

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with William 'Bill' Smith

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VRK-A-L-2010-008

William Smith, an Army mortar crewman during the Korean War, and a Prisoner of War for most of the war, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Feb 23, 2010 Location: Smith residence in Quincy, Illinois

Date: Mar 4, 2010 Location: Smith residence in Quincy, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Tape Transcription Center, Boston, Massachusetts

Edited by: Marianne Lawrence and Rozanne Flatt, ALPL volunteers

Total Pages: 164 pages Total Time: 1:43 + 2:14 + 1:22 + 2:13 / 1.72 + 2.23 + 1:37 + 2.22 = 7.54 hrs

Session 1: Early life through Smith's combat experiences in Korea in 1950

Session 2: Smith capture by the Chinese in Nov of 1950, and early imprisonment

Session 3: Smith's first 18 months as a POW, communist propaganda & resistance

Session 4: Smith's last year as a POW in the 'Reactionary Camp' and his release

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on 04/27/2010.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

William Smith, *Veterans Remember*, VRK-A-L-2010-008

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: William (Bill) Smith was born on August 7th, 1929 in Bennettsville, South Carolina, and grew up on his family's 1,600 acre produce farm near Rockingham, North Carolina. During WW II Smith lied about his age in order to get hired at a shipyard in Brunswick, Georgia, and then was drafted into the Army in 1944. Following Basic Training his mother intervened, and he was release.

Two years later, when he was of age, Smith joined the Army again, and by mid 1947 was serving with H Company, 77th Infantry Regiment, 6th Infantry Division in Pusan, Korea. By late 1948 when U.S. forces withdrew from South Korea, Smith was transferred to M Company, 34th Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, then stationed in Japan. He was on his way home as his enlistment was completed when on June 25th, 1950 the North Koreans invaded the south. His enlistment was immediately extended, and he soon was back in Korea with the 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion, attached to the 1st ROK (Republic of Korea) Division. On November 2nd, near Unsan, North Korea, he was captured by the Chinese. He survived a torturous march north to a temporary camp, and spent his first winter near the Yalu River. Roughly half of the prisoners died during that first winter. In the spring he was moved to nearby Camp 5, the largest of the POW camps.

Smith endured a variety of tortures during his captivity, suffered through incessant indoctrination sessions, was court-martialed and sentenced to hard labor (assigned to work in the camp's hospital), and in the summer of 1952 was labeled a 'reactionary' by his captors due to his uncooperative attitude. He was thereafter sent to Camp 2, Company 3 with other reactionaries. Suffering from malnutrition and other ailments, Smith was exchanged with other sick and wounded prisoners in April, 1953 as part of 'Operation Little Switch'. He was processed through Freedom Village at Panmunjom, sent to Japan for an initial evaluation, and eventually sent to the United States for further treatment and a reunion with his family. While in Japan he was ordered to sign a document which prohibited him from talking to anyone other than the FBI about his experiences. Bill passed away on June 17, 2016. [See also Smith's interview with his wife Charlotte, for the remainder of his story.]

Subject Headings/Key Words: Prisoner of War during the Korean War; J.A. Jones Construction Company of Brunswick, GA; H Company, 77th Infantry Regiment, 6th Infantry Division; life in occupied South Korea before the war; M Company, 34th Regiment, 24th Infantry Division; life in occupied Japan following WW II; 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion, 1st ROK Division; Chinese Offensive at Unsan, North Korea on 1-2 Nov, 1950; the Valley (prison camp in North Korea); biological warfare allegations; Camp 5; torture as a prisoner; indoctrination/brainwashing by Chinese while a prisoner; progressives (prisoners who collaborated with Communists); reactionaries (prisoners who resisted Communists); Operation Little Switch; Freedom Village at Panmunjom; repatriation of prisoners; FBI & treatment of Korean POWs

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