

DePue: You had no idea that he was that close to you?

Smith: No.

DePue: In the dark?

Smith: He came in the trench, dark, parachute flairs, star cluster flairs. But all that was to the front.

DePue: And that was the sector that you were watching as well.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you able to make out silhouettes of Chinese coming at you?

Smith: Oh, yes.

DePue: Do you know if you were able to hit any of them?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And the machinegun was firing at the same time?

Smith: That's correct. Both of them were.

DePue: Were there still artillery or mortar rounds landing in the area?

Smith: Yes. Enemy that marched right up with them. It was like they were in it.

DePue: How many days had you been in the Old Baldy area when this happened?

Smith: Less than a week.

DePue: What happened after the platoon sergeant got to you?

Smith: He got the guy off of me, and said, "Are you okay?", and I said, "Yeah". He said, "Yyou know, they're still coming, so let's get with it". So I loaded my rifle and started firing again.

DePue: Did you do anything about the foot?

Smith: The next day.

DePue: Were you even paying attention to the foot at the time?

Smith: No. My mouth bothered me much worse than my foot.

DePue: So you were conscious of that.

Smith: Oh, yeah. I had jagged teeth.

DePue: In my experience, most cases, they would have wanted some kind of a buddy system, that there would have been two of you on that trench line on either side. Was that not the policy?

Smith: We didn't have that many people. I was on one side protecting the machinegun, and the other rifleman was on the other side protecting the machinegun. There were four guys in the machinegun bunker.

DePue: How close were you to the bunker?

Smith: Ten yards.

DePue: During all of this, what were your emotions?

Smith: High. Extremely high.

DePue: Were you confident?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you scared?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: So what helped you perform under all of that? What got you going, kept you going?

Smith: Nerves. And the fact that I didn't want to die and I didn't want my friends to die.

DePue: Tell us about the next day then.

Smith: Well, the next day, they—

DePue: Were you there all through the night?

Smith: All through the night. The action ended probably sometime around midnight when they all pulled back and everything quieted down. There'd be a shot here and there, or somebody would set off a controlled detonated explosive. Hearing somebody out in the wire. As soon as it started getting daylight, they organized patrols to go out front and see if there were any live enemy that can be taken in as prisoners, to see how bad the wire was, to see if the minefield had been opened up or what.

DePue: Did you spend the night next to this dead Chinese now?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: How close was he to you?

Smith: Couple of feet.

DePue: Did you attempt to do anything with him?

Smith: No.

DePue: Why not?

Smith: He wasn't bothering me.

DePue: Okay. So again, your focus is…

Smith: My focus is on what's going on.

DePue: Did you get medical care, aid, in the night?

Smith: Yes. The next morning, the platoon medic came around; he'd been told that I had been wounded. He came around and he took my boot off and my sock, and treated the wound in my foot. I think he probably poured it full of sulfa powder or whatever. And he attempted to pull out part of a jagged tooth, and then he gave me morphine to use on my mouth until I could be taken back to the aid station. I was walking wounded.

DePue: The bayonet had penetrated all the way through your foot.

Smith: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Did it break any bones?

Smith: No.

DePue: Did it cut any tendons?

Smith: No.

DePue: So in that respect you were extremely fortunate.

Smith: I was very fortunate. I've still got the scar.

DePue: How many other casualties did your platoon suffer?

Smith: I don't know.

DePue: Do you know if there were any that died that evening?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: In your platoon?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Was it the entire company, alpha company that was in the positions?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were there more than one company that was up there?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. What happened to you after that, after you started getting treatment then?

Smith: About three days later, they came and got me, and took me down to the bottom of the hill, drove me to the aid station. They took me on back farther to the rear, to a MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] hospital, where I got dental treatment. They extracted the remnants of one tooth and extracted another one. Told me to go back to my unit. And I said, "How do I get back?" And he said to ask the MP at the gate.

DePue: So you didn't even stay overnight in the MASH unit?

Smith: No.

DePue: And it strikes me as three days that you're in the front lines still; were there other engagements in the next couple of days?

Smith: Yes. But not like that.

DePue: What was going on in the next couple of days?

Smith: Well, two days later, the Chinese attacked again. They didn't get into the wire. Whether it was—we believed later –we determined that it was diversionary.

DePue: The second time.

Smith: The second attack was a diversionary attack. The main force was attacking elsewhere.

DePue: Do you recall where the other location was that they were attacking?

Smith: No.

DePue: Whenever I talk to veterans, it always strikes me[that] Old Baldy is basically a mountaintop position, correct?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: A hilltop.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: As was Pork Chop, as was T-Bone, as were lots of other places where you were. And then inter-connecting fire between those positions.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. So there's an awful lot that can be happening in those valleys, between those positions, I would think.

Smith: There were outposts. There were patrols every night. Some daylight patrols – depending on where the enemy was located at the time –you might have a daylight patrol just to make sure that the enemy isn't massing their forces.

DePue: I hate to belabor this point, but I am still curious about what happened to that Chinese soldier that you killed. Did somebody else come and remove him from the trench then?

Smith: A couple of days later, we piled all of them up.

DePue: Behind the American lines.

Smith: In front of the lines.

DePue: In front of the lines.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: A couple of days later means that they're pretty ripe by that time.

Smith: Well, if you bust them, they're ripe. They're swelling; they're swollen.

DePue: Why wouldn't they remove them and bury them someplace, just for sanitary reasons?

Smith: Didn't have the people, the resources.

DePue: What was the rationale putting them in front of the lines?

Smith: Stop bullets.

DePue: As a message to the enemy?

Smith: Could be.

DePue: How were you processing all of this, Ed? At that time, you're what, eighteen now?

Smith: Just had my eighteenth birthday on Baldy.

DePue: And how do you process what you're seeing?

Smith: Combat is such a high; it was to me. Combat was such a high that it took days to come down after an incident. So you're talking incoherently, somewhat, with each other; you're boisterous; you're alive; you made it through. You don't even think about those that were killed or injured more than you. You just think about you and your friends that are right there.

DePue: Did you have a sense of elation that you'd survived?

Smith: Yes. Yes. Euphoria.

DePue: That you'd beaten them.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Any sense of how many Chinese had died that first night in front of your position?

Smith: Between what we put out there that had gotten up into the lines and were killed, and what we found on patrol, there were probably 150 or so dead Chinese out there.

DePue: That had taken on a couple companies of American troops, it sounds like.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: You mentioned patrols here. Did you go on any patrols?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: As a machine-gunner? Were you carrying a machinegun, or…?—

Smith: No, I was a rifleman.

DePue: What was it like on a typical patrol?

Smith: I don't think there was a typical patrol. We had essentially three kinds of patrols. We had a contact patrol, where you went out and tried to make contact with the enemy, tried to find out exactly where he was and make contact with him. You had an ambush patrol, where you went out and set up an ambush in an area where you knew that the enemy sometimes sent patrols or moved ammunition bearers or food bearers up to the front. You had a patrol where you went out to try to capture a prisoner. That were the three kind of patrols that I had been on. It is a constant fear that the guy next to you is going to goof up, if you don't know him real well. You might be in the same platoon, but you don't know each other. So you were always concerned about the other guy.

DePue: Were you concerned about your own performance and not letting your buddies down?

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: Any particular patrols that you especially remembered, a vivid memory for you?

Smith: One. We went out on an ambush patrol, and I was assistant patrol leader, while the squad leader was patrol leader. And so I took up the rear of the patrol, and we had one of the guys start acting up; he started coughing, he started making noises, he started talking. And we're in no man's land.

DePue: All deliberately, or…?

Smith: Deliberately. Very deliberate. Tried to quiet him down, and couldn't force him to quiet down. Somebody hit him, knocked him down. We tied him up, stuffed a cap in his mouth, and went back to our lines. We went back to report in, and we went into the platoon CP, the command post for the platoon, and was telling what was happening, and somebody untied him outside –he was outside in the trench –and somebody untied him, and he threw a grenade into the CP. We had just rebuilt all of those bunkers, and we had put good grenades sumps in them, and sloped the floors so that they ran into the grenade sump. The grenade went into the sump and blew up. Went back outside and he took off down the hill on the enemy side into the wire, into the minefield. Don't know whether he blew up a mine, or whether somebody else blew it up. Then people started shooting, not aware of what's going on, thinking that it's the enemy in the wire, in the minefield, and so he was killed.

DePue: I would imagine that that kind of experience –seeing all of that, experiencing all of that –would rattle you.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What were you thinking at that time?

Smith: I was incredulous that an American would do that, that a guy would –out in the middle of no-man's-land –start babbling and making noises and fighting with you. Have no way of finding out now what his reasons were, what happened to him, what caused him to do that. Was very concerned about going on patrols after that, much more.

DePue: Recalling the ambush patrols, can you describe a typical one of those, or one that you recall?

Smith: One that I recall is, we were given some map directions, and some drawings, and we were told where some H&I fire would be fired at certain times –harassing and interdiction fire, I believe that's called. We were given coordinates of where some would come at a certain time and to avoid that spot, but to set up our ambush patrol near there, because that was a known route that the enemy used. We sat out there for three or four hours, and no enemy came along. We went back in.

DePue: So successful because the ambush didn't happen.

Smith: Correct.

DePue: Did you go on any patrols where the purpose was to get prisoners?

Smith: Yes. Went on one of that type. There was an enemy outpost that was known to our intelligence somehow; somebody knew where the enemy outpost was. We went to try to capture a prisoner at the enemy outpost. The enemy engaged us before we got there; ended up in a firefight and withdrawing.

DePue: So you weren't successful in that mission.

Smith: No.

DePue: I've always thought that had to be **the** most delicate and dangerous mission to do, or at least one of the ones. While you were on the front lines, were there times when the Americans would actually assault the Chinese positions?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And did you participate in some of that?

Smith: We were in reserve. Once we practiced a company-size raid back in the rear when we were in reserve, and then didn't go on it. I have no idea what occurred or why. But when they were retaking some terrain, our company was in reserve; we were not employed.

DePue: I want to ask a little bit about the tactics, and since you were in the machinegun squad, or the heavy weapons squad, if you can start by how it was that you would deploy the machineguns.

Smith: If you were in defense, you employed the machineguns on the most likely avenues of approach, based upon actual terrain and a map. You figured out which areas the enemy was most likely to approach your area in. And so you set up your machineguns, you set up fields of fire, and you actually fired them to see if they worked. You put aiming stakes in the ground in front of your position, so you knew which of those areas you were firing in, in the dark without seeing it; just by pointing at a stick force from the left or whatever, you knew where you were at. Machineguns were normally done in pairs, even though two machineguns was really the TO&E, we actually normally just always had four at least; two would be employed on each side of the platoon. And then two riflemen with each machinegun group, and there would be four people, two people on each machinegun: a gunner, and a loader. We acted as protection, maybe, with the rifleman, or also to help get more ammo to them if they needed more ammo.

DePue: When you say you had machineguns in pairs, they weren't right next to each other—

Smith: They were normally in the same bunker.

DePue: In the same bunker.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: But each had their own specific field of fire?

Smith: Correct; overlapping.

DePue: Did you have adjacent machinegun positions that would catch—

Smith: Yes, companies or platoons to the left and right.

DePue: Okay. How often did you actually get to man one of the machineguns then?

Smith: Once in combat. Once where we were being attacked, I was on the machinegun.

DePue: Can you describe that particular incident for us?

Smith: I burnt the barrel out and had to replace the barrel. We were firing so much ammunition.

DePue: Was is another night attack?

Smith: Early morning.

DePue: Was some daylight involved then?

Smith: No. It was early morning, three or four o'clock.

DePue: Not much more recollection of the event than that though?

Smith: No.

DePue: Okay. Was there a lot of enemy propaganda going on that you were exposed to?

Smith: Yes, occasionally a loudspeaker would come on somewhere in the valley or the next hill, and someone would speak in English and in Korean. So our own leaflets that were being fired over or dropped on the enemy, we picked those up occasionally. Never saw any printed enemy propaganda.

DePue: What was the nature of the American propaganda that you got your hands on?

Smith: Oh, leaflets telling them to surrender, and how well they'd be treated, and showing them dying if they didn't. Showing—normally, they were in a couple languages. Safe pass, safe combat pass, English, Korean, and Chinese.

DePue: Do you think it was effective at all?

Smith: Very little.

DePue: In either direction.

Smith: Right. On what we were giving them, how are they going to get to us? They've got to leave their own people to get to us, and somebody's going to stop them. Very much the same with us.

DePue: I'd like, if you could, during the times that you were in the front lines, and this wasn't all the time, was it?

Smith: No.

DePue: What was a typical day while you were in the front lines like? From the beginning to the end of the day?

Smith: A typical day was sleep during the daytime and stay up all night. And there was daytime operations going on, but most of the time, if you were on the line, you slept in the daytime. Somebody stayed up and kept watch, but you weren't expecting to get hit during the daytime. Sometimes you had to go down and work with the Korean labor force in bringing water, ammunition, C-rations up the hill. You had to go down and supervise them, and actually help them bring the stuff up. But most of the time, if you were up all night, if you were out on patrol, if you were in a gun position or anything all night, you slept most of the day. Had a little stove, fuel pellets to warm up your C-rations.

DePue: Shave out of your steel pot [helmet]?

Smith: Occasionally. When you have enough water to do it. There were times when there was hot chow, and then you'd go back, and you'd get a helmet full of water and take it back up with you, and shave after you got back up.

DePue: Were you getting a couple of hot meals a day?

Smith: No.

DePue: How often did you get hot meals, then?

Smith: A couple of times a week when we were on the line.

DePue: People were warming up their own coffee on the front lines, though?

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: So you had heat pellets?

Smith: Well, we had heat pellets, but most of us found squad stoves: little stoves that you just put gasoline in and pumped them up.

DePue: Okay. What was your favorite C-ration meal?

Smith: Corned beef hash.

DePue: What was the C-ration you didn't want to see?

Smith: Hamburger patties.

DePue: That doesn't sound appetizing at all. (laughs)

Smith: No. The grease was terrible.

DePue: Was there a lot of swapping of C-rations going back and forth?

Smith: Normally, when they break them down, and the squad leaders would pick them up, or you'd go back to the platoon CP and pick them up, they broke them down by meals. They broke them down so that everybody got their fair share of the fruit, everybody got their fair share of the different packs that were in there. I was one of the few people that liked corned beef hash, so I had more that enough of that.

DePue: How about cigarettes? Was that part of the C-ration at the time?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you a smoker?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Was there anybody who didn't smoke up in the front lines?

Smith: Not that I know of. (smalllaugh) Not that I'm aware of. Sometimes you traded cigarettes, Luckies for Chesterfields, or something like that.

DePue: I know that your unit was back at—at least I think your unit –was back in line November and December time frame as well.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: So let's talk about what it was like in those trenches, in these bunkers. High elevation in the wintertime.

Smith: Cold. You thought you were in Alaska; it was that cold. And very difficult to get warm. We didn't have the latest in the cold weather gear. We were issued some of the stuff that we should have been issued earlier –or that the unit should have been issued earlier –we were issued it. We had shoe packs, which was an insulated boot: leather upper and a rubber lower, and felt insoles to go in that. Your feet sweat if you had much activity, and you had to switch your insoles out and put them inside your shirt –next to your belly or your chest to dry out –so you could switch them. We did have decent parkas; we didn't have the latest, but we had decent parkas. I had a problem with long underwear; I never could get any small enough for me. Go back to shower point, get a shower and change clothes, and all I could get was extra-large long johns, instead of extra small.

DePue: How often were you able to get back to get a shower?

Smith: Not very often. Even in reserve, we didn't necessarily get back to the shower point very often.

DePue: But if you're in the front lines, it's not like you're getting a shower every week, maybe?

Smith: No. Oh, you don't get it at all.

DePue: While you're in the front lines.

Smith: No.

DePue: Well, I know that the secret of keeping warm is keeping clean and dry.

Smith: And layers.

DePue: And layers. What do you think was the worst about extended duty in the front lines then?

Smith: The boredom. Periods of highs with periods of boredom.

DePue: That was worse that the cold?

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: And the lousy food sometimes?

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: What made the boredom—

Smith: I was prepared for the cold, mentally; I was prepared for the lousy food. My feet had been frozen in Camp Breckenridge, and I was hospitalized with frozen feet. So I had a very low tolerance for cold. But I was prepared for it, mentally.

DePue: So you knew how to take care of your feet.

Smith: Yes. Change my socks; change my inserts of my shoes.

DePue: Well, then, did the boredom surprise you?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What did you do? How did you deal with it?

Smith: Played cards. Told lies. Sat around and did nothing. Wrote letters. If you had something to read, read it.

DePue: Curse your fate, maybe?

Smith: No. Not me.

DePue: Were there some grumblers near you?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Well, there were people who were drafted, and maybe married and have a family. There were people who were more family-oriented, possibly, than I was. I wrote a few letters to my girlfriend; I wrote a few letters to my parents. I wasn't a prolific letter writer.

DePue: Did you get an R&R while you were in Korea?

Smith: Yes. I got it a very fortunate time. I got it in December of '52. After I left the unit, it got hit extremely hard; just like we'd been hit in September, the unit got hit harder in December.

DePue: Did you lose some buddies during that action?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: When did you come back from that then?

Smith: Second week in January.

DePue: Were they still on the front lines at that time?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Did you know that they had been hit that hard?

Smith: No. We knew that they'd been hit. We were told that when we were back at Kimpo Airport, getting ready to fly to Japan.

DePue: What was it like then, returning from R&R [rest and relaxation] and finding that out?

Smith: Well, when we went back, there were also replacements going up to the unit at the same time with us, so we knew that they'd probably been hit fairly hard. When you're at the bottom of the feeding chain, there's a lot you don't know. You don't always know what's going on around you; you don't always know what the big picture is. And unless you're in the rear and get an occasional *Stars & Stripes* [official Army newspaper] to read or something, you don't know what's going on, really what's going on.

DePue: Did you lose anybody who was especially close to you while you were in combat?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Is that something that you can talk about?

Smith: Not very well.

DePue: Was it during the time of December, or was it actually—

Smith: It was in December. My best friend and I went on R&R together; somehow that happened, somehow two of us out of the same squad. We didn't know we were going on R&R. The first sergeant called us down to the CP, and said, You're going on R&R. Get in the back of this ¾ ton [truck] and have fun."

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about your R&R.

Smith: Well, we went back to Kimpo Airbase, and were processed: told to unload our weapons, not to get rid of the weapons, make sure the pins were well in our grenades, so forth. We flew to Japan, R&R center, where we were welcomed, and told to turn our weapons in, take all of our grenades and ammunition and put them in barrels –grenades in this barrel and rifle ammunition in this barrel and pistol ammunition in this barrel –and taken in and given showers as long as you wanted to stay there, which was a thing that many of us stayed there for awhile. Came out and were fed beautiful steaks and ice cream. Don't remember what else there was; I just remember the steaks and the ice cream.

DePue: This was all at Kimpo still.

Smith: No, this is all in Japan at the R&R center.

DePue: Oh, ok.

Smith: Japan. But we carried our weapons and ammunition all the way to Japan right on the airplane. And then they measured us for uniforms, tailored uniforms; sewed our patches and insignia on them; gave us a payroll, a pay; told us what to avoid and where to avoid; what hotels not to go to. Of course, you took those names down.

DePue: (laughs)And went to them anyway?

Smith: Yes. (laughs) If you wanted to stay at the R&R center, you could. If you wanted to go into Tokyo, you could. You were told what time and where to be back at, and warned of the consequences; they'll send you to the front lines. (bothlaugh) Told how much whiskey you could take back on the airplane; an enlisted man could take one case.

DePue: That's a lot of whiskey.

Smith: That's a lot of whiskey. A lot of people want it. Might be able to pay for your R&R with the case of whiskey when you come back.

DePue: Did they allow you to have whiskey on the front lines?

Smith: No.

DePue: So that was strictly when you were in the rear areas.

Smith: Yes. I didn't get back to my unit with my whiskey. I mean, I sold it before I ever got back to the unit.

DePue: Sounds like there was a healthy black market for liquor in Korea.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Anything in particular you remember about your R&R that was memorable?

Smith: No. I enjoyed myself, met a couple of young ladies, we went shopping. I remember the streets of Tokyo, and the shopping. The food. How Tokyo differed so much with Korea. How there was no sense of a war going on a short ways away.

DePue: What was the most refreshing part of those differences?

Smith: I think just being able to completely relax, and order a meal at a restaurant. Sit in a bar and play a phonograph. Just complete relaxation.

DePue: And how long was the R&R?

Smith: Seven days.

DePue: Seven days in—

Smith: Seven days R&R.

DePue: In Tokyo, or overall?

Smith: In Tokyo.

DePue: Okay. Then you said it was early January when you returned to your unit and found out that they'd been in some very heavy combat while you were gone.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Was it then that you found out that some close friends of yours had been injured or killed?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Your reaction?

Smith: Was upset. Didn't ask for a lot of details. The fact is, the platoon leader and platoon sergeant were different people. Don't know whether the others were injured or rotated or what. Didn't ask. Went back to my position: machinegun squad.

DePue: Were they in the rear area at that time, or still on the front?

Smith: They just were pulling off.

DePue: Okay. What did the unit do then for the next few weeks or couple of months?

Smith: Reserve and training and replacements.

DePue: You had mentioned that there was awhile there –this might be about that time frame –when the division was in reserve. They went through some more serious training where you served as a demonstrator at an NCO [non-commissioned officer] academy?

Smith: A total of thirty people from the battalion or the regiment –I don't know which –we were sent back to serve as demonstrators, helpers, at the division NCO academy at Chinchon, which was a new experience for me. We served as guards sometimes; we actually went out and fired machineguns when they called a confidence course. We set up the confidence course; they asked for somebody that had had experience with explosives, and I put my hand up. Of course, I had never had any experience with the kind they had, so when I loaded the holes on the confidence course, I put the size I would have used in civilian life in the holes, and they're about two and a half times as strong, so they really got a rocking going through the confidence course that night.

DePue: Oh, wow. It amazes that in the midst of combat, a unit comes back into the rear area, and the division holds an NCO academy.

Smith: The NCO academy was ongoing. I don't know when it started. But it was going on before we came back there, and they were bringing new officers coming in the division, and new NCOs coming in, through that academy. And if they had been in combat before, they didn't go through it, but if they hadn't been, they went through it. We familiarized them with the weapons; we had just switched from a 2.75-inch rocket launcher to a 3.5-inch rocket launcher. We demonstrated it, showed them how to fire it, and had them fire it with dummy rounds. Familiarized them with M-1 and the carbine 45. Familiarized them with enemy weapons. Familiarized them with enemy tactics. Whatever they needed. And we served as demonstrators and assisted the cadre, the instructors, in whatever they needed.

DePue: Did your unit eventually make its way back up the front lines while you were there?

Smith: Yes. Just before I left.

DePue: Was this in the same area, or a little bit farther west?

Smith: A different area. Farther to the coast, so the east.

DePue: What was the nature of the intensity of the combat when you went back this time?

Smith: It was all patrols and artillery and mortar fire.

DePue: Was it as intense as it was at Old Baldy?

Smith: No.

DePue: Do you recall any particular incidents from that time frame?

Smith: No. Just firing back and forth.

DePue: I would assume that you got a Purple Heart from that first engagement, when you—

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Was there any other injury that you sustained?

Smith: Pretty much when the round came back and exploded, I had a concussion from that. Had a few pieces of shrapnel in me, and rocks and stuff in me, that was no big deal.

DePue: And this is all again from that same one incident that you described earlier.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Did you receive any awards during the time you were there?

Smith: No. Just a Combat Infantryman's Badge.

DePue: Well, from what I know about infantrymen who received the CIB, that's pretty important. That's high in the pecking order, isn't it?

Smith: Yes. You wore it.

DePue: All the time.

Smith: Pretty much.

DePue: When did you receive that?

Smith: I guess September of '52.

DePue: You served in the military that had just recently been [racially] integrated.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: How did you think the integration of the Army was going?

Smith: Not well. The units were required to assimilate a certain percentage of blacks, Negroes, as they were called in the military. The fact is, when the military orders were cut, it showed whether you were a Caucasian, a Negro, or other, on your orders. We had some blacks. Since I grew up with blacks and ran across blacks on my travels, I wasn't unused to black people. They didn't bother me. It didn't bother

me sitting down and eating with them, or trading blood with them, or anything else. There was a lot of rednecks in the military: career military rednecks, draftees who were rednecks. A lot of the career military NCOs were Southerners, a lot of them. If they weren't, they acted like it, I guess. Most units, they were assimilated pretty well. And I think it depended more on the people: the blacks themselves or the other individuals within the unit. I had no problems.

DePue: So it wasn't a matter of the performance; it was the prejudices that people brought to service long before?

Smith: That's correct. And as far as performance, only had one in Korea –a black that was a problem –and the rest of them were just like you or I, and the same as the Korean soldiers that served with us. One or two of those were no good; the others were fine.

DePue: But you saw whites who…

Smith: …were just as bad.

DePue: …fit in that same bell curve.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: The soldier who went berserk—

Smith: Was a black.

DePue: Okay. Well, you mentioned the Koreans., Your opinions of the Koreans that you encountered? South Koreans.

Smith: We had South Koreans in our units, KATUSAs, Korean Augmentation to US Forces. They were sons of wealthy people, politically connected people, people high in the military. It was their sons that got to serve with the US units, so they were educated; most of them were well-liked; they were assimilated right into the squad levels. Of course, there was one or two that fit outside of it, that you wouldn't cross the street to spit on him. But most of them were just like we were.

DePue: What was the reputation that the Korean units had, the ROKs? [Republic of Korea soldiers]

Smith: Very poor. There was one ROK unit that had a very good reputation; it was based upon their commanding officer and his abilities, and the reputation he had of actually shooting a couple of battalion commanders in combat for cowardice. Took out his .45 and shot them.

DePue: This was a Korean general officer?

Smith: Korean general officer –who is their MacArthur –a highly regarded man yet today.

DePue: But why did the rest of the ROK units have such a poor reputation?

Smith: Poor leadership.

DePue: Did American troops consider them to be unreliable units?

Smith: If they were beside you, you were worried.

DePue: Did the units serve with some other U.N. forces? [United Nations]

Smith: Within each regiment, we had a battalion of U.N. forces. We had Dutch, Turks, so forth.

DePue: How would you describe them as soldiers?

Smith: Extremely good.

DePue: The Dutch and the Turks both?

Smith: All of them. English.

DePue: So that didn't make you nervous, to be serving next to them.

Smith: No. You were warned about being around the Turks; don't go in their lines at night, even if you knew all the passwords and you can speak Turkish, because you won't come out alive. They didn't shoot; they waited for you to come up, and they used a knife on you. So the reputation went.

DePue: (laughter) But otherwise, you were happy to have a Turk next to you?

Smith: Oh, yes. Very happy to have them. Happy to have the Marines.

DePue: What was your impression of the fellow soldiers you served with?

Smith: Most of them were outstanding people. They were farmers, machine shop workers, or people like me.

DePue: How about the NCOs and officers you had serving with you?

Smith: I had very little contact with the officers. I knew more about my battalion commander than I knew about my company commander.

DePue: Just didn't see the company commander?

Smith: Didn't see him.

DePue: Platoon leaders, you didn't see?

Smith: Uh-uh.

DePue: Really?

Smith: Really.

DePue: Well, I would assume that you'd get kind of an attitude that they weren't willing to carry their load, then.

Smith: You just didn't know. I'm sure I had four or five platoon leaders during the time I was there.

DePue: Because they'd been injured or killed or rotated out?

Smith: No, just rotated out.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: Three or four platoon sergeants. Squad leaders were never more than a corporal.

DePue: What was the highest rank you had while you were in Korea?

Smith: Corporal?

DePue: Does that mean you were a squad leader?

Smith: No, I was assistant squad leader.

DePue: But still in this weapons squad.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. How about the enemy? Your opinion and the soldiers' opinions about the enemy that you faced?

Smith: Very able. Rumors were, many times, that they were drugged up, or that they forced them—there were people behind them with guns to force them to go into combat. Some of the things we did find, though the first people that came up to go through the wire or to lay down on the wire were unarmed. They didn't have weapons. Now, whether the people behind them picked up their weapon or what, we don't know, but they weren't armed. They brought Bangalore torpedoes up and pushed into the concertina, into the mine field, and exploded them. Some of them actually came up and ran and charged, and laid down on the wire, so that the assault force could go across them, across the wire, across their bodies. We knew that they were capable, as far as weapons, as far as firing mortars and artillery. We feared the mortars and artillery more than we feared the attacks.

DePue: How did you cope with the mortar and artillery barrages then?

Smith: Depending on what time of day it was, hunker in a hole and get ready. Sometimes it would be just harassing fire; other times it would be preparatory to assault. Other times they might just be trying to get a rise out of the US.

DePue: Get a reaction from you guys.

Smith: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Well, with all of that going on, it sounds like –where these bunker positions were – was pretty barren terrain.

Smith: Yes. Nothing.

DePue: Nothing.

Smith: There's still nothing there.

DePue: Except a lot of shrapnel, maybe.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Did you have much experience with Korean civilians then?

Smith: Very little, during that period. When I was back at division headquarters we were allowed to go into Chinchon if we had time off. And the people there were happy to see us, and get us to try their foods, and talk to us, and trade cigarettes out of us, or whatever.

DePue: I would imagine that life in Korea was extremely hard, and these were desperate people, oftentimes.

Smith: They didn't appear to be. They didn't act like they were desperate. I'm sure they were. But they had a life and they tried to live it. They were happy that we were keeping the North and the Chinese from disrupting their lives.

DePue: So they were appreciative of the American involvement.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you able to stay in touch with your family pretty well?

Smith: I think so. I got a few packages while I was there, and letters. They sent me Ray's Chili from Springfield, (DePuelaughs) since I grew up on it. My mother tried sending a cake a couple of times. (laughs) That didn't arrive very well. The Mello Cream doughnut people sent me some doughnuts once.

DePue: I imagine they didn't last very long.

Smith: No. They didn't get there in great shape, but they were fantastic.

DePue: A little taste from home.

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: How often did you guys get mail, then?

Smith: If we were on the line itself, probably weekly, when hot chow came up, at evening chow, not at the breakfast chow; if they brought hot breakfast chow up, no mail came. But in the evening, it might come.

DePue: So was that one of the highlights of the week, when it came?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Sure.

DePue: You mentioned you had a girlfriend. Were you writing to your girlfriend during this time as well?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Which one did you prefer, a letter from your girlfriend or your folks?

Smith: My girlfriend.

DePue: How serious were you then?

Smith: We're married.

DePue: Okay. (laughs) How did you meet her?

Smith: We were next-door neighbors.

DePue: So you grew up in Springfield next to each other.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. And when did you start dating?

Smith: After I entered the Army.

DePue: So not until then.

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: So she was certainly aware, though, that you had kind of toured the country before you joined.

Smith: Oh, she was very aware. She kept her eyes on me all the time. She knew when I had girlfriends at my house, or when I came home and when I left, and…

DePue: She was much more interested in you at that time than you were in her?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What's her name?

Smith: Donna.

DePue: What was her maiden name?

Smith: Pelham. P-E-L-H-A-M.

DePue: Okay. You came home at what time then? Returned from Korea when?

Smith: April of ’53.

DePue: And what was the reason that you came home then?

Smith: I rotated. I had spent my time in the front lines; I had forty-five points, whatever. So I rotated.

DePue: Okay. And you came back as an individual rotation.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: The 2nd Division was still there at the time.

Smith: 2nd Division was still there.

DePue: What was your attitude getting rotated home?

Smith: I was happy in one aspect and sad in another. I was happy to be going back to civilization. R&R was a touch of civilization, and not sleeping under a real roof for months. Walls with windows in them that you could look out. But in another way, I hated leaving; I hated leaving friends.

DePue: Was that the main reason you hated leaving?

Smith: I think so.

DePue: Did you feel a sense of obligation to those people?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. So you returned, you said, in April of ’53.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was the route you took to get home then?

Smith: Airplane to Japan, bus from the airfield to Yokohama, Yokohama replacement depot waiting for enough people to fill a troop ship. So I was in Yokohama maybe two weeks.

DePue: So you got your troop ship experience.

Smith: Oh, I got my troop ship, believe me. We were on an overloaded tub that lost part of its steering mechanism about four days out of Seattle. So we were going in a circle waiting for a tug to pick us up. So they cut chow down to two meals a day, and the seas were rough because of not being able to steer properly into the seas.

DePue: So there werefolks who were having a hard time keeping their meals down?

Smith: A lot of seasickness. A lot of diarrhea, a lot of vomiting. In the mess deck, they had the tables in a standing position, nothing seated, and you'd go to chow, and there might be two other people at the table with you. You had to be careful that you didn't let your tray slide down, because somebody might vomit in your tray before it came back to you.

DePue: How did you cope with all that?

Smith: Oh, I loved it.

DePue: You didn't have a problem with seasickness?

Smith: I didn't have a problem. I harassed other people. I'd get down in a troop compartment, and they'd be laying there on a bunk seasick, and I'd get up and get on a pipe and hang up there and then swing back and forth, and they'd get all mad at me. (chuckles) The bad part was going into the latrine, and the guys using two stools at one time: vomiting in one and defecating in the other, and stuff on the floors. It was a job keeping it clean.

DePue: When you enlisted, did you enlist for two years?

Smith: No. Three.

DePue: Three years. So you still had quite a bit of time left in the Army when you returned.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was your thought about what you wanted to do with your life at that time?

Smith: Just stay in the Army.

DePue: Why?

Smith: I just thought I wanted to.

DePue: Is that where you felt like you belonged?

Smith: Yeah. I felt comfortable there.

DePue: Okay. And where did you end up? Did you get to go home first, or did you go—

Smith: Got to go home. Got to Seattle and processed and given a uniform. Turned loose. Told where to report, when. So I went home and spent my time visiting relatives and doing whatever. Friends. Got on a bus and went to—I can't remember now, it's a camp down in Missouri, was down there—

DePue: Leonard Wood?

Smith: No. It was down in the foothills. Can't remember the name of it. It's a place where they train community college and other things now.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: I was only there a few days. They were going to put in a branch disciplinary barracks there; a bunch of us were sent there to man the disciplinary barracks, but it hadn't been constructed yet.

DePue: When you were coming back, what was your intention as far as Donna was concerned?

Smith: Eventually getting married.

DePue: Did she know that was your intention?

Smith: Oh, yes.

DePue: Okay. So had you guys kind of discussed that even before you went to Korea?

Smith: Not really. But it was an unspoken agreement.

DePue: Okay. Was it the kind of thing that was discussed in letters back and forth?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. When did you get married?

Smith: In August of '53.

DePue: So you didn't waste too much time in that.

Smith: No.

DePue: And where were you married?

Smith: Aiken, South Carolina.

DePue: Because that's where you ended up being posted?

Smith: That's where I was, at Camp Gordon, Georgia, outside of Augusta. It's now Fort Gordon.

DePue: So Aiken, South Carolina is where you got married?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And Fort Gordon?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. You said it was Camp Gordon at the time?

Smith: Camp Gordon.

DePue: Okay. Where—right across the border then?

Smith: Yes. Augusta is on the river, North Augusta is in South Carolina.

DePue: What did Donna think about your desire to stay in the Army?

Smith: Well, that hadn't been discussed at that time.

DePue: Okay. Do you think she was hoping that you'd do something else after that three year hitch?

Smith: No, I think she pretty well knew I'd do something like that.

DePue: Okay. This was also about the time that things—actually, you were married right after this—that things were winding down in Korea. Do you recall the occasion where Syngman Rhee released tens of thousands of prisoners into the Korean countryside?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was your reaction to that?

Smith: Thought it was funny at the time, personally. Found out what kind of chaos it created later.

DePue: What did you hear about that?

Smith: From people coming back.

DePue: But what were they telling you? What was the nature of the chaos?

Smith: Oh, that—first they were told that the prisoners had escaped, and they were sent out to try to round them up. And so a few guys got hurt and a few guys got killed in the exercise. But then they were told that the prisoners hadn't escaped, that they were turned loose.

DePue: Were the ex-prisoners the ones who were lashing out at the Americans who were looking for them?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And again, I would think, having been at Koje-do, and charged into a couple of these compounds itself, did you have a hard time making sense of all of that?

Smith: Yes. It was incomprehensible. But at some point in life, you learn that people tend to congregate, go along with fealties, with people of their own kind. And consequently, I guess I just felt, he's Korean, they were Korean, they were Chinese, he did what he thought he should do.

DePue: He being Syngman Rhee?

Smith: Syngman Rhee.

DePue: Well, part of the reason, as I understand it, was the total frustration that the peace talks were bogged down, and it was bogged down because of this issue of…

Smith: Prisoners.

DePue: … [Prisoner] repatriation. What were your thoughts then when you heard that there was an armistice signed?

Smith: I was very happy. But then found out it wasn't the end of the war, that it was just a truce. And that the Americans pulled back, and the North Koreans and Chinese pulled back, from a given arbitrary line, and set up lines again.

DePue: Well, at one time, when MacArthur was hailed as a hero, you said yourself, because he was insistent that the war end with total occupation of the North. But were you okay, then, with that aspect of the way that it ended?

Smith: No. Not the fact that it was just a truce, the fact that the war wasn't a win, the fact that we still had troops there.

DePue: Okay. And—but again, you're trying to put your own life back together again. What were you doing it for at Gordon?

Smith: I was cadre. I was in a basic training company. I was a platoon sergeant and I was field first sergeant of a basic training company.

DePue: Did you enjoy that work?

Smith: Oh, very much.

DePue: At this point in your life, did you have any difficulties in adjusting from that intense combat to this civilian life?

Smith: I don't think so. I think I went right into it. I wasn't a heavy drinker; life satisfied me very well. I had a couple friends that I'd met along the way, right before I got married. Friends and I would take off for a weekend, do whatever. After I got married, it was my wife, and then we had friends. I enjoyed what I did. We lived in Augusta, and I took a bus early in the morning to a camp and went in and woke the troops up, and got them out for reveille and chow, and marched them to training every day. Put them to bed, and went home.

DePue: Well, at this point in time, I think what I'd like to do—this seems to be a natural place to take a break, and in the next session –talk about those inter-war years, at least for yourself, and your experiences in Vietnam. But I did want to ask you to be a little bit reflective on Korea again, and that experience. Looking back some fifty-five years later, what are your thoughts now about your experience there?

Smith: I think my experience was typical. I think my experience was something that I was expecting. I know that there were times that I enjoyed combat for the high that it gave. I don't say I enjoyed it at the moment, but afterwards.

DePue: Are you proud about what you accomplished in Korea?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Do you think the America, the United States, was there for the right reason?

Smith: I believe so, based upon the treaties that we had made at the time. Based upon the fact that we had troops in Korea at the time the North Koreans made their incursion into the South.

DePue: Looking at Korea today, are you proud about the way the South has come back, economically and politically?

Smith: They're the most industrious people in the world. I went back to Korea in the military for eighteen months, from the first of January of 1961 through June of 1962, I was in Korea. Back up right behind what is the front line, in the 1st Cavalry Division. I went back to Korea in 2001 on a return trip, and the people are even more industrious now than they were in '62. If you need a new set of tires on your car at midnight, you can go to the car dealership and wake the guy up, and he'll come down and put new tires on your car. It is such a people and a work ethic that is unbelievable. Just unheard of. Yeah. So I was very proud. And the South Korean army is very well trained and very—how do I want to say it?—if they're told to stand at parade rest and not move for two hours, they'll stand at parade rest and not move for two hours. And they man positions on the line right now; they go in

position and they hold a rifle for two hours, watching out in front of them into no man's land.

DePue: Any final comments you'd like to make? Any reflections on your experiences in Korea before we turn off the recorder today?

Smith: No, I just—I'm glad that I got to go, when I got to go. I'm glad that I survived it. I never thought I wasn't going to survive it; I always thought that I was going to come back and be able to tell war stories. So I'm just glad I got to do it.

DePue: Okay. With that, I think we'll conclude for today.

Smith: Okay.

DePue: Thank you very much, Ed.

Smith: Okay.

(end of interview)

Interview with Edward L. Smith

VRK-A-L-2008-039.02

Interview # 2: August 14, 2008

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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A Note to the Reader

This transcript is based on an interview recorded by the ALPL Oral History Program. Readers are reminded that the interview of record is the original video or audio file, and are encouraged to listen to portions of the original recording to get a better sense of the interviewee's personality and state of mind. The interview has been transcribed in near-verbatim format, then edited for clarity and readability, and reviewed by the interviewee. For many interviews, the ALPL Oral History Program retains substantial files with further information about the interviewee and the interview itself. Please contact us for information about accessing these materials.

DePue: Today is Thursday, August 14, 2008. My name is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here for part two of the series of interviews with Ed Smith. Part one with you, Ed, was about your Korean War experiences; this part is going to focus more on the years between Korea and Vietnam, and especially on the Vietnam years and afterwards.

Smith: Okay.

DePue: Thank you very much for allowing us to do this.

Smith: You're welcome.

DePue: When we stopped in the last interview, we were talking about your experiences at Camp Gordon. And as I understand, you were there from 1953 to 1955.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: And a young newlywed at the time.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Did you start a family while you were at Camp Gordon?

Smith: Yes. We had our first child born there in 1955.

DePue: And his or her name?

Smith: Her name is Sandra.

DePue: Okay. And what happened in 1955 in your military career?

Smith: I moved from Camp Gordon to the 7th Army in Germany, to a place called Wildflecken, up on the East/West German border.

DePue: What was your assignment there?

Smith: I was a squad leader in an armored outfit, the 373rd Armored Infantry Battalion.

DePue: Now this is during the height of the Cold War. What years exactly where you there?

Smith: 1955 through 1958.

DePue: What was the rank that you had?

Smith: It was sergeant.

DePue: And could you tell me again the unit that you were in?

Smith: 373rd Armored Infantry Battalion. We were stationed right on the East/West German border, right by the Fulda Gap.

DePue: Okay. The Fulda Gap is a famous piece of terrain, in American military circles at least. Explain or describe the Fulda Gap.

Smith: The Fulda Gap is the best route of attacking Germany, coming into Germany. It allows armored vehicles to move very quickly.

DePue: Your Korean experience was — correct me if I'm wrong—it was straight-leg infantry. Dismounted infantry.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Was this your first experience in armored?

Smith: In armored infantry. I was in a tank battalion in the National Guard.

DePue: Okay. So you had some experience.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was the vehicle that you had?

Smith: They were T-13s, meaning that they hadn't been accepted yet. Then they became M-75 armored personnel carriers.

DePue: I'm afraid that's one I'm not familiar with.

Smith: And then we got the later versions that were swimmable [amphibious].

DePue: Contrast the experiences: the straight-leg infantry in Korea versus the armored infantry when you got to Germany.

Smith: There's nothing similar, especially when we did things like go on alert and move up on the border. It was all out right through the farmers' beet fields and everything else, and G-5 was following and assessing damages, and paying the farmers for their crops.

DePue: G-5 –that would mean at the division level?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: G-5 is what?

Smith: It has to do with people, civilians, that type of thing.

DePue: Civilian military operations?

Smith: Yes

DePue: How many people in your squad?

Smith: Normally we had six. We should have had ten.

DePue: But you were below strength for what reason?

Smith: The whole Army was on below-strength level. The Army was on a draw-down; they were forcing people out, especially officers. Reduction in force, RIF. And it wasn't a good time in some ways, as far as the people. But as far as where we were and how things operated, it was an outstanding experience.

DePue: What was the nature of the duty that you had then? Was it oftentimes actually patrolling along the Fulda Gap region?

Smith: No. We never patrolled. Our mission was to hold, and then destroy all bridges between the area where we were and Frankfurt. We were to hold until the dependents were evacuated. So it was a mission we practiced a few times. Munitions were pre-set in bridges. We had certain bridges that we were supposed to blow, and then we would move as fast as we could on through to the next bridge, and then blow it.

DePue: During these years, was there an expectation, or a fear, that the Soviets could come across the border?

Smith: Yes. We were told the Soviets had twenty-one armored divisions. We practiced, and we went on alert one time, and the Soviets were maneuvering on the other side of the border. The Soviets were sitting there revving their tank engines, and then pulling the tank forward twenty or thirty feet, and then backing up, pulling the tanks forward and then backing up, trying to intimidate us, or to get us to do something wrong.

DePue: Do you think they were trying to get it so the Americans would spark something?

Smith: Yes. So that we would cross the border.

DePue: A propaganda coup on their part?

Smith: Whatever, yes. They were definitely trying to intimidate us.

DePue: Were you in a position where you were able to actually observe the Soviet troops?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Fulda Gap. Is that on the border with East Germany?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were there East German troops there as well?

Smith: No.

DePue: What was your impression of the Soviet troops you saw?

Smith: They looked like they were well-trained, disciplined people. They were doing what they were supposed to do. We saw very few troops; most of them were buttoned down in the tanks. They had armored infantry, but they were not deployed.

DePue: It's certainly a different kind of foe than you faced just a couple of years before in Korea.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: You had respect for the Soviets then?

Smith: Yes. Based upon our training.

DePue: You were there in 1956 then. I believe that's when the Soviets went into Hungary in a big way to squash a rebellion there. Did that heighten tensions along the border?

Smith: Yes. That put us on alert for three or four days.

DePue: What were the thoughts, the discussion, going on around the Army troops at that time?

Smith: We didn't think anything was going to come of it. We didn't think the Americans were going to do anything. That we were just going to let the Soviets do whatever they wanted to do.

DePue: So that was the big question, whether or not NATO, and the United States in particular, would respond.

Smith: Correct.

DePue: Okay. What were your thoughts personally about the subject?

Smith: I thought everything was going to be fine. I thought that it was just a normal thing with the Soviets; they were just doing what they've always done.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that you didn't see this as a reason why the United States should go to Hungary's rescue?

Smith: That's correct. I didn't think that there was any reason that we would. Whether we should or not, but no way that we would.

DePue: Well, going back to a comment that you made, that you were traditionally, habitually under-strength in your squad and across the force, isn't this also a time when there's a universal draft?

Smith: Yes. No, the draft ended in '55.

DePue: Okay. I'm going to have to go back and look at my—

Smith: We had draftees in our unit, but the draft itself had ended in 1955. (cell phone rings)

DePue: Okay. Let's go ahead and pause this for a second. (pause in recording)

DePue: Well, shall we start again here then? We just had to answer the telephone quickly, but we were talking about the draft and the rationale for why there were fewer troops available then. Ed, can you talk about that just a little bit?

Smith: Well, I guess that it was money as much as anything. We never had enough fuel for our vehicles to train. There were times that we went out training without our vehicles, pretending that we were in an armored personnel carrier going down a road, clank, clank, clank, stopping and dismounting and going on line.

DePue: Well, I know enough about soldiers to know that they really don't like to play games with that kind of stuff.

Smith: That's correct. It was stupid. We were out for over a week without our vehicles.

DePue: Tough to maintain morale as a squad leader?

Smith: Yes. Most of the troops were pretty lighthearted. Most of the troops took things as they came.

DePue: I assume that your family accompanied you there.

Smith: They came later.

DePue: Later as in what time frame?

Smith: I went in June of 1958, and they came in December of 1958.

DePue: Okay. I thought you were there from '55 to—

Smith: Oh, yeah, sorry. I've got my dates—1955, June of '55, and they came in December of '55.

DePue: Okay. So most of the time you were there, the family was with you.

Smith: Yes. That's correct.

DePue: How did they like their experience in Germany?

Smith: They enjoyed it. We lived on the German economy for quite a while, but with a German family. We learned to speak German, learned to live their way of life, and my daughter learned to speak German as much as she spoke English.

DePue: Can you describe what it was like in Germany during that time? It's about ten years after the end of World War II.

Smith: It is; however, Germany still has not been rebuilt. Frankfurt had many buildings that were still rubble, destroyed areas. First impression I got when I got up to the Wildflecken area was seeing an old German couple with an ox-cart and an ox. When they stopped, they hooked the woman and the ox up to the plow, and the old man held the plow while the woman and the ox pulled the plow.

DePue: Well, that would be quite a contrast from what you would probably experience in—

Smith: Yes. Did not expect anything like that.

DePue: What was the attitude of the German people towards the American soldiers there?

Smith: It was very good in that area: little town of Wildflecken at the base of the mountain that we were on. Other areas, everybody was nice. The mountain right next to us was the Kreuzburg; there was a monastery up there that had been there since the Crusades. It was a common thing for German people to come by train and walk, in the summer and spring, up to the top of the mountain, and enjoy the hospitality, the monks' food and drink, and then walk back down and catch a train back out. We were at the end of the train line.

DePue: End of the train line, I guess meaning…

Smith: The train came from Hanau, Frankfurt, but we were the stop it was in, because of the border.

DePue: Why do you think the Germans warmed to the American GIs like they did? We were, after all, kind of, still an occupying force.

Smith: They still felt we rescued them from what was happening. They were losing sons, husbands, children, whole families due to the bombings. When the war ended they were very relieved.

DePue: Relieved that the war was finally over.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: How much of it had to do with the Soviets just across the border?

Smith: I think a lot of it, at that time, because of the reputation that the Soviets had already gotten by taking the parts of East Germany that they took, and taking Berlin.

DePue: So the German population was very fearful of the Soviets?

Smith: I believe they were.

DePue: This was also an important part of your life as well. Talk to us a little bit about your reflections back on your experience in Korea, and how that affected your life there in Germany?

Smith: Well, it made me realize that we were training for a reason. I was hoping we didn't go to war, but I knew that we were prepared and trained and could do it.

DePue: Okay. You described, when we met earlier, that this was a tough period for you personally, though.

Smith: I was drinking heavy. Not as heavy as to be incapacitated, but many times on the way home, I'd stop at the NCO[4] club and have a few drinks before I went home.

DePue: But that's not unusual for soldiers of that era.

Smith: That was normal. If you didn't, you were abnormal.

DePue: But you've also described that you were a different person than you are today, during this time frame.

Smith: I was different in personality. I was different in the way I acted. I had a very outgoing personality. I was very active at everything I did. We socialized at the NCO club on weekends, and I enjoyed myself. I knew everybody on the base.

DePue: Did you have any difficulty struggling with what your experiences were in Korea?

Smith: I did, but I did not realize it. I didn't realize that was the problem.

DePue: Well, can you go into that in some detail for this?

Smith: I was having problems –physical problems –and it was determined that the physical problems were caused by mental problems, caused by my experiences in Korea. That was the verdict of the psychiatrist. I was evacuated to Landstuhl Army Hospital, and there they determined that my illness was not physical, that it was mental, and that they recommended that I be discharged from the military.

DePue: What were your physical problems?

Smith: I was having pains in the lower right quadrant of my stomach they thought was appendicitis.

DePue: Did you understand at that time what was going on?

Smith: No.

[4] Non-commissioned officer

DePue: When you got to Landstuhl, I assume it was there that you talked to a psychiatrist?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was the nature of the treatment that he was giving you? The kind of questioning, the dialogue?

Smith: Very few questions that I can remember. Asked me about my life, and about Korea, and how my life was now, and how I got along in my unit. What I did, and how I liked the Army. That's about it.

DePue: I'm assuming that you were telling him that you liked the Army.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: So what was it that he discovered that caused him to make the recommendation that you be discharged?

Smith: I guess what is now called PTSD, [post-traumatic stress disorder] from my experiences in Korea that were affecting me.

DePue: Were these then very severe pains that you were suffering?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Debilitating, where you couldn't function.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What kinds of things do you think were triggering that then?

Smith: I really don't know. Because I got along well in the unit; I got along well with the people that worked for me and the people that I worked for. So I have no idea what caused it.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: I was a person that, if I was sleeping in the barracks or I was sleeping in the field, nobody want to come wake me up, because they didn't know how I'd react when I woke up.

DePue: Were there a couple of specific incidents that you…?

Smith: Well, I would come out of a sleeping back or out of the bed ready to fight.

DePue: How was the family life affected by all of this?

Smith: Family life was not affected greatly. It was a concern to my wife, about my pains and my problems. But we got along fine. Everything went well.

DePue: Was she concerned about the drinking?

Smith: I don't know. I don't know. She was concerned about the fact that I didn't come home immediately a lot of nights, that I would stop for an hour or two.

DePue: Would you have described yourself –or did they describe you at the time –as an alcoholic?

Smith: No.

DePue: Just a typical soldier who enjoys his beer?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. What was your reaction when the doctor told you that he's recommending discharge?

Smith: He didn't tell me that. He told me that I needed psychiatric medication. He prescribed something, and he sent me back to see a doctor that works for the Army Hospital, which was the nearest hospital to where we were stationed. The doctor there treated me medically, and I went to see him three or four times, and got medicine, and then stopped.

DePue: Was this another psychiatrist?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: So it was unknown to you that this one doctor had recommended you be discharged.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: When did you find that out?

Smith: About a year ago, when I got all of my records from the Army, all of my medical records. I found that in there.

DePue: What was your reaction when they told you that your stomach pains were because of psychological or mental problems?

Smith: I learned to accept it.

DePue: Was there part of you that was fighting that verdict, or that…?

Smith: I don't think so. I accepted it pretty readily. I accepted the taking of the medication without a problem.

DePue: So obviously, there were others –maybe this doctor in Wuertzburg, and certainly your chain of command –that disagreed with the verdict of being discharged.

Smith: The papers were sent to my company commander, and the company commander at that time was a Captain Penrod. I got along well with him. The fact is, when we were having squad tests, I was squad leader in one test and assistant squad leader with three other squads going through squad testing, so I guess everybody thought pretty much of me. I wasn't an infantry squad leader; I was a weapons squad leader.

DePue: Okay. What company?

Smith: I was in B Company 373rd Armored Infantry Battalion.

DePue: And in the weapons squad.

Smith: Right.

DePue: Which means, what kind of weapons did you have?

Smith: Machineguns and rocket launchers.

DePue: But similar kind of duties as you had in Korea.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. Were you greatly concerned about your medical condition?

Smith: Not after I came back and was taking the medication and it just stopped. I was fine.

DePue: So you felt much better after you started the medication.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was the medication?

Smith: I have no idea.

DePue: How long did you take it?

Smith: Probably six months.

DePue: They said to go ahead and stop taking the medication?

Smith: Well, I just stopped going to the doctor.

DePue: Okay. Any change of symptoms after that?

Smith: No.

DePue: So you thought it was all behind you then.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. What time frame was this. Do you know?

Smith: It was 1956, '57.

DePue: Okay. In what timeframe in 1958 did you get reassigned?

Smith: Left Germany in June of 1958.

DePue: Okay. And by the time you left, you thought all of this was behind you.

Smith: I'd forgotten all of it.

DePue: To what extent do you say you'd forgotten all of it? You kind of just put it behind you, or…?

Smith: I just forgot it, and didn't even think about it.

DePue: Okay. And the rest of your military career was going well?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Had you gotten promoted while you were in Germany?

Smith: No. There was no promotions in the Army.

DePue: Too many people and not enough places to be assigned.

Smith: Right.

DePue: Okay. What happens after Germany then? Where do you go?

Smith: To Fort Lewis, Washington to the 4th Infantry Division?

DePue: And what were your duties at Fort Lewis?

Smith: At first I was a squad leader, and then I was an operations sergeant for the company, and then I got some recruits to train and I was a platoon sergeant for recruits, and then I went back to being operations sergeant.

DePue: And how long were you at Fort Lewis?

Smith: Until December of 1960. Not long.

DePue: About two and a half years or so. Did any of these medical conditions you had in Germany reoccur there?

Smith: No, they did not.

DePue: Okay. And where did you after Fort Lewis?

Smith: January of 1960, I went to Korea. I was in an infantry unit: the 5th Cav[Cavalry] of the 1st Cav Division, and we were backing the line. We did not patrol, except when they thought there were line crossers; then we would go up into the positions that we would normally occupy and check them out and make sure there wasn't anybody hiding in there.

DePue: What were your impressions when you first arrived in Korea, after having been there ten years before?

Smith: It was an amazing difference. But it was still country; where we were at it was country-country. Nothing but little small huts and dirt roads and dirt paths and rice paddies, hills.

DePue: The Korean people were appreciative of the Americans being there?

Smith: I believe so. They liked us and they liked our money.

DePue: They liked our winning, you say?

Smith: Our money.

DePue: Oh, your money. Yeah. You said it was a lot different. Did you have a chance, then, to get into some of the cities as well?

Smith: No. Never into a city. Nothing but the towns and villages.

DePue: Have they started to rebuild?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you impressed by how quickly things were getting put back together?

Smith: Yes. I was impressed by how they did things and how they took anything that we considered as trash and used it to make something.

DePue: Okay. Tell me a little bit more about the nature of your duty while you were there.

Smith: I was squad leader at first, in a machinegun squad, and then I became company operations NCO, and that's what I was the entire rest of the time I was there.

DePue: And what was your rank then?

Smith: I was a sergeant, but I made E-6 there.

DePue: Okay. E-6, staff sergeant.

Smith: Yes. I was already a staff sergeant E-5.

DePue: Is that because they changed the rank structure?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. I guess I knew that about Korea.

Smith: I never did wear just three stripes. I went from two-stripe corporal to a sergeant with one rocker. That was in E-5.

DePue: That's what you were wearing in Germany as well?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And that was considered an E-5?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Well, in the current US Army, that's a sergeant, and an E-6 is a staff sergeant.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: And the sergeant has three stripes, and the staff sergeant has three stripes and a rocker.

Smith: Right. So when I got promoted to E-6, I did nothing. I didn’t have to change my chevrons. I already was wearing one with a rocker.

DePue: Was there a rank insignia with just the three stripes?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: So why were you wearing three stripes and a rocker?

Smith: Because I'd been that rank since 1954, and that's what it was then. There was no plain sergeants, no buck sergeants.

DePue: Okay. Did your family accompany you to Korea?

Smith: No. They did not.

DePue: Okay. How many children did you have at this time?

Smith: Three.

DePue: So you had two that were born in Germany?

Smith: No, none born in Germany. Had two born at Fort Lewis.

DePue: Fort Louis, okay. I'm sorry. You were there for how long?

Smith: In Korea? The tour I went there on was a one-year two. However, President Kennedy extended everyone, so I spent eighteen months there.

DePue: Why did that happen?

Smith: I don't know. The events in Cuba triggered a lot of different things. Rather than let the Army keep getting littler, he made everybody extend in the military, and he extended tours overseas.

DePue: Okay. So you got there in January of 1960.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: So you should have been rotating back to the States around January or February of 1961. The Cuban Missile Crisis didn't happen until later in '62. Where were you when the Cuban Missile Crisis happened?

Smith: I don't remember, I guess.

DePue: Okay. Do you know when in 1962 you returned back to the States?

Smith: July.

DePue: July of '62. Did you enjoy your tour in Korea?

Smith: Yes. I made the most of it.

DePue: Okay. And did you have any further problems with the situation you described that first developed in Germany?

Smith: No.

DePue: Okay. Would you describe yourself as the same person as you were in Germany?

Smith: Not really. I was a little different. I drank every day. I patrolled at night a lot of times –the villages –myself and my best friend. We were courtesy patrol; there were no MPs [military police] in our area. So we patrolled the local villages to make sure the guys were keeping straight.

DePue: Well, you described yourself when you were in Germany, at least, and correct me if I get this wrong, but outgoing, rather gregarious, friendly. Would you say you're still that same person in Korea?

Smith: I was partly that same person, but there were times that I would like to have a drink in the morning. So there was a difference.

DePue: So you were drinking more heavily in Korea.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: How much of that was due to the fact that you were separated from the family?

Smith: All of it.

DePue: So you really missed the family then.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Did you get a chance during that timeframe to get a leave?

Smith: Yes, I found an obscure regulation, and took advantage of it; I put in for a leave and was allowed to return to the States. I just had to show that I had the money to make the trip, but I hopped: I took military flights back to the States and then back to Korea.

DePue: How long were you back in the States?

Smith: Twenty-nine days out of a thirty-day leave.

DePue: Okay. So you got back in pretty quick shape.

Smith: Yes. Going back, I couldn’t go back the direct route; I had to go from California to Washington, and then from Washington to Hawaii, from Hawaii to Japan, from

Japan to Pusan, and then I had a tough time hitchhiking from Pusan up to my unit on the DMZ. [de-militarized zone]

DePue: That takes more than a day, doesn't it?

Smith: I lucked out and found an Air Force operations sergeant who found me a pilot and a plane that would take me all the way up to division headquarters.

DePue: Were Donna and the children living at Fort Lewis on the post?

Smith: No, they were in Springfield, Illinois.

DePue: They came back here.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. How did the two of you manage to keep in touch with each other?

Smith: Communications by mail.

DePue: And how did she cope while you were overseas during this time?

Smith: She had to cope as both parents. Fortunately, my parents were near, her parents were near, her family was near. So that was a big help.

DePue: It was her decision to come back to Springfield, versus staying at Fort Lewis?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Because of the proximity of the family and the support they can provide. Did she like the fact that you were a soldier and going all over the world?

Smith: It was a decision that I made, and we discussed it in our early marriage, and she accepted it.

DePue: Okay. Something you didn’t argue about, because that was reality.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. Where did you go after Korea?

Smith: Went to Fort Ord, California.

DePue: Okay. And what unit were you assigned to there?

Smith: Company A of the 3rd Training Brigade.

DePue: The 3rd Training Brigade. So was that a training post at the time?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Was there a division stationed at Fort Ord as well?

Smith: No.

DePue: Okay. ’62 to ’65, this is very early during the Vietnam War. Were you paying any attention to what was going on in Vietnam?

Smith: Yes, pretty close attention, because I had friends that were over there, and they wrote occasionally. Had an engineer battalion that was getting ready to go to Vietnam that tried to get me to move in as their operations sergeant. I wasn't ready to go at that time. The fact is, as things started getting closer to the time –I would be there in three years –I called Washington, and my counterpart at the DA, [Department of the Army] and told him I’d like to go to Hawaii. He told me, “No, you don't. You're not going to Hawaii; you're going to Germany”. I told him, “I’ve been to Germany, and I want to go to Hawaii”. He says, “No, you don't want to go to Hawaii”. I said, “I know that Sergeant Major Smiley is getting ready to rotate, and I’d like to go and try to take his job”. He says, “No, you're going to go to Germany”. Well, the 25th Division went from Hawaii to Vietnam.

DePue: Oh. So that's what he was trying to tell you.

Smith: That's what he was trying to tell me.

DePue: Okay. Were you interested, at all, to go to Vietnam at that time in your life?

Smith: No.

DePue: Okay. Why not?

Smith: I didn’t see a need.

DePue: Did you understand what the United States was doing? Why we were there in Vietnam?

Smith: No. I did not. I didn’t accept their reasoning. I felt that we were just trying to uphold a government that was crooked, taking a lot of money; and their soldiers weren’t trained well and did not fight well.

DePue: Now, this is even long before you even got to Vietnam. That was quite a different attitude you had from your experience in Korea.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Why do you think there was a change in your attitude?

Smith: Reality. I became a different person again. I no longer drank. Well, I didn't drink much. I spent more time with my family, or more time working: one of the two.

DePue: Well, you say you were a different person. I was thinking that maybe it can be explained just by, you're much more mature at this time.

Smith: Probably that's part of it. I was still a kid, though.

DePue: Even in 1965.

Smith: Yeah, when I was in Korea, I joined the Jump Club, the 1st Cav Jump Club and was doing freefalling and things of that nature. So I think I was still kind of a kid.

DePue: But again, you describe yourself as a different person by the time you got to Fort Ord, rather than just maturing.

Smith: In the training of the troops, I was very cognizant of the fact that many of them were going to go to Vietnam, and I spent a lot of time training them so that they would be good soldiers. I was platoon sergeant and field first sergeant, and then I became operations sergeant for a battalion.

DePue: So by 1965, what was your rank?

Smith: Still an E-6.

DePue: Okay. The differences that you saw between Korea and Vietnam during this time frame? Was part of it because of different circumstances in Korea versus Vietnam?

Smith: I believe so. I was young in Korea, and I believed in what we were doing in Korea, whether that was because of propaganda or because of my growing up during World War II, I'm not sure. But I had friends in Vietnam; I had friends who were advisors, and I had friends who were Green Berets in Vietnam in the early years, and the letters from them told me things weren't good.

DePue: It was certainly a different kind of combat that you had in Korea. What were some of the things that you can recall now? The kinds of messages that they were trying to convey about what was going on in Vietnam.

Smith: They said that the soldiers were poorly trained, and that they would run at the first part of combat, and that the only good soldiers they had were those that they were paying, mercenaries –Nams, Chinese, that they were paying to fight –they fought. And the reserve military and the active military of the South Vietnam ran at the first chance that they could.

DePue: Okay. In 1965 then, you head back to Germany. Is that correct?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: How long were you in Germany?

Smith: Three years.

DePue: And what were you doing in Germany? Where were you and what was your assignment?

Smith: I was intelligence sergeant in the 48th Infantry, and then I was chief operations sergeant of the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Armored Division.

DePue: Was the 48th Infantry part of the 3rd Army Division?

Smith: Yes. Part of the 2nd Brigade.

DePue: Where were they based?

Smith: Gelnhausen, Germany, which is between Hanau and the border, quite a ways from the border.

DePue: Is this southern Germany?

Smith: Yes. Central.

DePue: North of Bavaria, or…?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. How similar or different were your duties, and the assignment of this unit from your first tour in Germany?

Smith: Well, this tour I was in headquarters all the time. I saw the big picture; I had a top secret crypto clearance. I had assignment and travel restrictions, which meant I couldn't even go to Vietnam until those assignment and travel restrictions were lifted, because of the knowledge I had. For one year, as part of my job, I was the custodian of the keys that would unlock the atomic weapons in the area, which meant that I had to be fifteen minutes at all times from the safe. Two officers had to come and unlock the safe, and break open the code and verify it, every time we had an alert or any time we had a message.

DePue: This is ten years, roughly, after you had last been in Germany. Had things changed quite a bit?

Smith: Germany was completely different: extremely modern, lots of automobiles, the German people were wealthier; their standard of living was much greater. I'm not sure… Where we were at, they seemed to like the Americans.

DePue: How about the nature of the threat that they faced: the Soviet Union and East Germany?

Smith: It was there. It was still there. We were near the East German border, where we were at. Part of our mission was to go up and block –in blocking positions –to allow the other units to retreat.

DePue: So that part of the mission sounds very similar to your first tour.

Smith: Very similar, except now I'm in a brigade rather than in a company.

DePue: Did you have a change to observe Soviet or East German troops close up?

Smith: Only those who were on military mission on our side of the border.

DePue: Military mission.

Smith: Yes. They were allowed to proceed around anywhere that they wanted to go.

DePue: Soviets?

Smith: Soviets. They were military mission: they had special ID cards, they had special license plates on their vehicles which we had to report if we saw one. They would come to an area and observe training.

DePue: Did we have counterparts over on the other side of the border?

Smith: I don't know.

DePue: Okay. Well, I wasn't aware of that. Did you have fear or respect for the Soviet military at that time?

Smith: I had respect because of my knowledge of the intelligence that I was aware of.

DePue: When did you leave Germany?

Smith: Well, before I left Germany, I became cooperation sergeant of a theatrical company that was code of conduct. We designed sets and put on a performance with actors personifying the code of conduct. How you act as a POW [Prisoner of War], what you do and what you don't do. Those kinds of things.

DePue: Was that in part because of the experiences the Army had with POWs in Korea?

Smith: Very much so. And the fact that what few POWs were coming back in Vietnam were special cases that had to make certain agreements to be traded back.

DePue: They were being subjected to lots of torture or propaganda or both?

Smith: Yes. But they had to agree not to say that when they returned.

DePue: Okay. What was the essence of the code of conduct that you were trying to instill in soldiers?

Smith: I am an American fighting man, and I won't give anything but my name, rank, and serial number. That's it. I won't betray my friends. I will continue to have faith in my country. We did this as a play, which became mandatory training for all the 7th Army after I left.

DePue: Normally, you think of theatrics, and it's lighthearted, it's kind of entertainment. This is a very sober, serious kind of message that you're trying to convey. Was that the attitude that you and the people you were working with had about it?

Smith: Yes, but we also tried to make it so that it was entertaining. And it was entertaining. We used state--the-art projectors for that time; we had two projectors in the theater. We had people onstage, and POW settings. Projectors we used to show what some of them were thinking. We took pictures of the guys with their wives or their girlfriends out in the park and things like that. Then we would flash these pictures while the guy is being interrogated, or sitting in his little bamboo cell; we would flash these on as what he was thinking about.

DePue: You think it was effective?

Smith: I think it was very effective. A couple of generals said it was very effective.

DePue: By proof that it became mandatory for everybody.

Smith: Yes. What caused it to occur was, headquarters and headquarters' company of 3rd Armored Division was sent out to do some training on a Saturday; the MPs were assigned to capture some of them, and treat them as prisoners and interrogate them. And by virtue of how they reacted or acted, the commanding general of the 3rd Armor Division declared that something be done about teaching code of conduct. So, since I had spent years teaching that type of thing and POW, I was opted to go to G-2 at 5th Corps to organize it.

DePue: What was the mood of the Army in '66, '67, '68? I mean, this is the time of the huge buildup in Vietnam.

Smith: This is the time of the huge buildup in Vietnam. It's the time that there's a lack of equipment everywhere else in the Army. There's a lack of repair parts. There's a lack of personnel.

DePue: Well, describe the morale of the troops of Germany at this time.

Smith: Morale of most of the troops in Germany was good. I don't think the morale of the troops ever got that bad in units like I was in. Maybe in some other units it would get that way, but there was a lot of esprit de corps in the combat units.

DePue: Well, apparently there was still a very real threat that you faced right across the border.

Smith: That's correct. And that's what we went on alerts for.

DePue: So that kept people's attentions focused on military things?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Were you aware of a lot of the protests that were going on in the United States about Vietnam?

Smith: Somewhat. We didn't have American TV; it was only in Frankfurt or places like that. So all we had was some German TV, and they didn't play much of that.

DePue: 1968 is such a crucial year; the Tet Offensive[5] kicks off the year. You were still in Germany at that time?

Smith: I was still in Germany for the first Tet Offensive.

DePue: Were the soldiers paying attention to that?

Smith: No.

DePue: So that kind of—

Smith: We weren't getting that much news.

DePue: Okay. How about the Russian occupation or crushing of the Czech rebellion?

Smith: We went on alert.

DePue: You were there during that time. I believe that's August of '68?

[5] A series of crucial battles in the Vietnam War Vietnam War

Smith: Something like that.

DePue: So that was very heightened tensions at the time?

Smith: Yes. And that's part of when we were traveling around teaching the code of conduct.

DePue: Oh. Well, that is interesting. What were your expectations at that time: that this might trigger an all-out war?

Smith: I thought it would.

DePue: Why a difference versus what happened in Hungary in ’56?

Smith: A different outlook on the Americans, and the fact that we had committed so heavily into Vietnam. They felt we might commit for the Czech people, because we were right by them.

DePue: But the mere fact that Vietnam’s going on also makes the American military and NATO much more vulnerable, doesn't it?

Smith: Then, yes.

DePue: Did you think that the Russians might be more provocative because of our distractions in Vietnam?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What were you being told by official military circles about it?

Smith: Not much. I know what intelligence I saw on a daily basis, and I know what intelligence that we had to get at briefings as far as what the Soviets were doing and the East Germans were doing. We had more East Germans that we were facing now than Soviets.

DePue: It was a different kind of a troop.

Smith: We thought so.

DePue: In what way?

Smith: We didn’t think they were as well-trained or as disciplined.

DePue: Or maybe as committed to the cause?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Were you working more closely with German units by that time?

Smith: Occasionally. Not much.

DePue: What was your impression of the Germans that you were working with?

Smith: Thought some of them were good, but thought some of them were sissies. They had long hair, things like that.

DePue: By this time were the German people kind of tiring of the American presence?

Smith: I think part of them were. Part of the people that became German soldiers, the first German soldiers, were people who had been prisoners of war, and who had remained in Germany and became part of the German border patrol.

DePue: When you say prisoners of war, you're talking obviously about from the Second World War.

Smith: They were Second World War prisoners of war of the Germans.

DePue: So Poles, Ukrainians, Russians...

Smith: Very much Polish.

DePue: And a lot of them were now…?

Smith: They were labor guards.

DePue: Well, I'm assuming they would have been happy to be on that side of the border versus back in Poland.

Smith: I would think so, but also, when they got a chance to go into the German military, they were offered more pay, more benefits, better living conditions.

DePue: So a very calculating kind of decision on their parts then.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Were you aware of what was going on back in the States with the Democratic convention in August of '68?

Smith: No. Not until later.

DePue: Where was your family? Were they with you in Germany?

Smith: They were in Germany with me. They went over on the same ship I did.

DePue: Okay. Anything else you'd like to tell about your experiences in Germany?

Smith: I don't think there's too much to tell, other than the fact that I enjoyed the tour even though I had some problems. The brigade commander blamed me for his sleeping trailer not getting to him one night on maneuvers, and I had nothing to do with his sleeping trailer. So that took me off the sergeant major's list.

DePue: Were you a master sergeant by this time then?

Smith: I was a master sergeant. I made E-7 and E-8 both at Fort Ord.

DePue: Okay. So this is kind of a quirk or turn of fate that blocked you from getting command sergeant major. Was that a temporary thing, or…?

Smith: Well, at that time, promotions were still given down to units, and I was number one in the Division line to become sergeant major. They took me off the list, so that meant I wasn't going to get back on the list.

DePue: So all it takes is to upset one guy, and he can block that. Now, did promotion policies change thereafter?

Smith: Well, later, they went to the Department of the Army, and I got back on the promotion consideration list.

DePue: Where did you go from Germany, and when did you leave Germany?

Smith: I left Germany in December of 1958…

DePue: '68.

Smith: '68. Left Germany in December of '68, and January of '69 I was in Vietnam.

DePue: When did you find out that you were headed to Vietnam?

Smith: September or October of '68.

DePue: Okay. Was that something you requested?

Smith: No. But I knew I couldn't leave until December.

DePue: Okay. Where would you have wanted to go?

Smith: I knew it was my turn to go to Vietnam. I was due.

DePue: Okay. And what happened to the family then, when you left Germany?

Smith: They came back to Illinois.

DePue: To Springfield again.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. What were your thoughts then heading to Vietnam, before you got there?

Smith: Before I got there? I didn't know what to expect in a troop unit. I wasn't sure what to expect. I knew things that I'd been told by people who had returned from there, but I really didn't know what to expect.

DePue: Well, back in your first tour in Germany, when you were diagnosed with some psychological issues, and you got on medication, then obviously you were able to put your life back together again after that. Was there any reoccurrence of that, especially as you started to approach going into Vietnam?

Smith: No. None whatsoever.

DePue: Okay. Your impressions when you first arrived in Vietnam then?

Smith: Well, the first thing I did was arrive at the Ton Son Nut, and then moved up to the 25th Division at Cu Chi. And went to tunnel school, one day in tunnel school. Then I was supposed to go to the 2nd Brigade as Operations Sergeant Major, and I was sent to the 27th Infantry as 1st Sergeant.

DePue: 2nd Brigade of the 25th Division?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. And the 27th Infantry Regiment.

Smith: Yes. 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry.

DePue: Was that mechanized?

Smith: No. Foot soldiers.

DePue: Straight leg again.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: So you get to experience combat as a dismounted infantry once more.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Describe the morale of the unit when you arrived.

Smith: Pretty sorry. They had problems with people wanting to go out on patrol. The way that things were conducted left it very difficult for people to acclimatize themselves. They would go out on patrol today, and may come back today, or tomorrow, and then there would be steak and beer, and sleeping in a hut. Then a few days later, a week later, it would be go out on action for, maybe, two or three days and return, and there was steaks and beer, sleeping in a hut. Television. The GI could not acclimatize himself to the war or not to the war. It was no clear division. He was always ready to go out, or they were, in the different—I call them forts that we occupied around different places –fire support bases where there would be an infantry battalion in artillery. They would go in and out from there. Go out on combat. Sometimes they would be attacked at the fire support base, but most of the time they were never attacked there.

DePue: But they would be stationed at these fire support bases for only very short periods of time?

Smith: A few months. And they may go from one fire support base to another.

DePue: But you were talking about going on a patrol, or going out on action for two or three days, or one day, and coming back and having steak and beer, and watching TV, and then going back out again. But I wouldn't think that's going on at the fire base.

Smith: The fire base, it wasn't. But when they came back to the base camp, it was.

DePue: And did you find that difficult? You know, the switch is on for combat and then it's off for combat?

Smith: I found it difficult for the troops.

DePue: That they couldn't adjust that quickly to things?

Smith: That's correct. When we had people out for three or four days, sometimes we'd try and take mail out to them. We'd take soda out, cold soda; we'd put ice in mail bags and put Coke in the mail bags, and took hot chow out if we could. Ammunition resupply. Fly it out and then feed them and then come back.

DePue: You're saying that, but are you saying that that was probably the wrong approach to take?

Smith: No, I'm not saying it was wrong; I'm just saying that's part of what we did that was so different.

DePue: And I'm getting the impression though, that you're being critical of that on and off kind of a…

Smith: Yes, I was very critical of it. I was very critical of the contact that the GIs were allowed to have with civilians. I was very critical of the amount of drugs that were being used. I was critical of the way that the war was being fought. I was very unhappy seeing so many young people being killed or maimed, both American and Vietnamese.

DePue: What exactly would you have liked to see differently, in terms of how the American tactics of fighting this war were going?

Smith: To fight and take and hold and clear an area. You can't fight a guerilla war with normal tactics. You can't do that. You have to fight like the guerilla does. They were dug in holes and we never did find all of their holes. We never did find all of the tunnels at Cu Chi. When they brought the 25th Division in and put them down at Cu Chi, there was a tunnel network all over the place, already there. So the first few months they were there, they were getting people killed at night and wondering why, wondering how the enemy was getting in to kill them. The enemy was just coming out of a hole in the ground right where they're at. It was very difficult.

DePue: What you're describing sounds like the Americans at that time –this is '69 –were fighting a conventional war against a guerilla enemy?

Smith: That's what they were trying to do.

DePue: And how exactly would we have changed our tactics to be more effective, do you think?

Smith: To eliminate completely, certain areas, and move everybody out of certain areas.

DePue: The civilian population.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: And as long as those civilians are there. Were you fighting Viet Cong or North Vietnamese?

Smith: Both.

DePue: Okay. Can you describe then a typical action? Or an operation?

Smith: If you were going out, you might go and get on a boat and go down the river a ways, and then get on the land and be ambushed immediately. You might get off the boat and never make contact. You might fly out, land at an LZ [helicopter landing zone] that's cold –no fire going on and be ambushed right away. There could be

thousands of Vietnamese in an area, and you could go right through it and never know they were there –the Vietnamese army. They were that well hidden and that well trained. We had all kinds of devices listening on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and other trails. We had listening and visual devices all over the place. So we knew what was going on, but we weren't doing enough about it.

DePue: Well, what you're describing here –it sounds like on a lot of these missions, you go into an area and then you leave. So it was part of the criticism: when you leave, it obviously reverts to enemy control?

Smith: Yeah. It was already under enemy control and it didn't change. If they didn't engage you and you didn't find them, they were still there; if they engaged you, and you found them, you left. You didn't stay. You may try to eliminate an area, but they'd just move into the jungle and regroup.

DePue: Was it the policy at this time that the missions were designed to search and destroy, find the enemy and destroy them?

Smith: And destroy his supplies.

DePue: How much were the tactics and the strategy oriented around controlling civilian populations, or the hearts and minds?

Smith: None. Their hearts and minds were against us.

DePue: The soldiers knew that?

Smith: Yeah, well, you go into a village and you start dragging people out of huts. Or you start searching for trap doors in huts, and you find somebody; he may be a VC or he may not be, and you treat him as if he's the enemy. You round the people up in the village, you move them all out together, and you try to sort out the young men who may be Viet Cong, or North Vietnamese soldiers, who are there. So the people were not happy.

DePue: Your impression, then, is that even the South Vietnamese villagers saw the United States as enemies?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: No question about that.

Smith: No question about that. We were the enemy.

DePue: Okay. Let's talk specifics here. Start with the specific assignments you had when you first arrived, for the first few months?

Smith: When I first went there for the first few months, I was the 1st Sergeant of a headquarters in Echo Company. Then I was 1st sergeant of Charlie Company, at a place called Dau Tieng.

DePue: Echo Company and Charlie Company were both line infantry companies?

Smith: Echo Company was like a combat support company. And so I was headquarters in Echo, 1st sergeant. Then I was Charlie Company, a line company, 1st sergeant.

DePue: Okay. And all the locations here. We're looking at a map of the Parrot's Beak area, and the fishhook area along the Cambodian border. I believe this is 3rd Corps, the southern portion of Vietnam?

Smith: Parrot's Beak.

DePue: Down in this area. I'm assuming this whole region here kind of defines the Parrot's Beak.

Smith: We were between the Cambodian border and Saigon.

DePue: Okay. Tay Nin was one of the places you had mentioned earlier. Where's Tay Nin?

Smith: That's correct. There's Tay Nin; there's Dau Tieng right here.

DePue: Dau Tieng and Cu Chi you mentioned as well, that's all in that area? And that was generally the operational area for the 25th Division?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: And the 2nd Brigade in particular?

Smith: Well, the 2nd and 3rd Brigades rotated; we changed places with each other.

DePue: Okay. As a 1st Sergeant, did you go on quite a few patrols?

Smith: No. As a 1st sergeant, I didn't go on patrols. As a 1st sergeant, I made sure that where we were at was secure. When I was at Dau Tieng, when I was headquarters and 1st sergeant, it was my job to make sure that the troops in the field were supported. The medics were under me; the signal was under me; ordnance, supply – all of that was back there.

DePue: Okay. So the company commander would have –in terms of what his assignment was supposed to be –he would have more of those kinds of things than you would.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: That yours was more logistical. Was it also morale and discipline?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you having a lot of soldiers coming and seeking you out, looking for advice, or to complain, or to bitch about something?

Smith: Not as much as you would think. Some would come for advice; some would come and just want to talk. One incident: I had a young solider that came in country with me, and he got killed two weeks later. When we were packing his belongings to send back, we found a kilo of the finest marijuana that you would be able to find in his belongings, back in the rear. He had not been out of military control, so he had to have gotten it from a civilian on a military base.

DePue: How much was your challenge in terms of discipline then?

Smith: Quite a bit. You remember the movie *Platoon*?

DePue: Yes.

Smith: That was Dau Tieng. The drug bunker? There was such a drug bunker. Except the difference was that you had to be black or Hispanic to go in that drug bunker. It became my job to close that drug bunker down.

DePue: How did you do that?

Smith: By confiscating all the drugs I could find, and every morning, have a formation and burn the drugs in front of the people. Send more people out to the field where they belong; less people hanging around back there.

DePue: A lot of the soldiers you had, then, I assume had been in the Army a very short time before they ended up in Vietnam. Were they well trained before they got to you?

Smith: Some were and some weren't. It depends on what training company they came from in the States –how good their cadre were.

DePue: Okay. Were their minds into it?

Smith: No. Very few of them's minds were into it. They were counting their days. They had their FIGMO charts, and, oh—

DePue: FGMO—?

Smith: F-I-G-M-O. Freak it: I Got My Orders. And so they had their FIGMO charts and were counting their 365 days. As they got closer to it, they became more reluctant to go into combat.

DePue: It just occurred to me –in discussing with you those years you were in Germany – you were away from all of the noise and the demonstrations and the American public's turning away from supporting the war back in the States, and these kids came right from that.

Smith: That's correct. I never saw the nightly news at suppertime with the war going on. I never saw any of that. I was completely isolated. I was three years away from it. And so when I got to Vietnam, I didn't understand some of the feelings.

DePue: But they were expressing those feelings to you, I would think.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was your reaction when you first encountered that?

Smith: I thought it was to be expected, because I didn't feel good about the war either. Even though I was there –I put my heart into my job –but part of my mind was against it. Especially after seeing so many young people killed right after getting in country, and then having the base camp attacked on the second Tet; having to kill so many people, and finding so many of the enemy dead that looked like they were fourteen or fifteen years old.

DePue: Why don't you explain that action in detail, if you're willing to? The second Tet. So this would have been…

Smith: February of '69.

DePue: Shortly after you got there.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you with Echo Company at that time?

Smith: I was Headquarters Company. And at Dau Tieng, the base camp for the brigade, I was awakened about midnight by firing, and then by mortar fire. So I got out and grabbed my gear and went out, and they were already in the wire; they'd already got inside the wire by that time. The mortar fire was going on. They were using Bangalore torpedoes to tear away the wire and come through. They destroyed, I believe, six helicopters where we were at on the airfield. Some of my men were in the bunkers that were being occupied, and firing and fighting against the people. We tried to send an armored personnel carrier down to help one group that was really under heavy fire –two of my signalmen –and it got hit with an RPG [rocket-propelled grenade] immediately, and burned. The MPs tried to send one down that way to help, and it got hit by an RPG and burned. I organized a group of people who were in the back –the supply and some of the other people –into a reaction force. And waiting to be called upon during the night. We weren't called on during

the night; and things cooled off in the morning. I sent the cooks down to the mess hall to prepare coffee and breakfast, and the mess hall had been booby trapped, so I lost a couple of cooks right away.

DePue: Killed?

Smith: Killed.

DePue: What kind of booby traps?

Smith: Don't know. They were hooked to the doors, the screen doors, so when they opened the screen doors, they went off. So I felt there were still enemy in the wire, enemy in our area, so I organized a group and went around, and finding snipers in trees, and I was using an M-40 grenade launcher to blow them out of the trees.

DePue: You personally?

Smith: I personally.

DePue: So what, within fifty meters or so, or closer than that?

Smith: Something like that, or less. You'd find some tied in a tree; you'd find others way up in a tree. Most of them were tied there so that they wouldn't fall when they're trying to shoot you. And they did shoot some of the troops.

DePue: Well, from their perspective, that's a suicide mission, isn't it?

Smith: For the sniper? Yeah. Certainly.

DePue: Did you understand that level of dedication to their cause?

Smith: Certainly. It was their homeland.

DePue: Were these Viet Cong or North Vietnamese?

Smith: These were Viet Cong.

DePue: Okay. These were some of the people you were talking about, fourteen year old kids, that looked like that?

Smith: Yes. There were a whole bunch of them. After we cleared out the live people that we could find, we were making a sweep down by the airfield, and come to a culvert. One of the war dogs alerted on the culvert. So we didn't know what was in there. There were a few live Vietnamese in the culvert, but what they had done is, they had pulled dead bodies in behind them as they crawled in the culvert. So when we

found something, we found dead bodies, but there were live people in the middle of the culvert. And these were kids, this group. All kids.

DePue: Any question that they were non-combatants or combatants?

Smith: They were combatants, but I questioned the fact that it was a terrible waste of human life, especially at such a young age.

DePue: So what did you do about the ones that you found in the culvert?

Smith: We took them prisoner; turned them over to the MPs.

DePue: American MPs.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Would they eventually be turned over to Vietnamese troops?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And what would likely happen to them then?

Smith: They might be killed.

DePue: And that was something you understood?

Smith: Something I didn't like. But something that I understood would probably happen.

DePue: Had no control over that.

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: Saw the same things in Korea. Not much difference, when it's brother fighting brother.

DePue: Did you have South Vietnamese units or troops around this area that you were working with?

Smith: No.

DePue: This was strictly an American operation.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Any other incidents that you recall especially?

Smith: More of the same. One night, the personnel sergeant slept in the same bunker, hooch, that I slept in. One night I was getting ready to go down there after supper, and I got a premonition that I shouldn't sleep there that night. So I told him that, and he said, "Okay, I'll take your advice.". We went up and slept in bunkers. And about two o'clock in the morning, a 240-millimeter rocket came in: landed right by our hut; blew the sandbags to bits; blew our bedding to bits, our clothing. It was allgone. After that, he kind of wondered about me.

DePue: That you had a premonition, you had a sense about it.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you religious at this time?

Smith: Not really. I had my belief in God, but I was not a religious person.

DePue: Okay. Did that cause you to think about things when you had had that premonition, or were you too busy?

Smith: I really didn't consider it. Just one of the things that goes on.

DePue: When you went back to Charlie Company, you're that much closer to combat, though.

Smith: It was out in an old French fort.

DePue: Any particular incidents while you were Charlie Company 1st Sergeant?

Smith: No. They were patrolling from there, and one day a helicopter came and picked me up and took me to division headquarters, covered in mud. I went in and was interviewed by the G-3 sergeant major, and then interviewed by the deputy G-3, and by the G-3; G-3 told the liaison officer to go out to the base camp and pick up my gear. I wasn't going back

DePue: How long were you with Charlie Company then?

Smith: Just a month.

DePue: Longer with headquarters company?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Did you see any action or experience any combat with Charlie Company personally?

Smith: No.

DePue: Again, the position you were in, the troops that were under you certain were.

Smith: Yes. They were going out. And we weren't being hit at that fort.

DePue: Okay. Describe that fort if you could, very briefly.

Smith: The fort? Some of the bunkers and fighting positions were still those that the French had prepared during the years that they were there. What we had done is string barbed wire around it. It was the wet season, and it was just pure mud. There was nothing, there was no grass, there was no nothing. It had just all been blown away over the years.

DePue: Was the level of discipline in this line company different than the headquarters company?

Smith: No, it was worse.

DePue: Worse.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. I guess that does surprise me. Any particular incidents that dealt with discipline, that you recall?

Smith: Well, one where a couple of guys were caught with their boots off at the wire, scraping their feet through the wire to keep from going on patrol. Had a man go AWOL and was never seen or heard of again, even after the end of the war; there was nothing ever heard of him. I put one guy on a Conex container while I was waiting for the MPs to come get him, and I had the guard rattle him every hour on the hour.

DePue: To make sure he was still okay.

Smith: Yeah. Make sure he was still up. I had an incident where I was called out and a brigade XO [executive officer] was in one of the sleeping huts, being held prisoner by a GI with an M-16 and a hand grenade. I went in and talked the guy out of it, and I never even got a thank you from the major. He left in a hurry. I put this guy under guard and then sent him out to a line company; he was from a line company originally, and had been sent back because he was a problem.

DePue: Why back to a line company, rather than put him under arrest, and prefer charges?

Smith: The major didn't say anything, so I just determined it was best to send him back to a different line company.

DePue: Let's talk then— You talked quite a bit about the quality or the lack of quality of these soldiers that you were getting. How about the NCOs that you dealt with? Especially the junior NCOs?

Smith: The junior NCOs were good. We had a couple of different types. We had Shake and Bakes, which had went through advanced training and NCO school, after advanced infantry training; they were sent to an NCO school. And so they were made NCOs before they came in country.

DePue: So they'd be very young.

Smith: They were very young. And they were very good, very good troops. Very motivated. The E-6s and E-7s that were there were all well-motivated. They were very good. They didn't necessarily believe in what they were doing, but they believed in doing the best job and protecting their men, if they could.

DePue: So you're painting quite a different picture for these NCOs than the enlisted men themselves.

Smith: Mostly, yes.

DePue: Okay. The enlisted men: were they draftees?

Smith: Most of them.

DePue: Could you tell the difference between the ones who had enlisted and been drafted?

Smith: No. No, you couldn't.

DePue: Okay. How about the officers? Especially the younger officers?

Smith: The younger officers: some of them were very good; too many of them got killed or hurt. They were sent for six months into a line unit, and then they would be rotated back to some headquarters, either battalion headquarters, brigade, division. So many of them would get wounded or hurt or killed, it was kind of difficult getting to know them.

DePue: Did it make sense to you that they would have the six-month hitch and then be sent out?

Smith: I understood part of it. I understood that they needed knowledgeable people back at brigade and division and elsewhere who had some personal knowledge of the fighting, and who had been platoon leaders or company commanders in a unit.

DePue: But there's been an awful lot of criticism about the one year rotation policy: that the guys got there, and as you said yourself, immediately start counting the days until

they get out. And these officers who just get a little bit of experience under their belt and then they're shipped out.

Smith: That's correct. Which left the platoon sergeants being the ones that are carrying the load.

DePue: Did you see problems with unit cohesion because of all of this turmoil?

Smith: No. Because it was being held together by the NCOs.

DePue: And the NCOs were typically there for the full year.

Smith: One year.

DePue: Did you see people who reenlisted to stay?

Smith: Yes. Normally to go somewhere else, but yes, who enlisted to stay in Vietnam. Oliver Young, who—is that his name, Oliver…?

DePue: Stone?

Smith: Stone. He was in our unit before, and that's where he made the movie about that base camp. He reenlisted to stay in Vietnam, but to go to a rear unit.

DePue: How much were you hearing about what was going on back in the United States while you were Vietnam?

Smith: Quite a bit. Had TV, Laugh-In. [a famous TV comedy show]

DePue: So a lot more than in Germany?

Smith: Oh, completely. Nightly news. Not the Stateside news, but Armed Forces television news.

DePue: Do you think that what you were seeing on the American news outlets was accurately reflecting what was going on in Vietnam?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was your reaction to all the protests that were going on in the United States?

Smith: I understood it, but I thought that it was undermining the morale of the troops, both in the States and out of the States.

DePue: So did it anger you?

Smith: It upset me. It didn't anger me; it just upset me. I was more angered about what was going on in Vietnam.

DePue: Can you discuss in more detail why you were upset with what you were saying?

Smith: It was the way the war was being conducted. The lack of South Vietnamese troops. The fact that so many young people were getting killed. When you sent a platoon out of twenty-one people and seventeen of them get killed in one day, it's pretty disgusting. It kind of angers you. It made me very angry.

DePue: Was that an incident that occurred while you were the Company 1st Sergeant?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: With Charlie company?

Smith: No. With headquarters company, but it was one of the line company's platoons, which I was familiar with them all.

DePue: Okay. How about your family? They were back in Springfield.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And were you able to keep up with Donna pretty well, and the kid?

Smith: Yes. Letters. Telephone call a couple of times through Mars[ham radio]. Kind of using the radios.

DePue: Did you get an R&R while you were there?

Smith: Got an R&R to Hawaii.

DePue: Were they able to meet you there?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: How long was the R&R?

Smith: Seven days.

DePue: Tough to go back?

Smith: Yeah. I was treated so well in R&R, because I went to Hawaii –and here I am, a 25 Division 1st Sergeant –to the home of the 25th Division. Got to the R&R center, and was pulled out, and we were given a cabin right off the beach which was reserved for field-grade officers. So we had it very nice.

DePue: I would think it's such an incredible contrast to what you were experiencing in Vietnam, though, it would be tough to adjust. What was reality? Was reality Hawaii, or was reality what was going in Vietnam?

Smith: Reality was both. Reality is where I was at the time. I enjoyed being with my wife; I knew I had to go back, and I knew when I was going back, so I enjoyed each day and each night. And when it was time to go back, I was ready to go back.

DePue: Can you describe your personality, or the person you were while you were in Vietnam?

Smith: I was quick-tempered. I don't know whether that was because of my anger or what. I wasn't as gregarious; I wasn't as outgoing. I wasn't happy, as I said before, about the way the war was being fought, and about so many people being killed. I was very disturbed about it. And I let that show. And when I left the 27th Infantry… The reason I was sent to Charlie Company was, the 1st sergeant of Charlie Company was on the E-9 list and I wasn't. So he wanted Headquarters Company, and I was sent to Charlie Company. So I made my anger known about that, and that's why I went to Division headquarters.

DePue: They didn't want somebody with your attitude as a 1st Sergeant in a line company?

Smith: No, I don't think that was it. The battalion commander didn't want me to leave. Three days after I left I was briefing him at division headquarters, at the top.

DePue: So tell us a little bit about your assignment, once you got to division headquarters?

Smith: First I was the Assistant Operations Sergeant, and the sergeant major there was getting ready to rotate. He left after I'd been there about a month, and so I took over as Chief Operations Sergeant, the sergeant major's job. We operated a tactical operations center, with G-3 and G-2 operations on one side of the building and intelligence on the other side.

DePue: G-2 being intelligence, G-3 being operations.

Smith: Operations. Also in the building we had FAC [Forward Air Controller], we had artillery liaison, and by that time, the division commander had a way of fighting that had been different. Any time troops came into action, he sent everything to them firepower wise: helicopters, gun ships, aircraft from the Air Force or the Navy, artillery. It was just force fire to them.

DePue: Do you think that was the right approach?

Smith: I think it was a very good approach. We were losing fewer people, and having a much higher kill ratio.

DePue: Of enemy.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Was there also a higher kill ratio of innocent civilians?

Smith: I don't think so. Because most of the time we didn't fire into a village. Most of the time the action was outside the villages.

DePue: So how much of the time that you were in Vietnam was spent at the division headquarter in G-3?

Smith: Six months.

DePue: So about half of your tour.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And if I have my timeline correct, that means that you rotated back to the States, or rotated out, before the 25th and some other units went into Cambodia?

Smith: Yes. They went into Cambodia right after I left. The fact is, the 27th Infantry went into Cambodia.

DePue: Okay. So you weren't with them at that time.

Smith: No. We routinely had troops going into Cambodia in the force of the action. There's no guard towers and monuments marking this arbitrary border; there were a lot of times that we had troops go in who were pursuing the enemy and engaging the enemy, and inadvertently crossed the border. Almost all the time that it happened we got notified through the United Nations.

DePue: So somebody was paying attention to where the border was.

Smith: Yes. And we had to send a letter stating why it happened, how it happened, and apologizing.

DePue: Did that make sense to you?

Smith: No.

DePue: Why not?

Smith: Well, I thought the war was a war, and if we had to chase them, we should chase them, and we should be allowed to chase them.

DePue: So when you did find out –you were already out of the country –but you found out about the invasion into Cambodia, and when Nixon declared that, you were supportive of that action?

Smith: Yes. Very much so. Because there were training camps right across, right in that Parrot Beak's area. There were supply depots in that area.

DePue: What was your assignment following Vietnam?

Smith: To California, the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the California Army National Guard, stationed in Southern California.

DePue: Okay. How long were you in that assignment?

Smith: From '70 to October of '71, when I retired.

DePue: Okay. I want to go back to Vietnam, but let's finish up with some of your observations about the soldiers, and that experience as an enlisted advisor to the California National Guard. What was your impression of the California Guardsmen?

Smith: The officers and senior NCOs and warrant officers in the California Army National Guard, most were pretty good. A lot of the soldiers that we had were Disneyland employees, professional baseball players, professional basketball players, professional football players, who had all been found billets in the National Guard, and who, if they had a game on a Sunday that was a training day, I had to excuse them, and make sure that they made it up on another date.

DePue: So a plum assignment, if you found your way into the California National Guard at that time?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And obviously, that was the alternative to being drafted, or—

Smith: That's correct. Also all the local police were in it. It was just a strange outfit.

DePue: How would you describe the level of discipline and motivation of those soldiers?

Smith: It was very good. They knew that they were only in for weekends and two weeks out of the year for training. A lot of them enjoyed their weekends, because they really didn't do much. Sometimes they were sent back home Saturday night and then come back Sunday. They really didn't have a lot to do.

DePue: And if they got in trouble, if there were discipline problems, would they be discharged and then subject to the draft?

Smith: They'd be subject to the draft if they missed too many drills. They didn't have to worry about the draft, because I took care of them. I accounted for everyone in the unit who attended drills, and if they missed four drills or five drills, it was off to the Army.

DePue: Okay. You described yourself as a Senior Army Advisor, enlisted advisor. Were you assigned to a specific unit then?

Smith: I was assigned to a unit that had five armories in Southern California.

DePue: Okay. An infantry unit?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. So five armories, about a battalion-sized organization?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And when did you start thinking about retiring?

Smith: When I started having to give death notifications to families.

DePue: In Vietnam.

Smith: No. From Vietnam, being killed in Vietnam. In California, I had to go knock on the door.

DePue: Well, can you talk about that a little bit?

Smith: The first time, I didn't know what to expect. I was notified about six o'clock in the evening, who had been killed, where, and where his parents were located. But I had to wait until the next morning to go tell them; I couldn't tell them in the evening or night. If you pull up in a military vehicle, a military uniform, at eight o'clock in the morning, people know what you're there for. They know. There's no doubt in their mind that their son has been killed. So sometimes it was extremely difficult. Had a shotgun taken after me; had a guy chase me out with a hammer. I had a real problem: I had an Oriental officer, and so he would not go on the notifications with me.

DePue: That was somebody else's decision or his?

Smith: His. He felt that it would anger them even more.

DePue: Did you agree with him?

Smith: In a fashion, yes.

DePue: That doesn't mean you necessarily liked the decision he made, though.

Smith: That's correct. I didn't like going alone.

DePue: How many of those did you have to do?

Smith: I did about twelve.

DePue: And how many years did you have in the service at this time?

Smith: Nineteen.

DePue: So did you decide then, when you got to twenty years, you're going to retire?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. And so it was right on the twentieth anniversary?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And you were still an E-8 at that time?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Why had you not been promoted after all of this service? You'd been on the list back in Germany years and years before.

Smith: I don't know. I don't know whether there was something in my records or what.

DePue: Do you think, in retrospect maybe, it was this piece of paper on the medical…?

Smith: No, I really don't, because I was granted top-secret clearance and everything, so I don't think it was that. I don't think that ever came to light. I don't have any idea. A colonel, a general, somebody that was unhappy with me at some point.

DePue: But towards the end of your career, these decisions had been elevated up to the Department of the Army, correct?

Smith: Yes. But your records were presented instead of you. When it was at unit level, you went in front of a board; that board may be composed of officers and NCOs, and that board then decided whether you were promotable or not. When I was promoted to E-7 and E-8, I went in front of boards; I had time in service and time in grade waived in both cases, and I had it waived again when I went in front of the E-9 board. I had a date of rank as an E-8 as of May of 1964.

DePue: That's a long time as an E-8 then. The longest rank you held in the Army.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Let's go back to Vietnam. While you were there, the peace talks were already going on. Did that sound right to you? Did it make sense to you?

Smith: It didn't sound right to me: the fact that they were being held in Paris, that there was not a lot of publicity about them. It didn't seem right that we were still fighting, and that we still had so many MIAs and POWs in South Vietnam and North Vietnam. We occasionally got messages that stated some artifact or some person had been seen somewhere in our area, and we immediately dispatched a range of platoons by helicopter to see if that person was there or what artifacts were there: were they dog tags or mess kits, or what they were. We never found anyone.

DePue: You were back in the States and out of the Army, I guess, by the time the treaty was signed. I believed that was '73.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: What was your reaction when you heard that news?

Smith: I was happy. I was still concerned about the MIAs and the POWs. It was a sore subject to me, the POWs, because I had studied so much about the Korean War POWs, the Americans who were POWs.

DePue: Just because you had to do the—I can't remember the name—the code of conduct training.

Smith: Well, also, as part of my duties, NCOIC [**Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge**], a survival, a statement evasion course at Fort Ord. That fell under me. So I was very concerned about those kinds of things.

DePue: Fair to say that you're still very upset about that side of the war?

Smith: Yes, I am.

DePue: Okay. Do you think that the war was winnable?

Smith: No. Not the way we fought it, nor politically.

DePue: Making the distinction about the political side of it as well.

Smith: Well, the political side of it was just part of it. We didn't go in it to win. We didn't have the heart to win. So there was no way we were going to win.

DePue: Your view towards the North Vietnamese, the Communists… Let me ask you this way: your feelings about what happened to South Vietnam after the fall in 1975?

Smith: We knew it was going to happen. There was no doubt in most of our minds that it was going to happen. Their armies were ineffective; we just gave them all of the equipment, gave them so much stuff that they didn't know what to do with it. Didn't know how many of the army were leaning towards the Viet Cong side or the North Vietnamese side. They were all one country.

DePue: When you were in Korea, was it clear in your mind who the good guys were and who the bad guys were?

Smith: Yes. Very much so. Still is.

DePue: When you were in Vietnam, was it clear in your mind?

Smith: No. Not clear at all. You never knew. Unless they were attacking you, or you run into them in the woods and they fire on you, you never knew.

DePue: Did you understand the attraction that many South Vietnamese civilians had towards communism and towards what the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were fighting for?

Smith: Yes, because of what we were doing. We were driving them into the Viet Cong's hands simply by the way we treated them.

DePue: So it was more that versus an attraction towards communist theory.

Smith: Yes. They had no attraction towards communism. They wanted to be left alone.

DePue: Okay. Tell me a little bit about the reception you received back in the United States when you returned from Vietnam.

Smith: When I first went into Los Angeles in a military vehicle, I was stoned and spit at and a few things of that nature.

DePue: Could you describe that first incident in a little bit more detail for us?

Smith: Well, I was trying to find an address where I was supposed to meet with some people, and was driving an Army staff car, and stopped at a stoplight. I was four or five vehicles back from the stoplight and some people came out of nowhere and started throwing things, and cussing and spitting and carrying on.

DePue: Well, describe these people, if you could.

Smith: Some were Hispanic; some were white. They all looked like they didn't have jobs. They weren't hippies. They just looked almost like street people, except I imagine they lived in houses.

DePue: That wasn't an isolated incident for you?

Smith: There were a few other small ones, but nothing like that one. That was the first one.

DePue: Okay. I keep going back to Vietnam. There was one thing I definitely wanted to ask you about Vietnam, and that was race relations that you saw. You were in a pretty important position; the 1st sergeant is such an important position in a military unit, especially in dealing with discipline. So what were you seeing in terms of the nature of race relations?

Smith: The younger soldiers who were of color were difficult to deal with.

DePue: Why?

Smith: The NCOs of color were very good, very dedicated NCOs, and tried to keep things level. But we didn't have as many black NCOs as we had black soldiers. So most of the time, there was no black NCO where you had black infantry soldiers. Many of them did things to try to avoid going on patrol. They'd go on sick call or do other things. Intelligence-wise, we were told that many blacks were told to go into the military to learn as much about the military as they could, and to be prepared to fight the white people at some point in their life. That's why armories were raided and guns were taken from military installations in the States as part of that overall plan, as what we were told in the intelligence briefings. I have no idea whether it's true or not, but that's what we were told. We were told that in Germany, in fact.

DePue: You described the race relations that you observed in Korea as being pretty healthy, basically.

Smith: They were very good.

DePue: And would you say the same thing was true in the peacetime Army when you were in Germany and Stateside, in Germany and Korea?

Smith: Yes. They were very good. They started getting bad in Germany the last year.

DePue: '67.

Smith: '67, '68.

DePue: Okay. And what do you attribute that to?

Smith: The attitude of the blacks overall towards the whites.

DePue: This is three or four years after the Civil Rights Movement really kicked off in a serious way.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Kind of all gets jumbled in together with the disgust over the Vietnam War itself and trying to sort that out.

Smith: That, and the fact that so many blacks were unemployed. The fact that we allowed people to segregate themselves so much. It's normal for people to want to be with people of their own kind. I understand that. But we caused other segregation. We didn't allow as much integration into white society or white institutions or clubs or neighborhoods as we should have; consequently, it caused them all to have to move into a certain area together. And there was a lack of employment; there was a lack of a lot of other things. A lack of education, which caused them to feel down towards Uncle Charlie, to the white man.

DePue: Did any of the discipline problems, the racial problems, the drug problems, contribute to your decision to retire as well?

Smith: Probably. Probably underneath.

DePue: And during this time frame, would you say—especially when you came back from Vietnam, and later on in your Vietnam tour—did you have any relapses of symptoms that you had back the fifties?

Smith: No. None whatsoever. The only thing I had was, people never wanted to wake me up. I slept with a .45 on my chest.

DePue: With your wife in the same bed.

Smith: No, in Vietnam.

DePue: Okay. I'm sorry. I should have been able to figure that out. Did your wife feel that – when you came back from Vietnam –that you were the same person?

Smith: No. She knew I wasn't. She agreed with my decision to retire. Even though it may not have been the best decision, it was the right decision at the time.

DePue: How did she see you changing?

Smith: I wasn't as happy. I wasn't as much fun. I didn't enjoy doing a lot of things.

DePue: Were you more distant from the children as well?

Smith: I think so. More than I should have been.

DePue: What did you do then, after you retired?

Smith: First year I retired, I had twelve jobs in thirteen months.

DePue: Was this is California?

Smith: No. In Illinois. We retired and came back here. I am an only child, and my parents were elderly and my mother had had severe bouts of cancer. And so we made a decision to come back here so we could oversee or kind of take care of my parents. My parents lived for quite a few years. But I would get a job and not like it and quit. It wasn't the right job for me, or I shouldn't be doing it. I was a manager in what is now Hardees, a restaurant. I sold farm co-op memberships door to door, or farm to farm. I can't remember what all I did. Then I started selling cars, and I enjoyed that very much. Started selling cars, in fact, in California, before we moved back here. And then back here, a year later, I started selling cars in Springfield at the Pontiac dealership.

DePue: Is that something you stayed with then?

Smith: I stayed with it for awhile. And then the inactivity times wore on me. The boredom of waiting for customers to walk in. I was sent to schools. I was hired under a veteran's program, a General Motors sponsorship, and I was sent to a couple of special schools training, and they taught me to send out postcards, do things of that nature, to contribute to the floor traffic at the dealership. I started doing that, and so I started getting telephone calls every day. I would send out a postcard that said—I would go down a computer printout of people who had two year old or three year old Pontiacs –and I would send them a postcard and say, "Please contact me about your 1973 Pontiac. Ed Smith, Huber, Pontiac."

DePue: Maybe they're thinking there's something wrong with their car?

Smith: Right. Right. And I would then tell them that I had a customer who was wanting to buy a car like theirs, and I knew that they had maintained theirs well because of the maintenance records. If they wanted to sell it or trade it in, I'd be happy to take care of it.

DePue: Did you have customers who were interested in their car?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: So there was always a market for recently-used cars to sell.

Smith: Oh, yes. For good Pontiacs at that time. I also would do things like, when I would see that someone had a death in the family, that the obituary showed a lot of out-of-town relatives, I would call up and offer to use a car, no cost, no obligation, that I would drop the car off at their house, and they could use it, and then I'd pick it up when they were through with it. Those kinds of things. So I did a lot to contribute to my sales. I was in the first three in sales all the time I was selling cars.

DePue: How long was that?

Smith: The first time was about a year and a half. Then I went to work installing safe-deposit boxes, vault doors, alarm systems, cameras, that type of thing, in banks. Then I went back to selling cars. Then I went to work for a company installing specialized equipment: binding equipment, collating equipment, that type of thing. Worked with them for awhile, and then I started my own business with live bait and tackle.

DePue: What year was that?

Smith: Must have been '75.

DePue: How successful was the business?

Smith: It was successful, it was very successful, except that when I sat down at the end of the year to figure out things, and figure out what I was earning, I wasn't earning minimum wage, based on the amount of hours I was putting in. So I closed the business and sold the equipment. That's when I started fighting depression, at that time. I had a hard time with depression. I was being drugged, seeing psychiatrists. The drugs would either turn me into a vegetable or wouldn't work: one of the two. I was being helped by the Department of Rehabilitation, State of Illinois, and they got me a job teaching at a private trade school; I was teaching housekeeping, groundskeeping, janitorial, that type of thing, to state clients at the private trade school in Chatham. I saw an ad in the paper one day for a management position, and I sat down over the weekend, a big yellow tablet, and wrote out my qualifications, folded it up and put it in the mail, and sent it to the address in Saint Louis. At the same time, I was working part-time for the salesman that was selling the binding equipment and the collating equipment; I was working part-time for him as a service person, teaching part-time and working part-time for him. People in Saint Louis called me and asked me if I could come to the interview; I went down, was interviewed. They asked me how much money I needed, and I told them; they said, Well, we can't pay you that, but we can pay you this, and I said, "Okay." The job was at Lincoln College as the physical plant director at Lincoln College. So I went up there and was there for fifteen years, until I had strokes. I was very active in facilities management at small colleges, active in a group of managers from small private colleges in Illinois and Indiana. I talked a couple of times a year at different meetings; I presented papers at the National Association of Physical Plant Administrators. I was very into it.

DePue: A very satisfying job for you then.

Smith: Oh, yes. Very much. Even though I was working for a private contractor, I was also working for the college. My pay went up, and bonuses every year, and vacations, and sometimes a fishing trip and other things. So it was good.

DePue: The depression was behind you then?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Any idea, at that time, what had triggered the depression?

Smith: Getting out of the military. Not being able to be satisfied with my surroundings or what was going on in life. Didn't want to start drinking; didn't want to get into that kind of trap. Did my best to fight it, but it just didn't do any good.

DePue: Now, I know that in the last few years, you've come back to reflect on your military career, and this is part of that experience. But I want to have you tell us the background story to that journey, if you will.

Smith: How do you mean?

DePue: How you came to start thinking about and talking about your experiences in Korea and Vietnam?

Smith: I was at Lincoln College in Lincoln, and a history professor by the name of Paul Beaver talked to me quite a bit. He asked me if I would talk to his students about the Korean War; they were discussing the 1950s. Paul Beaver was a different kind of teacher; he brought a woman in who had been a cheerleader in high school in the fifties, he brought people in to talk about the school dances in the fifties, and he got me in to talk about the Korean War. And that seemed to be beneficial to me.

DePue: What timeframe would this have been?

Smith: When did I start there... in '82? 1983?

DePue: So shortly after you began working there.

Smith: Yes. Then he invited me to speak at his classes in Normal, Illinois, that he had, and then he invited me to speak about Vietnam, and about my life experiences. So I did that a couple of times a year.

DePue: Was that easy for you to do?

Smith: At first, it was difficult, because I'd never been able to discuss it, except with other people who had been where I had been when I'd been there, because no two people's experiences are the same, no two people's recollections of their experience is the same.

DePue: Were you the kind of person who joined the VFW or AmVets?

Smith: No.

DePue: Attended unit reunions?

Smith: No.

DePue: So you didn't seek out these opportunities, did you?

Smith: No. Not at that time.

DePue: Why not?

Smith: Just didn't want to be around those people. Didn't want to be around people telling war stories. Didn't want to be around some of the people that I felt belonged to some of those clubs.

DePue: Just because of the kind of personalities they were, or because it was too painful for you to discuss?

Smith: I think it was because of my personality. I think it's because of the person I had become. I was no longer a socializer.

DePue: Okay. So coming back years and years after these events was difficult for you to discuss?

Smith: At first, it was difficult. And I agreed to answer all of their questions, but I reserved the right to refuse to answer a question. Most of the questions, there was no problem in answering. Occasionally a question would come up that I just couldn't answer.

DePue: What kind of questions would those be?

Smith: Too personal about me killing people. Things of that nature. I just didn't answer those. And it became easier each time that I gave the lecture.

DePue: Do you think it was therapeutic for you?

Smith: Oh, extremely. It brought me back into the realization that the Korean War was still bothering me, that I was still being bothered by that. I knew I had dreams and nightmares, but I hadn't realized how much it was affecting me all of the time.

DePue: Why Korea so much more than the Vietnam experience?

Smith: I think because of my age. The fact that being wounded at seventeen, being in combat at seventeen, being in combat at eighteen. I think that it bothered me but I didn't know it. I can still remember right now sitting in a foxhole all night, or sitting in a foxhole on watch, and then having to go in and wake up your replacement who's supposed to come take your place in the hole, and not being able to have a

cigarette or anything until you got back into a sleeping bunker, where you could have a candle or a light and you could warm up a cup of coffee or something. I still recall that right now, very vividly. I recall more now than I ever did. The medical treatments that I just had did nothing to alleviate the PTSD; they weren't designed to. However, instead of forgetting things, I remember more things than ever. I remember things back into my childhood that I never thought of.

DePue: Are you—go ahead.

Smith: It's just amazing, the amount of memories that are flooding into me the last few weeks.

DePue: Just the last few weeks?

Smith: The last few weeks, since I got to my treatments.

DePue: When did your treatments begin?

Smith: June. Ended in July.

DePue: What caused you, after all of these years, to go back and seek—this is years after you started thinking about these things again. Can I ask what caused you to go back and start treatment?

Smith: Nightmares. Dreams. Seeing things, seeing people who weren't there. Seeing things that weren't there. I decided I had to do something.

DePue: This started before we first talked.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Are you under medication now?

Smith: I am again now.

DePue: Is that something you think you'll be on for quite awhile?

Smith: I'm not sure. I don't know whether it will do me any good or not. I've been on every medication, every psychotropic medication that they've invented, starting way back in the early fifties, all the way through now. And most of them doing no good whatsoever.

DePue: But during much of the time we've been talking about the Vietnam experience, those years after Vietnam, I'm assuming you weren't on any kind of medication.

Smith: No, I wasn't. I wasn't until a few years ago.

DePue: And what caused you to go on medication then?

Smith: The severe depression, and the fact that I couldn't function well.

DePue: Was that before you got to the Lincoln College?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay.

Smith: I was seeing a psychologist with regularity at that time. I was being treated by a psychiatrist who was furnishing the medications when I started at Lincoln College.

DePue: Was this through the VA or civilians?

Smith: Civilian.

DePue: Were they identifying some of the sources of your difficulties with the Korean War?

Smith: The one psychologist felt that it had to do with war; not necessarily Korea or Vietnam, but the fact that it had to do with war. And then he told me to write down things, write stories, do things of that nature.

DePue: Now, you've described yourself here that your life has been a series of different people, different personalities. Is that a fair description of…?

Smith: That's correct.

DePue: When did you come to that conclusion?

Smith: A couple of years ago, doing introspective. After I recovered from my strokes, I became a consultant to Blackburn College in Blackburn, on building buildings, renovating buildings, things of that nature; I've done that since 1988, until the first of this year. I'd sit down, and I was having these flashbacks and things, and I'd sit down and started thinking about my life and what I'd done and where I'd been, and things of that nature, and decided I'd been different people.

DePue: The flashbacks were to what periods in your life?

Smith: Every period, but mostly in Korea. And then it started as Vietnam.

DePue: How about that time period when you were very young and were traveling around the country before Korea?

Smith: It's coming back now. I'm having vivid memories of it right now. I've been going for a walk every morning. I walked up there by the cornfield the other day, and I remembered walking through cornfields in the country selling magazine subscriptions door to door, it came right to my mind, immediately.

DePue: And you hadn't recalled that for decades?

Smith: Hadn't thought about it. Hadn't thought about it at all.

DePue: That was when you were, what, fourteen, fifteen years old?

Smith: Fifteen and sixteen. I recall working at the shoe factory in Springfield. I recall working at the bobby pin factory in Springfield. You never heard of that, I know.

DePue: No, you didn't mention that the first interview.

Smith: I recall those things vividly, and the memories are very sharp. Very sharp. I feel like an old man who wants to sit down and talk about the past, because I'm remembering things so much.

DePue: What do you think is bringing these things back now, after all of these years?

Smith: I think the treatments that I just went through. I believe that's it.

DePue: And this is part of the healing process, do you think?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Normally I would think that there was something traumatic that caused you to block these things out, but these are pleasant memories that are coming back to you now.

Smith: Well, some of them are pleasant, some of them aren't. I'm remembering Vietnam. I'm remembering Korea. But I remember the good with the bad, instead of just remembering one way.

DePue: But during the Vietnam years, do you know if you had memories of those early years on the road before Korea?

Smith: I didn't. I didn't think about it.

DePue: You just didn't have cause to think about it much?

Smith: I just never recalled them. I recall, when I was thirteen years old, I put a sign out in front of the house that said, *Garage Mechanic*, and this was right after World War II had ended a little bit, and cars were still in short supply, or people didn't have a lot of money to buy cars. So this old plumber that worked near there pulled in one

day and said, "Are you the mechanic?" and I said, "Yes," and he said, "Figure out what's wrong with my car and fix it." I had no driver's license or anything; I drove his car around the block, and determined that his drive shaft and the rear end of his car were in bad shape. I hitchhiked out to a junkyard out by the fairgrounds, and found a car that would fit the drive shaft and the rear end, and took it out, and hitchhiked back home, and put his car together. He was very happy. That was my only customer. (bothlaugh)

DePue: Gosh, I've been listening so closely, I forgot what I wanted to ask you next. Oh. Donna stayed with you for this whole time

Smith: Yes.

DePue: And from what you've told me, she's been in love with five different people.

Smith: Yes. Some of them she hasn't liked too well.

DePue: She's been very supportive through all of this.

Smith: Yes. It's been very difficult for her.

DePue: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Smith: It's difficult for her to understand that I would turn from a person who took control and was able to do anything, to turn into a person who was unable to do anything, who had no control over their life and just sat around. That bothered her greatly. Still bothers her.

DePue: Is that somewhat the person you are today?

Smith: No. Not right now.

DePue: Well, how do you describe yourself today?

Smith: Right now, I'm being very introspective. I'm retired, because I was not functioning well doing my work, so my family decided I should retire. And I knew I wasn't doing the best job I could at my work. I was having all of these flashbacks and memories.

DePue: This was at Lincoln College?

Smith: No, at Blackburn College. Just up until March of this year.

DePue: But you're of an age where you can rightfully retire and not feel guilty at all about it.

Smith: I was building a 30,000 square foot science building –a very intricate building –and I was making some decisions that weren't good, that weren't my best decisions. So I saw that, and saw that I should quit. And, yeah, I am of an age I can retire; I'll be seventy-four in a couple of weeks.

DePue: Well, that's ten years past the timeframe that most people think about retiring. So you worked well beyond a typical retirement age. Why did you keep working?

Smith: I was driven to work. I've worked all my life, from a kid.

DePue: It didn't feel right not to, then.

Smith: Right.

DePue: How long have you been living here then?

Smith: We bought this place in '84 when we were still living in Lincoln and we came down here on weekends. And then so we moved here in '95 when I had strokes.

DePue: How serious were the strokes?

Smith: I had a series of TIAs, or mini strokes, and then I had a small stroke that left me a little bit incapacitated for while. My left arm wasn't of the best use; I carried it a lot. I had speech and memory problems. I couldn't find words to say when I was trying to say something. Those things slowly went away. That's when I went down to Blackburn to offer my services as a volunteer, and they never did take me up on it, and then they had an emergency and asked me to write a contract. And so I was there for ten years.

DePue: We've been at this for quite a while here, Jim, and I appreciate your patience with me through all of these questions. Or Ed, I'm sorry. Thank you for not correcting me. (laughs) I'm wondering your feelings about doing this interview.

Smith: I think it's therapeutic. I think there's a lack of knowledge in the general population, the young people especially, about those years, those wars, those things. And a lot of what's in the history books doesn't touch on the kinds of things we're talking about. So consequently, they'll never learn those. I think that this way, some time in the future, somebody listening to this or reading it will be able to more understand what drives some people, be able to understand why some people are bothered by war and others aren't. I think everyone is; it just doesn't necessarily… I just think it's good for history.

DePue: You think this is somewhat therapeutic for you then as well?

Smith: It's very much therapeutic.

DePue: Has it helped you remember some things that surprised you?

Smith: Well, I don't know whether it did or the other did. I have very vivid memories of Korea at this time. And they're more vivid than when I went back to Korea in 1991. They're extremely vivid.

DePue: Especially in that first interview-when we did talk about Korea –did you have some reservations before the interview itself?

Smith: No. I had no reservations, because there wasn't anything I wasn't going to tell you.

DePue: Okay. What do you think about what's going on currently in the world? Thinking especially in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Smith: I don't like it. I think that it was a phony excuse that we went into Iraq. I think there was some reason to go into Afghanistan at the time; we didn't follow up on it, militarily, as we should have. We started concentrating on Iraq and ignoring Afghanistan. Consequently, it's still a training ground for our enemies, for people who want to see our country go down the tubes.

DePue: Well, certainly some parallels when we were discussing earlier your experience in Vietnam and right across the border in Cambodia. And of course, Afghanistan is right across the border from Pakistan.

Smith: Yes. Very similar parallels.

DePue: Do you see that being able to sort itself out?

Smith: No. Not in the immediate future. A new president may change things and may not. Iraq has to end. It's a cesspool that's just dragging us down, budget-wise especially. And so many people being killed.

DePue: Well, as we speak right now, there certainly has been an improvement in conditions in Iraq, and possibly the opportunities for us to graciously withdraw in the future.

Smith: Hopefully. Very much. Now we've got Russia going into Georgia, and the Russian president telling the US to make up their mind which side they want to be on: do you want to be on the side of the Georgians or do you want to be on the side of Russia.

DePue: So you're obviously paying close attention to world affairs right now.

Smith: To current affairs. I watch the news; one day a week I have a day where I take and I watch no news and read no newspapers. I don't want to have overload. So I have a news fasting day.

DePue: Is that the same day of the week?

Smith: No, I just pick a day and I just don't watch any TV, nothing, don't read the paper.

DePue: Do you think that's healthy?

Smith: Yeah,

DePue: In what respect?

Smith: I think it's very healthy. It slows down my anger. (both laugh) My frustration.

DePue: Okay. Where are you at in this point in your life, in terms of, well, where do you see yourself in the future?

Smith: I see myself living a good many years. I keep thinking about trying to go back to work. Knowing that I'm not just thinking about it. I hope to start fishing again. Can't travel too much sometimes, because sometimes I can't drive.

DePue: But currently you're not under any kind of doctor's care?

Smith: I'm under doctor's care, yes. I'm under care of a medical doctor and a psychiatrist.

DePue: Okay. And that will continue on, you think, in the future?

Smith: It will continue until I don't need it. I am diabetic; I became insulin-dependent earlier this year.

DePue: Meaning you're type II?

Smith: Type II, and then I became insulin-dependent. So I have to approach that daily; that's part of what I have to live with.

DePue: Well, you've experienced so much in your life. A lot of very good things; a lot of very difficult things. Looking back on it, what's your greatest regret?

Smith: I have no regrets. No, I have one now, that just came to me awhile back. And that's that I regret leaving home and not telling my parents why, and not apologizing when I came back.

DePue: When we first talked, you couldn't explain yourself why.

Smith: I still don't know why I left. I just know it wasn't good for them. Now, I know that. I didn't know that until a few years ago, until I got into my sixties. I never thought of it.

DePue: What is the thing that makes you most proud? Or most gratification?

Smith: My family. My service in the military and my family.

DePue: So you don't regret serving the military, even though you had serious doubts about being there?

Smith: Oh, no. I had so much fun at different times. I'll put up with the visions and the dreams.

DePue: And what advice would you give to the future generations?

Smith: Spend at least two years in some kind of service: the Peace Corps, Americorps, the military, go volunteer at hospitals or nursing homes. Spend time, if you're lucky, away from home for a year or two, and then continue your education.

DePue: How do you think all of that military service has changed you, changed your outlook? It obviously has.

Smith: It's changed it at different times. I was very gung-ho about the war when I was seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old. I was gung-ho about our mission in Korea in the sixties. After I had friends going to Vietnam and writing me notes and letters back and telling me what was going on, I felt we were in the wrong war. I had volunteered to go –when Eisenhower first sent the first advisors I had volunteered to go, and wasn't taken because I was married.

DePue: That would have been in the late fifties. What else would you like to tell us in closing?

Smith: Vote.

DePue: Vote?

Smith: Vote.

DePue: As we will have opportunity to do in about three or four months.

Smith: Vote and learn history.

DePue: Well, I think these two interviews will certainly, if people avail themselves, give them the opportunity to learn an awful lot about Korea and Vietnam and the human heart. I want to thank you for the opportunity of letting me interview you. I think you have a very courageous story to tell, and I'm not just talking about the experiences in combat, but your honesty in talking about some of your struggles afterwards as well.

Smith: Thank you. But you're welcome.

DePue: Appreciate that. Nothing else?

Smith: That’s it.

DePue: Thank you, Ed.

(end of interview)