

## Interview with William Smith

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, the 23rd of February 2010. My name is Mark DePue I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today it's my distinct pleasure to be with William Smith, who lives in Quincy. We're in William's home here in Quincy, Illinois. Good morning, William.

Smith: Good morning, sir.

DePue: We are here to talk about William's experiences during the Korean War, and the interesting part for me, the fascinating part and the important part for me, is that you were there in Korea in 1948, a couple years before the war, spent some time in Japan, and unfortunately came back to Korea when the war started and were subsequently captured and spent, what, three years in captivity?

Smith: About two and a half years. Right at two and a half years.

DePue: Probably the two and a half longest years you ever spent anywhere, I would think.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Because you have those important experiences, we're going to spend quite a bit of time before we even get to your prisoner of war experiences, as I had mentioned when we were just getting started here. Let's start at the beginning, and tell me a little bit about where and when you were born.

Smith: I was born in Bennettsville, South Carolina, August 4, 1929.

DePue: Okay. August the fourth?

Smith: Nineteen twenty-nine.

DePue: Okay. I had seen August the seventh someplace, so that's—

Smith: Well, let me explain that to you.

DePue: (laughs) We're starting early on this, aren't we?

Smith: When I went into service, they put August the seventh on there, and I never could get it changed, but my mother said I was born August the fourth, but all my papers, I've always had to use August the seventh because the damn Army—

DePue: Well, that's all right, that's all right.

Smith: —wouldn't listen to me, you know what I mean? They said the seventh when I went into Fort Bragg there, when I reenlisted.

DePue: I'm shocked to hear that the Army can be stubborn, too.

Smith: Oh, boy, I'll tell you. And I never could convince them, and they wouldn't change it.

DePue: Did you grow up in Bennettsville?

Smith: No, I grew up in Rockingham, North Carolina. We moved across the line because my grandfather and of course my family, owned a farm which was in South Carolina and North Carolina. You know what I mean. We were on the edge of South Carolina; we had land on both sides of the line there.

DePue: Had your family been living in that area for a long time?

Smith: My family had been living there for a long, long time, and the fact is, my grandfather used to deliver mail in a buggy in Osborne, North Carolina, which is about twenty-five or thirty miles from Rockingham.

DePue: Smith is a good English name; is that your heritage?

- Smith: Well, I guess. I'm not sure. On my mother's side, they always said I was French and Indian, but who knows. You know, you go back that far and they didn't keep good records at that time. I'm hoping the records are a little better now, but back then it was what people thought; they wrote it down, and that became facts.
- DePue: What did your father do for a living?
- Smith: Farmed. We had a produce farm, and we raised cotton, but mainly we raised beans, which was the main crop, butterbeans, not soybeans.
- DePue: So butterbeans for vegetables.
- Smith: Like lima beans. Yeah, vegetables, tomatoes and so forth.
- DePue: Was that a good living?
- Smith: Cantaloupe, watermelons. Yes. Well, you know, you'd throw away the clock; you worked from sunup to sundown. And when I found out that road went through our farm, there was two ends to it, when I got able, I took one end and took off. I left (laughter) the farm, and I just went back visiting; I never did go back to work. It's hard work. Farming is hard work, and it's the biggest gamble a man can make.
- DePue: Well, by the time you have some memories, we're still kind of at the tail end of the Depression, right?
- Smith: Right, and then my dad was working—of course we always worked on the farm, but they came along and they wanted to build an airbase—it was right before World War II—so he worked on the airbase at Maxton, North Carolina, and they transferred him to Brunswick, Georgia, when the airbase was completed.
- DePue: They transferred him?
- Smith: Transferred him, and he went to work with J.A. Jones [Construction Company] in the shipyard in Brunswick, Georgia.
- DePue: Okay. That's a little bit ahead of the story here. We'll get there pretty quick. The Depression years were tough for almost everybody. On the farm, did you have electricity?
- Smith: It finally came through, yes. REA [Rural Electrification Administration] came through, but I don't remember how old I was—the late thirties, I guess it was.
- DePue: Did you have indoor plumbing?

Smith: No, we had an outhouse, and that was about the only thing to go. And then the government came along and split up a lot of land and moved a lot of foreigners—we called them foreigners—in there. They gave them forty acres and a mule, you know what I mean?

DePue: Um-hm.

Smith: And (laughs) at that time we had all kinds of neighbors. They was from all over the country. And I went to school in a country school there, and that was before we moved to Georgia. And then when we moved to Georgia, like I say, the old man was working in the shipyard.

DePue: Okay. How old were you when you moved to Georgia, then, do you remember?

Smith: I was about fourteen.

DePue: Okay, so that's about the time when memories really started to kick in. And the name of the plant that your dad was working at, the shipyard?

Smith: J.A. Jones Construction Company.

DePue: Do you know exactly what he was doing there?

Smith: He was a shipfitter.

DePue: Which means...actually constructing the ships?

Smith: Constructing the ships. I was a timekeeper, and my sister was a pipe welder, and she was making more money than me, so I went into welding. I gave up the timekeeping and went into welding.

DePue: Okay, so you were fourteen when your family moved to Georgia.

Smith: Um-hm, I think.

DePue: It sounds like you were already working at a pretty young age.

Smith: I was. I worked all my life. Fact is, I've never been without a job—a few days, maybe. That's when I went into the Army, I had to use her birth certificate (laughs) to go to work in—

DePue: Your sister's?

Smith: Yeah—to go to work in the shipyard, because you had to be seventeen years old, I think. Then I became eighteen and I got a letter from President Roosevelt that says, "Greetings," you know, (laughter) and so I went up to Atlanta, at Fort McPherson, Georgia, in December of nineteen and—when was that? It had to be 1943.

DePue: Forty-four.

Smith: Forty-four.

DePue: I know from reading the book here. A lot of the things I'm going by are what was in the book. So technically how old were you when you got drafted?

Smith: Fifteen. I was fifteen years old.

DePue: Why didn't somebody point out to the government...?

Smith: Well, I went through all the basic—I took four months of basic at Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Arkansas, and then I got ready to go overseas, and my mother called my dad, who was in the Air Force at Lowry Field, and he got in touch with his company commander, and he called mine, and the company commander called me in, and he said, "Smith, you're a good soldier, but we're going to send you home, and when you get old enough," he says, "come back and see us." And so they sent me home. But I got all the benefits. I got mustering-out pay—you know, the three hundred bucks mustering out pay. In that time, it was pretty good money.

DePue: Why didn't your mother tell him before that time?

Smith: Well, she was kind of leery because maybe she didn't think I would go overseas. That's the only way I can explain it. I don't know.

DePue: Did you see this as a good place to be?

Smith: Well, it was a good place to be. I liked the discipline of it. It was good, because on the farm, it was nothing but hard work, and to me, the Army was easy. You know, it was a snap.

DePue: What kind of chores did you do when you were living on the farm?

Smith: Well, I picked beans, pulled cantaloupes, picked cotton, pulled watermelons; drove a truck. Rockingham is 115 miles from Columbia, South Carolina, 115 miles from Raleigh, North Carolina. We had a produce market in each place, and so we would haul the beans and stuff to Raleigh and Columbia, and that's what we did.

DePue: When did you start driving?

Smith: I guess I was about 13, 12 or 13, something like that. I was big for my age, you know. I got caught one time at Apex, North Carolina, barefooted, driving—and you wasn't supposed to drive barefooted. I didn't know that. But the policeman gave me a warning and told me to wear shoes from now on, but he didn't never ask me my age. (laughs) I don't know.

- DePue: When you were a young tyke going to grade school, was this a country school?
- Smith: Yes.
- DePue: One-room school?
- Smith: No, no. We had four rooms and a huge auditorium, and, let's see, it went to the seventh grade was as high as it went, then you had to leave to high school.
- DePue: Did you spend any time in high school?
- Smith: Very little. Very little, because we moved, and when we moved to Georgia, I didn't go back to school, and when I was in the Army—fact is, I was in Japan, I think it was—I got my GED [General Educational Development].
- DePue: Okay, so that happened—
- Smith: That was years later.
- DePue: Was school not that important to your parents?
- Smith: Well, it was, but my dad was drafted when he was thirty-six years old, I think it was, and he wouldn't take a deferment because he was working the shipyard. He could have got a deferment; he says no, nothing but yellow bastards took a deferment, and so he wouldn't take a deferment, and he went in the Air Force. Well, I went in the Army, and of course—
- DePue: Could he have gotten a deferment because he was—I know what they were constructing there were Liberty ships.
- Smith: Right, Liberty ships, that's right, which was essential to the war. I remember the Englishmen coming over there and getting them when we would launch them. After that three-day trial run, the British would come over and pick them up. It was the first time I ever saw an English soldier.
- DePue: What were you doing at the shipyards?
- Smith: I was a welder at that time. I was a timekeeper when I first went in there, but that didn't pay as much as welding, so I went to welding school and started welding.
- DePue: Okay. Well, you've had quite a life even before you got to the Army. A couple other things here. Was religion important to your family when you were growing up?
- Smith: It was very important. Fact is, we went to church every Sunday, and—
- DePue: What denomination?

Smith: Baptist, Southern Baptist. A lot of people call it Hardshell Baptists because a lot of the women wouldn't wear lipstick; they wouldn't wear makeup or anything.

DePue: Dancing?

Smith: No dancing. And fact is, when TV came around, very few of them would own a television set. They were pretty strict. But religion has always played a big part in our family. It goes back as far as I can remember, you know. It's always been there, and to me, it was always so easy, so simple. You believe in something and that's it. When you believe it, you don't have to worry about anything else except your faith. You believe in what you believe in, and nobody's going to change it.

DePue: Well, this is going to become very important quite a bit later in our conversation I know, but I wanted to get that to begin with, so there was strong tradition in that. Do you remember Pearl Harbor?

Smith: Oh, yes. I remember where I was when we got the news on the radio.

DePue: Tell me about it.

Smith: We had the radio. There was a Philco radio. We had two poles on the outside, you know, with the aerials on it, and two batteries behind the radio. It was on a Sunday evening, and we got the news around five or six o'clock—I can't remember.

DePue: You were still in North Carolina at the time?

Smith: Yes, when it came over the radio that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. And then we listened to the radio all through that evening, and then the next day I had to go to school, which was close by, and I was telling Miss Russian, our teacher, about it. President Roosevelt was going to speak on Monday at noon, so she brought our class from school up to my house, because it was only about maybe a block and a half.

DePue: When you first heard that news, did you understand what that meant?

Smith: Not really. It dawned on me that it wasn't good. My mother started crying, and then before long my uncle came by the house, which was Dad's younger brother, and everybody was really upset, but it was late in the evening, late at night. The next day my schoolteacher brought our class over and we listened to Roosevelt's speech, and that's about all I remember except going back to school.

DePue: Do you remember being inspired by the speech?

- Smith: Well, no more than anyone else. I mean, we were all kind of keyed up, but, you know, I think I was in the fifth grade at that time, or sixth. I can't remember.
- DePue: Yeah, you would have been eleven or twelve at the time.
- Smith: Eleven or twelve, somewhere along in there. But I remember distinctly listening to President Roosevelt on the radio.
- DePue: What was the mood of the country? Now, you said your dad shortly thereafter moved.
- Smith: Well, after they got through with the air base at Maxton, North Carolina, J.A. Jones Construction Company was building ships down in Georgia, and the ones that wanted to go moved to Georgia and worked in the shipyard.
- DePue: And your dad was still a civilian at that time.
- Smith: Oh, yes, he was still a civilian, and then he got drafted, and he wouldn't take a deferment, and he went in the Air Force. I was working in the shipyard, and my sister was working in the shipyard, and she was a pipe welder, and I found out I could make more money welding than I could...
- DePue: Did your mother work at the time?
- Smith: No, no. She stayed home because I had a younger sister, baby sister, and I had a baby brother, and she stayed home and took care of them.
- DePue: What happened to the family's farm?
- Smith: Well, my aunts and uncles kept it, and in fact, some of them still have part of it now, but they cut it up, you know what I mean, and sold it off and everything.
- DePue: Do you remember things like rubber drives and aluminum drives and...?
- Smith: Yes, and iron, collecting iron and—but we were collecting iron and selling it, and they were selling the iron to Japan in the thirties, late thirties. They would come around to your house. We used to pick up—what do you call it—plows that had the old iron—
- DePue: Moldboard plows or something like that?
- Smith: Yeah, with the mules. The plows would wear out or something or other and they'd put new—God, what did they call those? They put new points on them, and they would throw away the old one there; that would be the iron, and we'd pick up the iron and collect it and sell it.

DePue: Even before the war.

Smith: Before the war. Because they knew the war was coming. You know, they knew in 1937, '38 the war was coming because England was already tied up, I mean, as well as I can remember, because my schoolteacher had a friend in England, and she would write to her, and she was telling her about the Buzz Bombs coming over from Germany.

DePue: That would have been 1940.

Smith: That would have been '40 and '41. And then when we got hit on December the seventh of '41—

DePue: But it was 1939, 1940 when you guys were collecting scrap metal that you knew was being sold to the Japanese?

Smith: Yep, yep.

DePue: Of course, most historians think that the war came about because the Americans stopped selling oil and stopped selling scrap metal to the Japanese because of what they were doing in Asia.

Smith: You know, I don't really know, but I know we had a man to come and talk to us that had been in the Philippines when the troops got ran out of the Philippines, because I remember him pulling the maps down and showing us Luzon and what was happening at that point in time. That had to be '40.

DePue: Well, see, the war started in December '41, so that would have been—

Smith: Forty-one, so that would have been in the early forties, yeah.

DePue: Forty-one, early in 1942, when the Americans were forced out the Philippines.

Smith: Yeah, because he was telling us all about it, and it was the first time I'd ever heard of a war stamp. He had some war stamps in an envelope and he showed them to us, you know. Ten-cent stamps, quarter stamps, fifty cent—Victory stamps or something or other they called them. You bought the stamps and filled up a book, and then you got a war bond when you turned the book in.

DePue: So you were already buying war bonds.

Smith: Eighteen seventy-five was the war bond that you got—but the bond was twenty-five dollars, you know, but it cost \$18.75.

DePue: Did you remember rationing?

Smith: Oh, yeah. We had rationing. We had sugar rationing, and I believe there was a meat, because the red points—as well as I can remember, the red points were

the meat. Is that right? I'm thinking that was the most precious, because it was on the black market. People used to sell those stamps, you know, like gas rationing. There was gas stamps. And I had a buddy that was supposed to go in the Army with me, and he got caught selling gas stamps, and he went to the pen in Atlanta, (laughs) and I went to Fort Robinson, Arkansas. (laughter) And we was good buddies, and I didn't know he was selling gas stamps, you know. That's how much you know about people.

DePue: So the government took that pretty seriously, then.

Smith: Yes, sir, buddy. He went straight to Atlanta.

DePue: Before you were actually drafted, while you were working at the shipyards, did you follow the war pretty closely then?

Smith: Well, the only thing that really I followed was when the British came over and got the ships. I didn't understand that. You know, why were we building ships for England? I didn't quite understand that, but I remember the British guys coming over there because they'd have to stay for about a week, and they'd go out and take that ship out when it was launched—we would launch them one a week, and they would take them out on the trial runs and then the British soldiers would come in and take over. And that's about all I remember of them.

DePue: Okay, you said that you were drafted in late 1944, I believe.

Smith: Yeah. December '44 is when I went into service in Little Rock, Arkansas. I got my notice, and then I had to report to the bus terminal down in Brunswick, Georgia, where they had a bunch of us coming in, and then they took us on a bus to Fort McPherson, Georgia.

DePue: Where'd you get your physical?

Smith: Up in Atlanta. That's where we got the physicals and everything.

DePue: Was there any curiosity about this very young-looking guy?

Smith: Well, you know, I don't know. I was big for my age, and I guess they were taking everybody that could handle a gun, you know. I don't really know. But we had sixteen weeks of basic, which was pretty rough, out in the Arkansas hills.

DePue: Where was it, Fort McPherson?

Smith: No. I went into Fort McPherson, but they sent us from there to Camp Joseph T. Robinson in Arkansas. Arkansas has a lot of mountains, just about like West Virginia—not quite as bad, but...

DePue: The Ozarks of Arkansas.

Smith: Yeah. We were there. I was there for sixteen weeks, and I had just finished up basic when they called me into the orderly room and told me that I was a good soldier but I was too young, to come back when I got older. And that was it.

DePue: So it sounds like you were released before the end of the war, then.

Smith: Oh, yeah, the war was still going on, because when I got to Fort McPherson, Georgia on May the eighth was when Germany surrendered, I believe.

DePue: That sounds about right.

Smith: Yeah, May the eighth of nineteen and...

DePue: Forty-five.

Smith: Forty-five.

DePue: You remember the celebrations at that time?

Smith: Yeah, they were all celebrating, and they gave us uniforms then with the Ruptured Duck on it. (laughs) But I got the duck when I got discharged.

DePue: Now, what does that mean?

Smith: Well, that means that you had served.

DePue: Is it a ribbon then or a medal?

Smith: No, it was a medal. It was just a Ruptured Duck. That's what it was. That's what they called it. I don't have one—I wish I had one, but—I've been trying to get one at the Army surplus store. But it was a button, and it was almost like a bird, but it was gold, and it showed that you had been in service.

DePue: Do you remember much about basic training or the NCOs especially?

Smith: Oh, yeah. We had one, Sergeant Curtis. He'd fought in the Aleutian Islands, and he came down as cadre, and he was the only combat man we had except our company commander at the last, a first lieutenant. He'd fought in Germany—or he'd fought the Germans—and he became our company commander before the basic training was over. And I remember him real well—a heck of a nice guy. Because you could tell the men that had been in combat, him and Curtis, (long pause, deep sigh) they were different.

DePue: Were they tougher on you?

Smith: No, they were more compassionate. They were more down-to-earth. They told everything (pause) straight, just like it was; they didn't beat around the bush

about anything, you know. And they told us what to look out for, what to do in certain situations as best they knew, and they were more guidance counselors than anything else in my opinion, but they were... (emotional pause) Sorry about that.

DePue: That's okay. It sounds like you had a great amount of respect for them.

Smith: I did, because it dawned on me what they had been through. I mean, we'd been on the rifle range and on maneuvers and firing and so forth and everything, but they had actually been in combat. They were different from the other sergeants, you know; they were just different.

DePue: You said you found basic training to be pretty rough, and it impressed me that you grew up on a farm, you knew about hard work...

Smith: Yeah, I knew hard work, but basic was—I mean, they ground that into you, you know. We did our running and calisthenics in the morning, and of course listening to classes and learning about the weapons—the regular basic that you go through.

DePue: What did you do after you got released?

Smith: I went back to Georgia, and then my dad, like I say, was in the Air Force, and my mother had moved back to North Carolina, and I stayed there and I went back to work on the farm and drilling wells. We had a well-drilling outfit that my grandfather had.

DePue: Water wells?

Smith: Water wells. And we'd drill wells. We didn't have a machine, now, that did it; we did it by hand—put up the three-prong, you know, on a rope, and that's the way we dug wells.

DePue: Do you remember when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan?

Smith: Yeah, on Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, yeah.

DePue: What was your thoughts at that time?

Smith: Well, I was wondering why they hadn't done it earlier, you know, sooner. (laughs) Why wait? But not knowing—of course, they didn't have the bomb.

DePue: Did you even understand what the heck this thing was?

Smith: Not really, but I knew it was good for us. That's what I thought. And when they hit Nagasaki is when the Japanese surrendered. I knew that was pretty good. But there wasn't too much going on about—I mean, everybody knew about the bomb, but it didn't seem like there was much activity in the

community about it. You know what I mean? Farmers just went right on doing what they did.

DePue: Was there more celebration day for V-E Day for V-J Day, then?

Smith: You know I believe there was. I believe there was. But, like I said, my uncle, he was in the airborne, he was in Germany, and all of my buddies that had been drafted, but I think they celebrated V-E Day more than they did V-J Day.

DePue: So you're on the farm. I suppose your mom's waiting for your dad to be released. What were your thoughts for your future at that time?

Smith: I really didn't think much. I wanted to take over the produce end of it and expand it, but that wasn't to be because I was a little radical, I guess, and they wouldn't trust me in handling anything.

DePue: "They" being some of the other members of the family?

Smith: Yeah, the other members of the family. And of course, I was young—I realize that—but they didn't think that I knew enough to be let loose on anything, and that's why I left.

DePue: Well, is there any thought about going back to school?

Smith: At that point in time, not really. When I went in the service is when I decided to go. We had guys that couldn't even speak English, you know, Mexicans and so forth—and they were sending them to literacy school, literacy training. We had it every day, and fact is we had that in Japan with them, and we had to give them more training. They trained them in the States and we did more advanced training overseas. And I was talking to a kid one day, and he says, "Well, why don't you come on over and meet our instructor?" and I went over there and was talking to him, and he said, "Why don't you take the GED test?" I didn't know what a GED test was. (laughs) And he says, "I'll tutor you on it." And so I went over about three nights a week for about six or eight weeks, and then I took the GED test, and that was the end of it.

DePue: And you just mentioned that was in Japan in 1949.

Smith: In Japan in '49, yeah. I went down to Nagasaki to spend a weekend down in Nagasaki. There was nothing there but a few Quonset huts and rubble. God, it was awful.

DePue: Did you have some second thoughts about the wisdom of dropping the bomb?

Smith: No, it didn't bother me at all, I just—oh, God, it was devastating because there was nothing there. People were still living under the ground, and see, they dropped that bomb in '45, and this was '49, and they were still living in the holes and in cages—not cages, but underground—and there was nothing there

except Quonset huts that we had put up. Boy, I think in Nagasaki, there was more destruction than there was at Hiroshima.

DePue: But again, even when you saw the level of destruction, you didn't question that it was the right thing to do.

Smith: Nope. It never even crossed my mind. I just wondered why they didn't do it sooner. I mean, that was the only thing that... (laughs) I mean, what did I know? I didn't—

DePue: Well, certainly historians today would say that saved hundreds of thousands of lives, both Japanese and American.

Smith: And Americans, yes it did.

DePue: Okay, let's talk about your decision to go back into the Army in 1947, then. What led to that?

Smith: Well, they wouldn't let me do what I wanted to do on the farm, because I wanted to expand and use hybrid corn, which they wouldn't believe me. Nobody believed anything I talked about or anything I told them or any ideas that I had, so I just left them, and I went back in service. Went up to the recruiting officer and says, "I want to reenlist in the Army." This was about nine o'clock. I says, "How fast can you get me out of town?" He says, "I can have you on the eleven o'clock bus going to Fort Bragg, North Carolina." I says, "Sign me up." So that's when I reenlisted and went to Fort Bragg. They sent me down to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, for a refresher course. And I was at Fort Jackson for two weeks doing the refresher course, having to fire the M-1, you get familiar with the rifles again, and then I believe I got ten days at home, and then I went to Oakland, California, and went to Korea the first time.

DePue: So you got an accelerated training program here.

Smith: Well, they call it a refresher course, because I've already had sixteen weeks of basic, and all I had to do was a refresher course for two weeks at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and then that's when they sent me overseas.

DePue: Did you tell them your actual birth date this time around?

Smith: (laughs) I told them, but they stuck with the seventh.

DePue: But they had the right year this time around.

Smith: They had the right year, but they didn't have the right date. (laughter) I'll tell you, some of the things I've been through, it's unbelievable.

DePue: What was your MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], your specific skill?

- Smith: Forty-eight twelve was mortarman. I passed the rifleman stage, and light heavy weapons was my specialty.
- DePue: Were you okay with that?
- Smith: Yeah, I liked that. It was fine.
- DePue: Did you request that?
- Smith: No, you were appointed that, you know what I mean? You were put in there. You could always ask for a transfer, but they said, Well, your MOS called 4812 and so forth, and I forget the rifleman's, but anyway—everybody had to have the rifleman. But I had the 60 mortars to 81 mortars and ended up with the 4.2 mortars.
- DePue: Sixty millimeter, eighty—
- Smith: Eighty-one millimeter.
- DePue: —81 mm, and four deuce was—
- Smith: Four point two.
- DePue: —inches.
- Smith: Yeah, yeah. It was a huge thing. That was the last outfit I was in. That was the outfit I was in when I got captured.
- DePue: What did your folks think, especially your mother, think about you going back in the service?
- Smith: Well, she didn't have too much to say about it. She knew the situation and she knew I wasn't happy at home.
- DePue: Was your dad back at home at that time?
- Smith: Yes, yes, he was back at home, and they'd taken over the farm again and doing the regular runs.
- DePue: Were they making decent money?
- Smith: Yeah, they was making fairly good. Of course, farming is always a big gamble, but we were very fortunate; we always seemed to come out pretty good. We never went hungry, and, oh, had plenty to eat and clothes to wear and had a little money to spend. Now, we didn't have as much money as we had when we was working at the shipyard, I remember that, because the money just wasn't there, you know.

DePue: When you heard the news that you're going to Korea, did you have an idea in your mind where the heck Korea was?

Smith: I had never heard of Korea, never heard of it. We got on the ship in Oakland, California, and I went on the advance party, which had to clean up the ship before the main group came in.

DePue: This wasn't a Liberty ship, was it?

Smith: I think it was on the USS *Shanks*, because it was the only ship I'd ever been on with a wooden deck, believe it or not.

DePue: So you knew it wasn't one built in your shipyard?

Smith: Right, I knew it. And the funny part about it, when I went back in 1950, I was on the same USS *Shanks*. I told my buddies, I said, "Hell, I been on this one before." Had the same wooden deck, you know what I mean? Oh, gee whiz.

DePue: So as far as you know, you were being sent to the ends of the earth.

Smith: Right. And when we got there, we landed in Inchon, and the fact is the ship couldn't go in all the way to Inchon, and they had to send out in little LCIs boats to pick us up and take us into shore because the tide wasn't right.

DePue: LCI is Landing Craft Infantry, I think.

Smith: Um-hm.

DePue: Well, Inchon is known for its extremely high tides. But did you stay—

Smith: We were a long ways from Inchon. We were twenty miles from Inchon when we got off the boat.

DePue: Wow.

Smith: Yeah. And we got on the train—

DePue: Did you stay in the Seoul area? Inchon is the harbor for Seoul.

Smith: Yeah, and we stayed there for, oh, just a couple, three days, and then they shipped us down to Pusan.

DePue: I'm curious why they wouldn't have dropped you off at Pusan to begin with.

Smith: I don't know. I don't know. That's the way the ship went.

DePue: What was your unit assignment while you were in Korea?

Smith: Let's see, the first time I was with the 6th Division.

DePue: Now, what I've got down here in my records, and I think based on what your book said, H Company, 77th Regiment, 6th Infantry Division.

Smith: Yeah. That was in Pusan.

DePue: What was H Company? Was that the...?

Smith: Light heavy weapons.

DePue: What was your specific assignment when you were in that unit?

Smith: I was a mortarman.

DePue: Were you working on 60s or 81s?

Smith: Sixties and the advance group was working on 81s, but mostly I was an M-1 and of course had the BAR [Browning Automatic Rifle] and the carbine and the .45. We had to learn all those weapons.

DePue: When did you first get to Korea, do you recall? The month?

Smith: You know, I don't remember. It was 19—

DePue: I know it was '47 sometime.

Smith: —47 sometime. It had to be late '47. It had to be December '47 or in the fall, because it was cold. I remember that. The weather was colder than the dickens. And when we got there, I talked to a mail runner, and the only thing you could do at that point in time was—they had three choices; it was guard, guard, and guard because it was during the occupation, you know what I mean, and all you did was guard duty.

DePue: So you didn't need to be a mortarman, fighting all the time.

Smith: No. And my outfit, H company, with the light heavy weapons, and then we ran reconnaissance around Syngman Rhee's house, over there at the—Vista, that's it. Vista Del Mar was the name of the street that his castle was on. That was the president's. We had to keep guard on it, and of course we rotated, but we would go out at night, certain hours of the night, in our squad and do a reconnaissance route, because at that time it was being infiltrated by the North Koreans, even at that time.

DePue: Syngman Rhee was the president of—

Smith: Was the president of Korea.

DePue: —South Korea. I would have thought he was in Seoul, not Pusan.

- Smith: Well, that was his summer home in Pusan, I guess it was. Yeah, the capital was in Seoul, but we still had to take care of his house down there.
- DePue: Well, I want to take you back—
- Smith: Vista Del Mar, because that's the first time I'd ever killed a Korean, on guard duty. You know, you're trained so—I don't know how to put it. You're trained so well that when anything goes out of line, you shoot, and I killed a Korean boy that was in the compound of the president's house. I always regretted it, but you do it by reflexes. I had a .45 and was walking guard, and I knew something was going on but I couldn't figure out what it was, and something ran by me and took off down, and I just shot. I hollered "Sugura, sugura, sugura" three times, sugara. And I just blew him to pieces.
- DePue: How young do you think he was? How old?
- Smith: Oh, maybe fifteen. It's hard to tell.
- DePue: Any idea why he would have been there?
- Smith: He was in there scrounging, because he had a basket on his back to pick up stuff.
- DePue: So you don't think he was a guerilla—
- Smith: No, I don't—
- DePue: —or a communist.
- Smith: I don't think so.
- DePue: I want you to describe as best you can what it was like in Korea at that time, and let's start with your first impressions and the sights and smells when you first got off that ship.
- Smith: Well, I got off the ship at Pusan, and that was near the RTO [Radio Telephone Operator], on a Sunday morning, I believe, and of course everybody was curious as to where we were going. They bused us out on six-bys to Camp Reese, R-e-e-s-e, and that was about two miles out of Pusan. In fact, it's north of Pusan. We were in the old Japanese constabulary\_huts, made out of mud, and that is where I was in the 6th Division. And that's when we found out if you got a chance to go to town, you had to go with two or three or more people; you couldn't go alone because they were paying a hundred dollars for a G.I. ear.
- DePue: Who was paying?

Smith: Somebody was down there, because we had a couple of guys lose their ears. But it was bringing a hundred dollars, a hundred G.I. dollars on the scrip.

DePue: Would this have been commies?

Smith: It could have been communist, yes.

DePue: So the Korean people didn't like the Americans?

Smith: No, they didn't like the Americans. Now, they were glad that the Japanese were gone, but they still don't like the Americans. They don't. I know you don't believe me, but they hate our guts. I've lived with them; I know them. They used to come into our huts at night and walk out with footlockers—because I shot a couple with footlockers, and they had to drop them before they went over the fence. We had a barbed-wire fence around Camp Reese. Man, I've gone out and picked up clothes and everything. When people would shoot at them—the guards would shoot at them—they'd drop everything and run—clothes and boots and everything.

DePue: Can you describe a little bit about what it was like in Korea itself when you did get off of the post?

Smith: Well, the only place I ever went was down to—it was a cabaret, dance hall, and they had tickets, sold tickets to dance with the girls, and that was the only place I ever went except the market. Now, they had one whale of a market that we used to go through and see all they had. They had snakes and frogs and—you name it, they had it, hanging up there, dried—some of them dried, and some of them was alive. Open market. And they had their vegetables. The odor was awful, but you got used to it. I didn't go to town too much when I was there.

DePue: So most of the time in Korea you stayed on post or...?

Smith: I stayed on post. We had a beer garden there, which, I didn't drink beer. I used to go down and sit with the guys, and they'd drink that old Red Fox (laughs) can of beer, and I'd drink a Coke or something like that, water, because I didn't like beer. I just didn't drink it. And that was the only thing we had. Of course, we had inspections right and left, but we had no recreation at all. And I became the company barber, which I got a private place over there to sleep in the barbershop and right next to the mess hall. There was just nothing to do there. You'd go downtown and the kids were running around with a tin cup wanting something to eat, you know, mama have-a no, papa have-a no choppa choppa presento and all that crap, and it was disgusting, really, and that's why I didn't go downtown much.

DePue: You'd grown up in the United States during the Depression; things were tough in the United States. How would you compare what you had experienced

growing up in the Depression in the agriculture community with what you were seeing in Korea?

Smith: Oh, it's no comparison. No comparison. Those people didn't have anything. At least we had our own vegetables, we had everything; they had nothing. They had nothing. It was just disheartening to see those people.

DePue: Was there a lot of infiltration of communists—

Smith: There was a lot of infiltration coming in down there. It was like those KBC warehouses.

DePue: KBC?

Smith: KBC, or KB—yeah I believe they were KBC. That's what we called them.

DePue: Do you know what that stood for?

Smith: I know there were warehouses that had all of our clothes and everything in them. There were two huge ones down at Pusan, and there was about twenty or twenty-five railroad tracks on the other side of them, because I remember they would dig down under those railroad tracks, dig a tunnel under there, and come up in the warehouse, and they were stealing our stuff. And we put the K9 dogs in there to catch them. I remember that. And gee whiz, it was just awful. But yeah, communists were infiltrating at that time. I couldn't figure out why they were catching so many and what they were doing there, but they said, well, they're northerners; they're from the north. And it didn't dawn on me that they were communists infiltrating and what they were doing there, but I knew we were catching a lot of them.

DePue: But there wasn't mention that these were communists?

Smith: No, they didn't mention it, they just said they were from the north. And at one time I thought they was coming down because they were hungry, you know what I mean? They didn't have anything else and coming down, stealing everything. But they were communists.

DePue: Did you or your unit have any dealings with the South Korean constabulary or the South Korean army at the time?

Smith: Very little, because just before we pulled out of there, we turned over our barracks and everything to the constabulary, to the South Koreans, but now that was in—I left there in December of '48—fact is, December the twenty-eighth of '48, which is when I got on a small ship and went over to Japan. But we had turned everything over. We stayed downtown in Quonset huts for three or four days while the South Korean army took over our base at Camp Reese. They moved in and took over everything.

- DePue: There's a lot of talk about the origins of the Korean War if you read the historical accounts and the South Korean army's preparation before that time, and a lot of criticism because the United States had refused to give the South Korean army any heavy tanks, any heavy artillery. Really, it was a pretty lightly armed force. Did you know about any of that at the time?
- Smith: No, I didn't, but I do know when I—we're getting ahead of ourselves now—but when I left there, I went over to Japan, I knew the difference in Japan was much better duty than in Korea, and it was more open and the people were more friendly than the South Koreans. Just when I was in with the 24th Division at Camp Mower in Japan. And—
- DePue: So let's talk about that. You said you left in December of '48, and what had happened at that time, the United States had decided to—
- Smith: To pull the troops out of Korea—
- DePue: —pull the troops.
- Smith: —but they left a small KMAG group there.
- DePue: KMAG being advisors, military advisors.
- Smith: Advisors, military advisors, yep.
- DePue: KMAG or KMA—
- Smith: KMAG, M-A-G, I think it was.
- DePue: Yeah, Korean Military Advisor Group. Nobody approached you about being in KMAG, did they?
- Smith: No, no. I don't know, I just did what they told me to do and went on over to Japan.
- DePue: Were you happy to be leaving Korea?
- Smith: Yes, I was, because until you did duty in Korea, you didn't even know what living was like. That was bad. And I had a couple of sergeants that had been to Germany, and they'd always tell me, Smitty, if you ever get a chance to go to Germany, go to Germany, go to Germany. To hell with the Far East. (DePue laughs) They knew the difference, you know what I mean, because they had been to Germany.
- DePue: Well give us a little bit more of the comparison and the contrast between Korea and Japan in terms of the civilian areas.

- Smith: Oh, the civilian areas. Well, we had certain areas that we could go to in Japan, and we had a lot more freedom there than in Korea, because in Korea, Pusan, that was the only place you could go, but in Japan, you could move around. Of course, there were certain streets you couldn't go on, but everything was pretty well mapped out. You could go most anywhere you wanted to, and the people were more friendly in my opinion than they were in Korea. I don't know if they were more afraid of us in Korea or... I don't know.
- DePue: Did you ever feel threatened or insecure when you were in the civilian areas in Japan?
- Smith: Not really, no, no, I never did, because there's too many women there. Man, I'm telling you, (laughs) and they like the G.I. dollar, you know what I mean? Oh, man, it was good duty.
- DePue: Well, G.I.'s being G.I.'s, even in Korea, I would imagine that there were guys who were trying to get hooked up with the Korean women.
- Smith: Yeah, well, they had one dance hall there, and it was so crowded... I went there a couple or three times and it didn't interest me at all. It just didn't...
- DePue: But you didn't mind going off base when you were in Japan?
- Smith: No, in Japan it was a different world and the people were more friendly. Of course, you had some old ones that were diehards, but as long as you watched yourself and didn't cause them any trouble and stay out of the way of the MPs, you was in pretty good shape.
- DePue: What was the unit you were assigned to in Japan? Were you still in the 6th Division?
- Smith: No, I was in the 24th Division.
- DePue: Do you remember specifically what unit you were in?
- Smith: Yeah. Company M, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division.
- DePue: And you said you were at Camp Mower, which is in—
- Smith: Camp Mower, which is right out of Sasebo.
- DePue: Did you develop a liking for the Japanese culture and people?
- Smith: They were all right, yeah. I got along with them all right, you know what I mean? They were just so much different from the Koreans. You got nothing, you know, from the Koreans, but it was just a different world. A different world. You were treated better in Japan than you were in Korea.

DePue: You're still part of an occupation army, so what specifically were your duties?

Smith: Our main thing was giving the kids that come over to Japan advance training in the infantry with the weapons. We had machine guns, BARs [Browning Automatic Rifle], and so forth, and we would give the kids eight weeks basic in the United States, and when they'd get to Japan we'd give them more advance training, and that was about it.

DePue: That doesn't sound like occupation duty, though.

Smith: Well, that was about it. That was what we did, and guard duty.

DePue: What were you guarding?

Smith: Guarding the warehouses and different areas there.

DePue: Now, Japan, at the end of the war in 1945 was—I'm looking for a good word—pulverized. There was an awful lot of destruction, but it sounds like the Japanese people weren't nearly as desperate as the Koreans you saw?

Smith: No, they were not, because Sasebo is in southern Kyushu Island, and they were just different. They were different. They all looked alike, but they were different.

DePue: Did you enjoy your duty in Japan?

Smith: I did, I did. I had been overseas so long, that's when I asked our company clerk when would I be able to go home, because I'd been in Korea and been in Japan for so long, and that's when they told me I could have gone home several months before, but I didn't (laughs) know it, and see, they'd keep you over there as long as long as you didn't bitch, (laughter) they would, I guess, keep you over there forever.

DePue: It sounds like you had the normal three-year enlistment tour, then.

Smith: Yeah, and then I was going make the Army a career, and I'd always put that on the forms when you sent them out, you know, if you intended to stay in the Army. I went to communications school and all that shit—I mean (laughs)—

DePue: That's okay.

Smith: —all that stuff. And then it was just fine with me.

DePue: Well, you said that you were planning to make the Army a career, then why did you ask to be sent back home?

Smith: Well, I wanted to come back to the States. I had been gone so long I just wanted to come back to the States.

- DePue: Oh, okay, so you weren't wanting to get out of the service at the time.
- Smith: No, no, I just wanted to come back to the States because I'd been over there thirty-something months, you know.
- DePue: Well, I want to get back to that, but I've got quite a few more questions. You talked a little bit about the training, and I always heard that there was an awful lot of turnover, and it sounds like your training was always focused on the new guys and basic weapons training. Before we get into more questions on that, though, I also have heard a lot of the stories about how the Army was cadre'd<sup>1</sup> at the time. Do you recall any of the specifics about the 24th division?
- Smith: Well, they were changing over, because the barracks we lived in was old Japanese barracks, all-wooden barracks, but they wanted us to put up curtains. They wanted to modernize it, I guess. I was a squad leader, and one of my jobs was to go downtown and buy material for curtains for the barracks, and which I'd never heard of anything like that before. I just couldn't believe it. That was one of the things... I don't know. We had a lot of inspections, but things were kind of changing because the old-timers didn't like what was going on because it was too easy on the recruits that were coming in.
- DePue: The World War II veterans.
- Smith: Um-hm. They didn't think it was tough enough on their training or anything was tough enough for the young kids coming in, because they were too lenient, because too many mamas went to the congressmen and said, my son is this, this, this, and of course the Congress is going to come over to the general and chew him out, and then he comes down and says, now, be slack with the boys, you know what I mean? You had to handle them with kid gloves, and the old sergeants just didn't believe that.
- DePue: Did the training impress you as being good-quality training?
- Smith: Well, I thought it was good, yeah, as long as they could understand what you were doing. Because I gave map-reading classes, I gave BAR classes, I gave bazooka classes. I was an instructor in just about everything we had except the water-cooled .30-caliber machine gun. I had the air-cooled machine gun but not the water-cooled one. But I'd teach them how to use it and so forth.
- DePue: Do you recall, did the 34th Regiment have all of the companies it was supposed to?
- Smith: There's a Company M, Company I...L—L was across the street. I believe that was all that was there.

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<sup>1</sup> Cadre: a group of trained personnel able to assume control and train others.

- DePue: A lot of the accounts that I've read is that the Army had cadred, so maybe they only had two regiments out of the three they were supposed to have, or maybe they were short a battalion or two in a regiment.
- Smith: It could have been, because I was in the—let's see—in Japan, 34th Infantry Regiment, the M Company—I was in the M Company—L Company, and then of course headquarters company, and I Company's the only one I can remember. I can't remember C Company.
- DePue: That's okay. I mean, you were still a very young man at the time. What was your rank?
- Smith: Well, private, because, see, that was before they brought the recruit back—you know, you had to be a recruit before you could become a private, and then a PFC and so forth and so on. And I was busted seven times, so I could make rank, but I couldn't keep it, you know.
- DePue: Well, what were you doing to get busted all the time, Bill?
- Smith: Well, you know, some guy come up to you and start running his mouth off, and I just (claps) pop him, and before you'd realize it, you'd done plastered him, and then (makes zipping noise) you go up to the orderly room and seven days company punishment, restricted to the company. I couldn't keep the rank. I couldn't keep it.
- DePue: Were you getting the reputation of being kind of a feisty character?
- Smith: Well, I don't know, I always got along good with most everybody, but I couldn't brown-nose. I didn't give a damn if they shot me, I wouldn't kiss their ass for nothing.
- DePue: Well, who are we talking about, the NCOs [Non-commissioned Officers] or...?
- Smith: Well, any of them. I wouldn't do it. I knew what I was supposed to do, and I did it, and when they tried to push anything else on me, I refused, and when I refused something, I knew I had a right to refuse it, you know.
- DePue: You weren't looking to make rank, then?
- Smith: No. As long as they left me alone, I was happy. I could make it, but I couldn't keep it.
- DePue: Well, let's talk a little bit more about the nature of the training, and I'm especially curious about what level of training. Did you go into the field a lot, go on maneuvers?

Smith: On maneuvers a lot, and fact is, we was on a mountain called Anabaruf, about—oh, God, I guess it's twenty-five or thirty miles from Sasebo, from Camp Mower. It was up in the mountains, and of course we had to put up tents, and we built permanent tents there with the post and so forth. You woke up and you was in the clouds, that's how high the mountains were. And we did training there.

DePue: Did you have any simulated combat exercises?

Smith: Yeah, we had simulated combat exercises, and we had—(laughs) one company commander would go around shooting firecrackers. (laughs) He got a kick out of it. I told them, "Somebody's going to plaster him one of these days,"—hit him with a rifle, you know. But he'd go around and throw firecrackers behind him and light a string of them and throw them out, especially at night. I guess he liked the fire, I don't know. He was the only one that did that.

DePue: Did you practice any patrolling?

Smith: We practiced patrolling and how to surround a house, how to take care of a crowd downtown with the wedge and formations, and how to move from over here, move them there. And regular routine.

DePue: Did you have any live fire opportunities with mortars?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. There at Camp Mower, there was a little small island out from camp there we used to fire rounds on, 81s. And you got a lot of practice because we had a sea wall there. We'd put the mortars up on the sea wall and fire them at the little island that was out there from Camp Mower. And everybody had to go through the same training. And, of course, when you had a misfire, you'd have to take that mortar up, tilt it up, and catch the shell—

DePue: Let the round slide out of the tube.

Smith: Let the round slide without hitting the firing pin on the end of it. (laughs) That's nerve-wracking, though, boy, I'll tell you. And when you're training those men, you get a misfire, you're the one that has to go do it; you can't trust the kids. (laughs) Oh, man. That puts a lot of pressure on you, especially if you have two or three misfires on the same day. Man.

DePue: Was this old, World War II—vintage ammunition?

Smith: World War II ammunition and World War II weapons. We didn't have any new weapons. (laughs) Like when we went to Korea, I was the only man—well, we had me and another man, we was the only ones that'd ever fired a BAR. You know what a BAR is?

DePue: Browning Automatic Rifle.

Smith: Browning Automatic Rifle. Shoots five hundred rounds a minute. I had four ammo bearers because you couldn't keep enough ammo. You'd run out of ammo in a minute. You just couldn't keep it up.

DePue: I'm kind of jumping back here, but growing up on the farm did the family hunt and fish and those kinds of things?

Smith: We hunted and fished. I used to hunt squirrels and rabbits.

DePue: Okay, so you weren't unfamiliar with weapons even when you got to the military.

Smith: No, well, I knew the shotgun and the rifle, and of course I knew the pistols, six-shooters. I never had worked with a .45, though.

DePue: Well, you had mentioned going back to the United States, and this would have been early June of 1950.

Smith: Right, yep.

DePue: Did you fly back, or did you...?

Smith: No, I came back on a ship.

DePue: What kind of a ship was that?

Smith: It was a Liberty ship, a transport ship, only the deck was metal instead of wood coming back. And it took us ten days to come back to Seattle, Washington.

DePue: But something happened while you were on board ship, didn't it?

Smith: Yeah, when the North Koreans attacked the South Koreans, then (doorbell rings)—I want to get that.

DePue: I think we're going to pause here for just a second.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, we took a very short break because somebody came to the door. You just mentioned, Bill, that the ship had departed from Yokohama, and I know you were out a couple days on the Pacific Ocean when you got some news. Tell us about that.

Smith: We got news that North Korea had attacked South Korea, and it wasn't only a few hours after that that President Truman froze everybody that was in service. I was coming home to discharge and reenlist, and when he froze everybody in service, I saw guys hanging over the rail crying (laughs) because they had their twenty years and was coming back for discharge, and man, I

couldn't understand it. We had some guys there that were World War II men that had fought in Germany, and some of them had fought in the Pacific, and going home for discharge, and then when Truman froze everything, boy, they all just lost it—a lot of them did.

DePue: You explained quite vividly that you had no great love or admiration for the Korean people and apparently didn't have a real clear idea of what was going on in the south with all these infiltrators coming in.

Smith: No, I didn't understand it. I couldn't understand it. It didn't dawn on me—of course, what I know now—but it didn't dawn on me that they were infiltrating and finding out how many troops or what was going on, military stuff. It never dawned on me that that's what they were doing.

DePue: What did you think about the decision that Truman's administration made pretty quickly, that we needed to fight in Korea? What did you think about that?

Smith: You know, I really couldn't believe it when I first heard it. Why? I just couldn't understand it, when we'd just left there, you know. I mean, we occupied the place, but of course the South Korean army couldn't hold them back.

DePue: Did you think at the time it was the right decision?

Smith: Well, I never really give it much thought except we had to go over there and help the South Koreans because they had been occupied forty-something years by Japan. And, of course, being a soldier, yours is not to reason why, yours is but to do or die. I didn't question that much. I should have, I guess—it wouldn't have done any good—but it didn't really sink in on me that we would have to go in combat. I don't know why—that was the logical thing to do—but I didn't think about it that way.

DePue: You got back to the United States about ten days, you said?

Smith: I got ten days delay enroute of leave, and then I was reassigned to Edgewood Arsenal.

DePue: Edgewood?

Smith: Uh-huh.

DePue: Where was that?

Smith: That was in Maryland.

DePue: And what was the unit, then, that you were assigned to?

- Smith: Second Chemical Mortar Battalion.
- DePue: Well, how is a chemical mortar battalion different than what you were doing with 81s and four deuce mortars?
- Smith: They were 4.2 mortars; they were larger mortars.
- DePue: Okay, I think I made a mistake. You hadn't worked with the 4.2 before?
- Smith: I had not worked with the 4.2 before that, no. I had to go out and be trained on the 4.2. Everything that was done on the other mortars, only this was a bigger mortar and a little different sights, but basically the same as far as leveling it and firing it. The sights and so forth were different, but that's about all.
- DePue: Why was it called the chemical battalion, then?
- Smith: It was left over from I guess the First World War that they named it 'chemical,' because we used chemical—well, they said chemical, but it really wasn't; it was HE [high explosive] heavy fire mortar rounds—white phosphorus—let me put it that way. That'll make it easier. We had the white phosphorus shells, and that was the chemical part, I guess.
- DePue: Okay, so the munitions that it fired were HE, which was regular high-explosive stuff, and white phosphorus rounds.
- Smith: White phosphorus rounds, and then we had shrapnel rounds.
- DePue: I would think that would be a matter of the fuse that you have.
- Smith: Yeah, shrapnel, I guess, just HE heavy.
- DePue: The white phosphorus—were they using those—I know that what happens, it burns extremely hot, but it also makes some smoke. So what was the use for that? Was it to burn people out or as a smokescreen?
- Smith: Well, it was more to burn people out than it was a smokescreen for the simple reason when it splattered out, when it exploded, those little drops of hot lead would burn you, and if you were—
- DePue: The phosphorus.
- Smith: Yeah, and it would hit them in the foxholes. Well, they'd jump out of the foxholes because they were burning, and then you'd hit them with HE heavy and knock them down, which, I mean, made perfect sense. It was a good tactic.
- DePue: Well, I know that—I think, from reading your book, you ran into somebody there that stayed a lifelong friend. Ray?

- Smith: Ray Mendell. Yeah, he was my foxhole buddy.
- DePue: Was he also coming back from Japan?
- Smith: Yeah, he was coming back from Germany, and I met him, there in Edgewood Arsenal. We became pretty good buddies.
- DePue: What was your specific job, then, in this unit?
- Smith: I was the gunner on the 4.2 mortar, and that was about it. Of course, I had a BAR, and that was the main thing—my main job was the BAR when we went under combat, but I had to be versed on the mortar because if anything happened to the guy in front of you, you step up and take his place.
- DePue: Now, you mentioned that you had ammo bearers with the BAR—
- Smith: Yeah, I had four ammo bearers with my BAR, because those bandoliers, you know, you can only take so many yourself.
- DePue: What was the caliber of the BAR?
- Smith: It was a .30-caliber.
- DePue: So that's a heavy round.
- Smith: That's a heavy round, pretty heavy round. And that gun would fire sometimes—you'd fire it so much it would start firing by itself. It would get hot, and then, of course, you put a clip in there, and man, it would just start firing.
- DePue: So it was clip-fed but not belt-fed.
- Smith: Yeah, clip-fed. No belts.
- DePue: How long did you stay in the States before you were shipped back overseas, then?
- Smith: I guess maybe six weeks or less—just a few weeks.
- DePue: During any of this time, either when you were in Japan or when you're back stateside in Edgewood, were you getting any classes or training on what to do if you were ever captured?
- Smith: Nope.
- DePue: No instruction on the Geneva Code?
- Smith: Geneva Code or Geneva Convention, no. They taught us in Japan—that's when the United Nations came into being if you go back and look at the

history—and it was supposed to do so much, so much, so much. We had some lectures on that, but the only thing we ever had was if you were ever captured, name, rank, and serial number.

DePue: That was the extent of it.

Smith: That was the extent of it, yeah.

DePue: You didn't have any notion of what your rights were under the Geneva—

Smith: What your rights or what—no. Well, I had heard of the words “the Geneva Convention,” but nobody believed it; you know, we knew it wasn't so. And it was proven in Korea. It didn't mean a damn thing. (laughs)

DePue: What was your impression of that company's leadership? Do you remember much about it?

Smith: In Edgewood?

DePue: Yeah, the 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion.

Smith: Second Chemical? We had about—oh, God, we must have had five or six company commanders in just a little time after we went overseas. I never had too much use for officers—that's just my personal feeling, you know. Some of them were pretty good, but most of them I'd run into, they wanted you to think that they knew more than they did know, most of them. (laughs) I don't know how you feel or what—you might have been an officer, I don't know—but that's the impression that I got out of most of them. They wanted to be the cock of the walk, but they couldn't walk straight, let me put it that way. (laughs)

DePue: Well, the strength of the Army at that time was all those World War II-vintage NCOs. How about the NCOs that you had to work with?

Smith: Some of them were pretty good. They too were different. I had an NCO in Japan who refused to go back to the States. He loved it so well over there, and he gave up his family and everything. He stayed there. And I've often wondered what happened to him, because he was a heck of a good guy, and I just don't know. Some of them—they were all different, though. I mean, you meet some good, some bad.

DePue: You had respect for most of the NCOs, though?

Smith: Most of them, I did. Most of them were down-to-earth. They told you what to do, and you knew why. In other words, if you didn't understand why you had to do it, they would explain it to you. Most of them were good at that, and that's why they were NCOs, I guess, but they were pretty good.

DePue: When did you ship back to Korea, then?

Smith: Six weeks, maybe? It was September or October...September, I would guess.

DePue: It was before the Inchon landings?

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: Okay, so that would have been in September, then, probably early September.

Smith: Early September, somewhere in there.

DePue: How did you get to Korea?

Smith: On that *USS Shanks* I was telling you about, the one with the boards and the deck.

DePue: You shipped out of where, then?

Smith: We shipped out of Oakland, California.

DePue: Did you go all the way straight into Pusan?

Smith: We went over by train to Oakland, and then we went straight into Pusan, yeah.

DePue: No stop in Japan this time.

Smith: No.

DePue: Can you paint me a picture of what it was like arriving in Pusan in September in the midst of this catastrophe, because the American Army and the South Koreans had been pushed into the—

Smith: Been pushed into the—

DePue: —perimeter.

Smith: Pusan perimeter, yeah. And we got off the ship there, and everything was quiet. In other words, you were given orders and we were pretty strained because when we got off the ship, we went straight out to a schoolhouse outside of Pusan and set up tents, and that's where they assigned me the four South Korean ammo bearers. It was just a few days, three or four days, I guess, before we started moving north.

DePue: What was the morale of you and the other Americans you were with?

Smith: Well, some of them were pretty down. I was more curious than anything else, and I knew what I had to do if the time come to do it. But a lot of the guys, were kind of disheartened. The morale was low, let me put it that way. And

we had some guys, like I said, that had been fighting in Germany, and they didn't like it at all either, but I didn't pay too much attention to it. I did what I was supposed to do, or I did everything that I thought should be done within my power. And then when they assigned me these four ROKs [Republic of Korea soldiers], I passed out their C-rations or K-rations were supposed to last three days. And then about three o'clock in the morning, one of them came and got me, and he was sick. They had all eaten every bit of the three days' rations, and they was all sick. I thought they was going to die. And so I had to get them out and walk them up and down the perimeter there because they had eaten everything in those bags, they were so hungry, you know, and it was three days' rations shot. But they didn't know any better.

DePue: Your old unit, the 34th, 34th Regiment, was the first—

Smith: First in Korea.

DePue: And part of the history of the American Army is Task Force Smith, which is the 34th. Had you heard anything about what had happened to them?

Smith: I hadn't heard a thing. I'd heard it on the radio about them being pushed back, but that was about it.

DePue: You had no idea that they'd gotten—

Smith: No idea that they got almost wiped out completely, no. But I met a couple of them in the prison camp. God, they're dead now; two of them are dead now.

DePue: I was curious about that, because that certainly would have been a rude awakening of what you guys were facing.

Smith: Yeah, but—

DePue: What unit was this chemical company attached to or assigned to?

Smith: It was assigned to the 1st ROK Division. The chemical battalion was a bastard outfit, and we were assigned to the 1st ROK Division of the South Koreans.

DePue: Did you personally deal with the South Korean army soldiers very much?

Smith: Not too much.

DePue: Just the ones that had—

Smith: Just the ones that were right there—well, the ones that were ahead of us—and then the four ammo bearers I had were South Korean army.

DePue: How quick did you guys get into combat, then?

- Smith: About three or four days, I guess. They had already pushed most of the North Koreans back, and when we moved in there we went up to Taegu and Twin Tunnels and on into Seoul.
- DePue: Was it just a few days after you got there, then, that the Inchon landings occurred? That was late September.
- Smith: Evidently it was, because when we went through Seoul, it was almost deserted except for the sandbags.
- DePue: Did you do much fighting between Taegu and Seoul, on the way in?
- Smith: No, not much. We got some fire, got to shoot some, but not much until we crossed the 38th.
- DePue: I know that the 1st Cavalry Division, was kind of on the lead, but was the 1st ROK going right along with them as you moved north?
- Smith: Yeah, I think the 1st ROK was in front of us, because we were supporting them, and the Cav [an armored cavalry unit] was over on our right.
- DePue: Even on the way north to Seoul?
- Smith: Yep. Well, past Seoul and crossing the 38th.
- DePue: Did you have many fire missions during that first—
- Smith: We had a few fire missions there, and we had a few fire missions before we ever got to Seoul, as well as I can remember.
- DePue: But this is a—
- Smith: Particularly at Cheorwon, we had a lot of it there.
- DePue: Well, that's quite a ways north of Seoul. So this is a time period where there's an awful lot of movement.
- Smith: Yeah. Well, we were on the move just about all the time.
- DePue: What was the transportation that the unit had organic to it?
- Smith: We had Jeeps, because I had to drive a Jeep, and six-bys.
- DePue: Six-bys? Six wheeled vehicle.
- Smith: Six wheels, yeah. Just six-bys—double wheels on the back, you know what I mean, the six-by truck—and that was about it.
- DePue: Do you recall any impressions that you had of Seoul when you got there?

Smith: It was just devastated. There was nothing there, very few people—nothing but sandbags. You'd have to go a block this way, a block that way, and a block this way. It was like that going through there because they had sandbags everywhere. Sandbags was up at the top of the hotel rooms. You'd take a thousand sandbags, and both sides of the street, and then bags here, bags there. And going through the streets of Seoul, I never will forget it. Very few people. A few MPs here and there was all.

DePue: Didn't see any of the civilians at all?

Smith: No, no civilians.

DePue: Were there what we would call build-up areas in the United States, major buildings, were they devastated, or...?

Smith: Yeah, everything that I saw when we left Seoul was nothing but, like, farmland, till we got to the 38th parallel, and then...

DePue: So you did little more than just drive through Seoul, then.

Smith: No, because they had already pushed them out of Seoul, pushed them north.

DePue: Do you recall any discussion—again, you're just a private and you're doing what you're told—but do you hear any discussion or recall the decision to go north of the 38th parallel?

Smith: No, not really. They come around one evening and says to me and Mendell, we got a mail truck going out if you want to write a letter home. That was the last of October, somewhere there, because we got the scuttlebutt that the Air Force said that the Chinese were building up on the border, thousands and thousands of them, and of course our leaders didn't believe it. The Air Force was taking pictures of them all the time and passing them down to us.

DePue: You heard that even when you guys were on the way north.

Smith: Um-hm.

DePue: Was the nature of the combat different when you crossed the 38th parallel and actually got into North Korea?

Smith: Yeah, they—

DePue: Right away?

Smith: Right away, because we went into P'yongyang, and—

DePue: Okay, P'yongyang is the capital of North Korea.

- Smith: —P'yongyang is the capital, yeah. And they had two or three breweries there—I remember that—and—
- DePue: Why do the breweries stick with you so much?
- Smith: Because the guys were emptying water cans on the back of the Jeeps and filling it up with beer. This kid that was with me, Roaten, the kid from Tennessee, was my sidekick there, and I had those four ROKs with me, and I told them: “No, nobody’s getting my water,” because I knew water was better than beer. I didn’t fool with the beer. That’s the reason I remember. They was coming down the street, and everybody (laughs) was drinking the beer and had them water cans full of beer and putting it back on the Jeeps, you know. “You’re not getting my water.” I wouldn’t have them do that.
- DePue: Do you remember any particular combat experiences before the date you were actually captured?
- Smith: Yeah, Sariwon—that was a little town. We took about three or four towns before we got to P'yongyang. And I can’t understand—it looks like it’s over here, but P'yongyang is way over here.
- DePue: No, here’s P'yongyang here. That’s the capital of North Korea. That’s where you would have gone through. We’re looking at some maps.
- Smith: Well, down here would have been...
- DePue: We’re looking at some—these are part of the West Point Atlas and military history is what we’re looking at here just to get our bearings. So P'yongyang is right here.
- Smith: Well, Sariwon would have been down here, is what I was looking at.
- DePue: It might be farther south here. Here’s the 38th parallel, though. Is that it right there?
- Smith: Yeah, there’s Sariwon, yeah. I knew it was before we went in there. We took that place about six times. And there was a lot of guerillas there, because I remember there was a little Piper Cub went over one time and says, “There’s several guerillas on the side of the road in the ditch.” We got fired on. I was trying to tell my South Koreans to “meeta meeta, lookie look, meeta meeta” both sides of the road, and this Piper Cub came over, and they saw some guerillas in a ditch, and they told us they were down there and to watch for them. Of course, we did, got rid of them, but... Then we went into P'yongyang.
- DePue: How much Korean did you speak at that time?

- Smith: Well, I don't really know. I knew enough to get by, Korean and Japanese, because it was all mixed because Korea had been occupied by Japan so they spoke Japanese as easy as they could Korean. And then I spoke enough Japanese to get by. The company commander called one time to follow the Koreans out and tell them to quit using the banjo, the john, at random. They had to go to a certain place, slit trench, to use the latrine and so forth. And it was hard to convince them to do that, but...
- DePue: Did having the Koreans in the company bring you up to full strength, then, at least to start with?
- Smith: Supposedly to bring us up to 201.
- DePue: Two hundred one percent?
- Smith: Two hundred and one men. That would have been the full strength of the company.
- DePue: Well, it sounds like you knew Japanese better than Korean at the time.
- Smith: Yeah, I did, because sugura changing. It just depends on where you were and what you had to do.
- DePue: Tell me more about the four Koreans who were assigned to you as ammo bearers.
- Smith: Ammo bearers. I named them Fee, Fi, Fo, and Fum. (laughter) And they all knew me, and, of course, when I'd call them, they knew what to do. They had my ammo.
- DePue: Well, how did they refer to you?
- Smith: Smitty-san.
- DePue: Smitty-san.
- Smith: Smitty-san. That's what I told them.
- DePue: Did you like them?
- Smith: Yeah.
- DePue: Were they good soldiers?
- Smith: They were good. They did exactly what I told them to do, and, of course, all they had to do was carry the ammo, and that was it.
- DePue: They might be thinking at the time that this was pretty good duty.

- Smith: They may have been, but—of course, they had rifles, too, but they always come to me.
- DePue: Do you know if they had much training before they arrived to your unit?
- Smith: You know, I don't think they did. I think what happened—and it may have been true, may not have been true. In Pusan, when they needed the men, they would drag a rope across a main drag down here and go up north of town and draw a rope around there, and the boys caught in between there all went into the service. I believe that's about the way they recruited them, because they were not disciplined too well, but of course, the ones I had did everything I told them to.
- DePue: What were their uniforms they were wearing?
- Smith: They were wearing mostly ours, like ours, similar to ours.
- DePue: Do you recall any encounters with North Korean soldiers while you were driving north?
- Smith: Not really. I ran into a lot of civilians, but of course, the North Koreans would put all the civilians on the bridges and then be behind them when they'd run across the bridges, and we would be coming up, and of course you had to shoot civilians before you could shoot the North Koreans.
- DePue: We're going to go for just a couple more minutes because I want to break for lunch, and then we can talk about your capture and all. But as the unit's driving north—okay, we're looking at a different map, now.
- Smith: P'yongyang, yeah.
- DePue: And right here is Sunch'on Tunnel.
- Smith: Sunch'on Tunnel, yeah.
- DePue: Did you hear of any stories about a massacre of American prisoners of war at the Sunch'on Tunnel?
- Smith: Yeah, I heard of it, and I—
- DePue: Even while you were driving north?
- Smith: Yeah. We had passed a lot of guys that had been shot where they had the rifles and the helmets—rifle stuck on the grave and the helmet sticking up. We passed a lot of those. We had heard of the massacre, but I'm not sure if I heard that after or before. I knew they would shoot a lot of them.
- DePue: You knew that it was habit to shoot prisoners.

Smith: Yeah, um-hm, because I know—

DePue: Did you have any—

Smith: Unsan, that's where I was captured.

DePue: Did you have any emotional reaction to hearing that news?

Smith: No, it didn't bother me because I expected it because they were brutal people to begin with. They were all just barbarians, really, when it comes down to it. Let's face it.

DePue: While you're doing that—

Smith: They had no thought of human life whatsoever.

DePue: As the unit was driving north, how would you describe the morale?

Smith: In our company, you mean?

DePue: Yeah.

Smith: I think it was pretty low in most cases, except some guys like me, curious, you know.

DePue: Well, weren't you hearing from the brass that the war's going to be over pretty soon?

Smith: Yeah, MacArthur had already sent yellow flags for the guys in the cavalry to wear to parade in Tokyo (laughs) on Memorial Day, you know what I mean, or Veterans Day or whatever it was, and they had already issued the yellow scarves to those guys. (laughs) And then the Chinese came across the border, and the shit hit the fan.

DePue: Yeah. Well, this is probably a pretty good point to stop and take a break, and then we'll get to a different kind of a war for you. Thank you, Bill.

(end of interview #1 #2 continues)

## Interview with William Smith

# VRK-A-L-2010-008.02

Interview # 2: February 23, 2010

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. The interview of record is the original video or audio file. You 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 was 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 Tuesday, the 23rd of February 2010. This is the second session with William Smith. Good afternoon, Bill.

W. Smith: Hello.

DePue: And we got you just up to November of 1950, and your unit was moving north past P'yongyang deep into northern North Korea. A couple other questions here for you before we actually talk about the incident where you eventually were captured. Tell me a little bit about mail. Were you able to keep in touch with the family while you were making this move north very well?

W. Smith: I never got any mail from home.

DePue: Were you sending any mail out?

W. Smith: I sent one letter out, on November the first. The company clerk came by, and he says, "We got a truck going back, and if you want to send any mail back, it's going back in thirty minutes; get it together and I'll take it back." And I wrote a letter home, sitting in my foxhole with Mendell. He says, "Billy, we better write; we might not get another chance," and so both of us wrote a letter home, gave it to the company clerk, and it went south. And that was on November the first.

DePue: You wouldn't happen to have that letter, would you?

W. Smith: No, I—

DePue: Do you remember what you said in the letter?

W. Smith: Our house burned up. But something in the newspapers about we had just—when my mother got the letter, we had just taken P'yongyang, the North Korean capital, and I know that was in the letter. And we didn't know how long we'd be there because MacArthur kept saying, "Go fifteen more miles" when he was racketing and things up that way.

DePue: He kept pushing the unit farther north.

W. Smith: He kept pushing: fifteen more miles, fifteen more miles. That's when we ran into the Chinese.

DePue: Now, I also found out that I'm to ask you about the lady with the radio.

W. Smith: Yes. I was sitting there in my foxhole, and I looked down—because I was on the right-hand side of the road this time—I looked down, and there was an SCR-300 radio and a woman under it going down the road, and she was just a-yak-yak-yak-yakking, you know. I looked at Mendell, and I says, "Hell, that's not right," and so I went and got her. And she was already almost through our position, because we were out on the point. And I went and got her and took the radio away from her and put a .45 up against her head. She knew what was going on then. And I took her down there to the command post, and I told the company commander. He says, "Well, where did you get her?" and I says, "Out there in the middle of the road." I said, "She's already come through our position, and she's already radioed it off." He says, "Well, get that radio off of her back." I said, "Not while I'm here." I said, "You wait. When I get out of the tent and get away from here, you can take the radio off, because you might have a hand grenade under it." You know what I mean. I left. I told him, I said, "You take it off after I leave, not while I'm here," and that was the end of her. But I knew that that's what she was doing, she was radioing our position in. And, of course, less than an hour later, we had to move; the whole company had to move out.

DePue: Now, you had just mentioned that MacArthur kept pushing you farther north, every fifteen miles another fifteen miles.

W. Smith: Fifteen miles, fifteen more miles.

DePue: And you'd also talked a little bit earlier in our first session about hearing about the Chinese, but that wasn't coming through the official chain of command, was it?

W. Smith: No. Fact is, Lieutenant [George] Deakin was the one that was telling us. He was my platoon leader. And he mentioned that they were coming across the border on the twenty-eighth of October—I mean, they were amassing on the border—and somehow or other he got it from the Air Force, because I remember him telling us, he says, “They say that the Chinese are getting on the border, but we don’t think they’ll cross it.”

DePue: Did you take that at face value?

W. Smith: I just shook my head, and I looked at Mendell and I says, “Boy, you think it’s been rough riding up here, wait till you face the Chinese.” And, of course, Ray was like me, he just shook his head. He couldn’t believe him, because we knew that they wouldn’t stop. They just wouldn’t do it.

DePue: Let me ask you this question. You didn’t have all that much schooling; you got your GED when you were in Japan. How much did you understand about communism versus capitalism?

W. Smith: Not a great deal. I had heard of it, and I knew it was there. I knew Germany, but as far as communism, I hadn’t, other than what I’d heard in school—and they said they taught it in college, communism classes, you know, and explained what it was and so forth—but it never really dawned on me that they even existed as far as that’s concerned. I knew they were different from us, but just communists is all I knew; I didn’t know anything about—

DePue: So as far as you were concerned, it was just ‘the enemy’?

W. Smith: Just the enemy, that’s right. That’s exactly right.

DePue: Okay. Well, then, I’d like to get us up to the point of the first of November, and for those who aren’t real familiar with the history of the Korean War, the first of November—you said your unit was adjacent, on the flank at the 1st Cav [1st Cavalry Division].

W. Smith: Yes.

DePue: And there is a short but very intense action between the Chinese and the 1st Cav, and obviously the 1st ROK Division for a few days, and then they melted back into the forests in the wood line again, and it wasn’t until the end of November that the Chinese attacked on a really massive scale.

W. Smith: Well, they hit us with the 8th Chinese Field Army, which was around eight thousand men.

DePue: Okay, so this was no small action on the first of November.

W. Smith: No, no, not as far as I was concerned, because we fought all night, and that morning—

- DePue: Now, where were you, first of all?
- W. Smith: Unsan.
- DePue: Just adjacent to Unsan.
- W. Smith: Unsan, yeah, right along up here somewhere.
- DePue: Okay, and we're looking at a map right now.
- W. Smith: No, I was below Unsan, right along there, because when we went through it, it was just burning, burning up, and the bodies were laid out there like you wouldn't believe.
- DePue: When you were moving north or moving south?
- W. Smith: Moving north. But that was after I was captured that I saw all the bodies.
- DePue: Oh, so I got you ahead of the story here. Go ahead and tell us about the incident where you are captured, then.
- W. Smith: Okay. We moved up here on November the first is when we wrote the letters home, and we moved up because we caught that woman going down through our position, and they made us move up farther on the road. And that evening there was very little firing, and all through the night, we could hear the birdcalls and the Chinese coming around, you know what I mean. We could hear that.
- DePue: Were you with the mortar weapons themselves, or are you forward of them?
- W. Smith: I was forward of them because we were holding the roadblock north of the company. Like, the company was behind us, back here.
- DePue: How many people were at that roadblock?
- W. Smith: Eight... Let's see. I had my four South Koreans, [Arthur] Welch, and Mendell, [Francis] Spain and me. No, Welch wasn't with us. Spain, Mendell, and me—there was seven of us.
- DePue: And you got to this position at what time?
- W. Smith: Must have been just dusk. Must have been seven or eight o'clock at night. And we stayed there, and very little fighting going on then.
- DePue: Were you expecting any fighting?
- W. Smith: Nobody was expecting any, I don't think. But when Deakin came around checking...

DePue: Deakin, the lieutenant?

W. Smith: He was my lieutenant. He was a West Point man. And he's coming around checking to see if everything's all right. And that was the last time I saw him that night. And we were getting low on ammunition, and I went back about four o'clock in the morning to see about getting more ammunition, and that's when I found out that the company had already moved out on us. So.

DePue: Talk about the combat itself, then.

W. Smith: Well, we were fighting. When they came across, there were so many of them.

DePue: Were you looking at wood lines or a clearing or what?

W. Smith: No, we were in part of a clearing, and the road was right here, and banking in the woods was up here. And of course they piled over the woods, and then they were coming forward this way. And some of them had already gone by us; they'd passed us by. And everybody was firing, and then I got hit by a concussion grenade, and I remember I'm laying on the ground, I'm flat on my stomach, and I looked up and I threw my hand up, and I was looking down the barrel of a sub Thompson machine gun, and it looked like a fifty-five-gallon drum. And I said, "Lord God, don't let him shoot," and the gun snapped. He went over here and shot the guy on this side of me, which was a South Korean; moved it back to me, the gun didn't fire; moved it over here and shot this guy; and when he got back to me again, he was out of ammunition. I'm assuming he was out of ammunition, because he started beating me with the butt of the gun. And that's where I took the worst beating I ever had in my life.

And then they tied me up with the double EA telephone wire, and running it down through my legs, and then they tied the guy behind me. Then they walked us around and threw us in a ditch, and in the ditch I saw my lieutenant. That night he was supposed to come up and tell us to pull back, but he didn't make it; he got captured before he got to where we were, so we didn't get any message to move. And when I saw him in that ditch over there, I asked him what happened, and he was trying to tell me, and the guards wouldn't let him say anything much.

And there were more there—they had a bunch of South Koreans there. And we stayed there for, oh, three or four hours, daylight, because the planes came over and was bombing and strafing because the company that pulled out left all the equipment. I learned later on—Major Cooper told me they got out the sick and wounded on four Jeeps is all they got out of that whole company that night. But when the planes come over, started bombing and strafing all of the trucks and Jeeps and everything that they left behind, destroying them so the Chinese wouldn't get them. That's when I learned that Deakin had come up through the night and got caught. We stayed there, and then we knew that

our fighting was over with for that particular time because there was nothing else we could do.

DePue: And the combat that evening—was this the evening of the first, or the...?

W. Smith: The evening of the first.

DePue: And into the second.

W. Smith: And into the second.

DePue: So you're fighting most of the night?

W. Smith: Fighting most of the night, off and on. It was sporadic. But they were still having firing missions, because the guns were going off behind us.

DePue: When they first attacked, was it already in darkness?

W. Smith: Yeah.

DePue: How could you tell what you were looking at?

W. Smith: Well, the moon was shining pretty good, but the Chinese—well, you couldn't tell whether they were Chinese or North Koreans or what; they were just coming at you. And then it quieted down until the next morning, and when the sun come up and the planes started, we realized that we'd already been surrounded. (laughs) Nobody was talking except me and Mendell. Welch and Spain, the other two Americans that was with us, they never said a word. They were speechless. They couldn't even talk. I told Ray, "You know, we're in a bad situation here," and of course when we run into Lieutenant Deakin over there in a ditch, we knew that it was pretty bad. And they had a lot of South Koreans, I think. They just took the South Koreans out and shot them.

DePue: Did you see that happen?

W. Smith: Yeah.

DePue: Was it that same day?

W. Smith: It was that same day. That would have been on the second of November, as well as I can remember.

DePue: Do you know, in that evening, were you pretty effective in your fire? Were you hitting the enemy?

W. Smith: Well, I thought I was, but with a BAR, you never know, especially when it gets so hot it starts firing itself and all I got to do would be change clips as best you could. I know my shoulder was sore, because if you shoot that thing

and it's not on your shoulder, it just knocks the hell out of you. It'll bruise you.

DePue: That was the first time you were in combat. What were the emotions going through your head at that time, before you were captured?

W. Smith: I don't know. Just shooting is all I could think of, just shoot, shoot, shoot. And I was concerned about my ROKs over here on this side, and there was one laying over here with a rifle, and I was just hoping that they wouldn't shoot us. You didn't trust them, you know what I mean? You couldn't trust them. I just... I should have trusted them more than I did, let me put it that way.

DePue: How about your emotions, your thoughts at that very moment of being captured?

W. Smith: I really was stunned. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe what I was going through, especially when they tied us up. It was more like a movie. It's happening, but is it happening to me? It's just...

DePue: Well, the first of November, the second of November, you're pretty far in northern Korea. Getting close to winter, if it's not already there.

W. Smith: It was cold. It was cold.

DePue: What kind of uniform did you have?

W. Smith: We had on summer clothes. I had heard—you can erase this—I had heard that the longshoremen struck and wouldn't load the ship, and that's why we didn't have any winter clothes.

DePue: Did you hear that after the war or...?

W. Smith: I heard that before we ever got captured, that we were not going to get any winter uniforms.

DePue: Longshoremen where?

W. Smith: In California. They wouldn't load the ship. They were striking for higher wages. But, like I says, stuff happens.

DePue: Did you have gloves?

W. Smith: No.

DePue: When they tied you—

W. Smith: Some of the guys later on had parkas, and I don't know where they hell they got them. We didn't have any, but I know some of the guys in the valley had

parkas, and the lice were so bad that the guys with the parkas died because the lice eat them up.

DePue: What happened, then, after that first night and you had everybody in the ditch tied up together?

W. Smith: We stayed there, and I guess the middle of the night, we started marching, and we marched over to a Korean house, and we stayed there all during that day. And there were two, I guess, officers there, North Korean or Chinese officers. One of them was North Korean and one of them was Chinese, because they both spoke English.

DePue: To each other.

W. Smith: To each other. They called us in and interrogated us, like wanted to know how many men were here and this, that, and the other. I told them I didn't know. I don't know. "What was you doing?" "I was over here." "What did you do?" "I was a BAR man." "What else did you do?" "That was all. That was my job. I didn't know."

DePue: Did they know that Deakin was an officer?

W. Smith: They knew that he was an officer, yeah, and they had already marked him up, and they had beat him. They had beat him pretty bad because their knuckles were—they beat him across his hands, bleeding.

DePue: You were talking about that first beating. Where in the body were you taking all these blows?

W. Smith: Mostly to the ribs and my arms, because I was holding like this, like this.

DePue: You were protecting your head.

W. Smith: Yeah. And then I got hit in the back with a bayonet, and it stung like hell, but it didn't hurt bad because I was numb. I was just numb.

DePue: Now, the concussion grenade at the point of being captured. Did you have some injuries?

W. Smith: Only my eyes and—well, everything was bleeding. My mouth was bleeding, my ears, my eyes was bleeding. I had shrapnel in my right foot, right ankle. Then when I got hit in the back with that bayonet, that just about finished me off as far as fighting was concerned, because you can't do much hand-to-hand combat with a BAR because that damn bipod is swinging around. You just can't do it. Incidentally, they charged me six dollars for two bipods I threw away. (laughs) They took six dollars out of my pay because I threw two of them away after... They got in your way more than anything else unless you

were going to be in a stationary position. You can't fire with them bipods going around like that. But I paid for them anyway.

DePue: How long did the interrogation, that first interrogation, last?

W. Smith: Oh, maybe about thirty minutes. Not long.

DePue: And you say both these people spoke English? They were the ones who were interrogating you?

W. Smith: Yeah, both of them spoke English real well, and the way I understand it, the North Korean couldn't speak Chinese and the Chinese couldn't speak North Korean, so they both spoke English. And then we were getting fired on—the planes were strafing the side of the hill—when they was interrogating us down in the valley in the Korean hut. I was just hoping they'd miss, wouldn't hit the house.

DePue: Had they fed you or given you any water up to this point?

W. Smith: No, no, I don't think.

DePue: How soon after that, then, did they start marching you north?

W. Smith: It was then about the middle of the night. They moved us over—oh, God, I don't know, we must have marched a couple of days before we came to the schoolhouse where they had a lot of the prisoners, and that's when we really started to march north, and there was about 750 of us. They was from the 1<sup>st</sup>, from the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, and some were ROKs, and of course us. We were the only ones from a mortar company besides the South Koreans with us.

DePue: The four ROKs that had worked with you, they were all shot that first night?

W. Smith: Yeah, I believe they were. Yeah, Fee, Fi, Fo, and Fum, I think they were all shot. They shot all of the South Koreans that was there. But they shot them on the second, the next day, when it was daylight.

DePue: But when you got to the schoolhouse there were some—

W. Smith: Got to the schoolhouse, there were some ROKs there, very few ROKs there, but most of them were the Americans. We had several officers there, too. And when we left the schoolhouse that night and started marching north, it was getting cold. And for the first eight days, me and my buddy—I had a tube of Colgate toothpaste in my pocket—and we was eating on that, and after eight days, we turned it inside out and licked it and had to throw it away—there was nothing there. And I told Mendell, "What are we going to do now?" He said, "Well, we got our shoes." (laughs) I said, "Well," and we start chewing on the leather, the combat boot. Then we came to a village, and they had a big basket—I never will forget it—of sort of tops that were frozen. They had been

cooked, and they turned purple, and there was big clumps of them out there in that basket, and everybody was running for it, and I got ahold of one and gave Ray part of it. It was frozen, but you'd break it off, and it melted in your mouth, and then you chewed it up and swallowed it. It had no taste whatsoever, but that was the first food that we had.

DePue: Eight days.

W. Smith: Eight days.

DePue: How about water? You can't last that long without water.

W. Smith: We had water going through the rice paddies, just a scoop like that of the hand. By that time, our beards was growing out, and breathing—when you'd get wet, your lips would get wet, you'd try to keep them wet. Then I don't even remember when we got the first water.

DePue: Was there any interrogation going on during this time?

W. Smith: No, because they were moving us, so...

DePue: When you stopped at night, where did you sleep? Did you sleep?

W. Smith: We were put into huts, civilian huts that they'd run the civilians out of or the civilians had left, or in mining camps—actual mines. We would stay there in the daytime until night came, and when night came, we started marching again.

DePue: Now, do you know generally the direction you were walking?

W. Smith: I'm thinking north. I'm pretty sure it was north.

DePue: Now, we were talking before we began the actual interview, and my guess, our guess is that you were walking up what is on this map called Death Valley, so that would have been northeast—more north than east, though.

W. Smith: Could have been. But how did we get back over here to P'yongyang? Oh, after the valley, yeah.

DePue: But you had made mention at lunch today that you had actually seen some action near the Chosin Reservoir.

W. Smith: Yeah. That's why I'm concerned about this valley here, because we escaped the first winter. Me and Gennaro left, and that's why I'm saying we were in the valley. We were in the valley when we took off, there, because we had parched soybeans and filled our pockets full of parched soybeans, and we figured in three or four days we could get back to our lines.

- DePue: So you had an escape attempt even that first few days.
- W. Smith: It wasn't the first few days; it was about a month, almost a month. It was a pretty good while, because we had marched—golly—we had marched a long time, as well as I can remember, before we decided that we could try to take off on a wood detail, because we went on wood details, and that's when we parched the soybeans, got the soybeans and parched them and filled our pockets full of them.
- DePue: Okay, I certainly don't want to speculate too much on here—and maybe it's only important to me—but that first action, the first and second of November, that's when you were captured. That first engagement with the 1st Cav and the ROKs lasted only a few days, and then the Chinese drifted back into the wood line, and MacArthur and the Army were still pushing north after that time, the U.S. Army.
- W. Smith: We was already captured at that time.
- DePue: You were already captured. So my guess—the Americans were pushing pretty much straight north from Unson. My guess is that the Chinese were moving you northeast up this Death Valley, away from the main fighting area.
- W. Smith: Could have been.
- DePue: And that would take you closer over to the Chosin Reservoir area.
- W. Smith: The Chosin Reservoir, because when we escaped, we could see the flashes of firing. We could see the flashing. I told Gennaro, I says, "Hell, if we can make it over there to our lines, we'll be in good shape." I'm glad we didn't make it, according to what happened later, you know.
- DePue: Well, the main Chinese offensive where they had both the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and 10<sup>th</sup> Corps happened right after Thanksgiving Day in 1950, so that would have been close to a month after you guys were captured.
- W. Smith: Yeah, and that sounds about right, because in this push down here, one of our sergeants from the chemical company was captured, and I met him after we had moved to Pyoktong. He had got captured right after Thanksgiving, or right at Thanksgiving, because he was talking about having a Thanksgiving dinner. What is his name? What is that guy's name, honey? He was in our company. He was a sergeant in our company, and his wife passed away and he married another girl, Mexican or Puerto—
- C. Smith: Hinojosa?
- W. Smith: Hinojosa, that was his name. Damn, I couldn't think of it to save my life. Sergeant Hinojosa, yeah.

- DePue: Was he of Japanese descent?
- W. Smith: No, he was Mexican.
- DePue: Mexican, okay. Okay, let's go back—talk about this situation where you tried to escape, then, again, if you can go into that a little bit more.
- W. Smith: Well, we got our pockets full of soybeans and we took off that morning right after roll call. They fell everybody out and counted heads when we went back in. We went back in, and came right back out and went around behind the hutch where you had the cooking compound. Everything was in a compound..
- DePue: With a fence around it, or...?
- W. Smith: No, just houses. It was a compound.
- DePue: So it was a little village, then.
- W. Smith: Yeah. Like, where you had houses here, it was a farm that had families in each house here, but it was together, it was all connected. And over here was the cooking place, and back over here was the banjo where they went to urinate and so forth, and we took off out through here and up through the woods. And—
- DePue: I assume this was all pretty mountainous, heavily forested terrain.
- W. Smith: It was, yeah, but in the wintertime, you didn't have many leaves on the trees. You know what I mean? They had gone out. We only got about seven or eight miles, and we got spotted over here by the home guard—kids out playing with their rifles, you know. They spotted us up in the mountain.
- DePue: Are these wooden rifles they had?
- W. Smith: Yeah, the wooden rifles that they were playing with. They called the North Koreans and the Chinese, and then they came up and got us.
- DePue: What happened after they got you again?
- W. Smith: They took us down to their headquarters, put us in the room. Of course, all those houses are made out of mud, mud and rice straw. Put us in there, and we told them we got lost on a wood detail. They said, Where's the wood? I told them we threw it away because we got lost, and that went along pretty good for about three or four hours, and about dark they came and got us and took us in to the honchos in there, and they says, You sure you was on wood detail? I said, "Yes, we just threw the wood away. We got lost." And they had brought the sergeant in that was in charge of the wood details that day. That day they didn't have a wood detail. It was our luck, you know what I mean. And that's when they sent us back. They just beat the shit out of us all over that seven

miles back up to the camp where we were, and instead of putting us in the room where we had been, they put us in a corn crib out there, and of course it was empty except for the shucks that was in the bottom of it, a couple feet of shucks. But in the bottom of that corn crib was corn which had come off of the cobs and so forth, and that couple, three days out there, we was eating pretty good. It was cold as hell, but we was eating corn; it was all right. And they figured we was having too good of a time because we weren't hollering or anything, and so they came and got us and put us back in the rooms, (laughs) where it was a little bit warmer. (coughs) Those houses, when they build them, they dig a trench, and they put rocks on each side and on the bottom, and they build the house over that trench, and they put a place here where they build a fire and a smokestack behind it, and of course when they build a fire, the smoke goes through that, warms the house, and goes up. And it works pretty good.

DePue: I think they call that ondol heating, that's piped underneath the floors.

W. Smith: Yeah, it's underneath the floor.

DePue: Now, a lot of what we're going to be talking about from here on out especially is in the book that William and his wife Charlotte put together about your experiences, called *A Moment in Time*. And I know in the book you talked about crossing a river during that initial movement as well.

W. Smith: I don't know, in two or three days we came to a river there, and there were just the five Americans, and they stopped at the river, and they picked out a place to go across—they knew exactly where to go. And they said, "Take off all your clothes." And I crawled up on a rock and told Lieutenant Deakin, "I'm not taking off all my clothes. I'm not going in that water. If I'm going to die, I'm going to die dry," and I crawled up on a rock and told them to shoot me. I said, "I don't give a damn one way or the other; I'm not going in the water." And Lieutenant Deakin came over, and he said, "Smitty," he says, "Look up." The moon was shining beautifully. "They're taking off their clothes," the guards were. So I crawled off the rock, took off my clothes, and we held them up over our head like this, and then we went across the river. And the water was about shoulder deep, and it was cold, and I've never been warm since. I can't get warm. And we got to the other side, and they let us put our clothes back on.

DePue: Your dry clothes.

W. Smith: Dry clothes, yep.

DePue: Took your boots off as well?

W. Smith: Took my boots off, yeah. And those rocks were sharp; some of them were sharp. Boy. (shivers)

- DePue: These were Chinese guards or North Korean guards?
- W. Smith: Some of them were North Korean, but most of them were Chinese.
- DePue: Did they have boots?
- W. Smith: No, they had padded shoes, made like a quilt.
- DePue: You know, I don't think we mentioned, and it's going to be important to mention, how much you weighed and how tall, how big you were at the time of being captured.
- W. Smith: Well, at the time of being captured, I was six feet tall and weighed 193 pounds.
- DePue: So a pretty healthy young man.
- W. Smith: Pretty healthy. I was in good shape, yep.
- DePue: Were you bigger than almost all the Chinese and North Koreans?
- W. Smith: Yeah, most of them. Not all of them, because some of them were pretty big, but most of them were small people.
- DePue: How long did you continue marching, then, do you think?
- W. Smith: I think about thirty days, as well as I can remember.
- DePue: Was this over some very rugged, mountainous terrain?
- W. Smith: It was, but we was on a road most of the time, but it was hilly, up the mountains. And one mountain, it was a monster. It must have been five miles high, because it took us all night to go over that thing, to come up and go down the other side. It took the whole night. And of course, at the time, we were meeting the Chinese troops and I'll say they were eight abreast coming this way, because I knew our troops was in for it when we saw so many of them. Man, there was thousands of them, and they passed us all night long. I mean, they moved.
- DePue: What was your impression of the Chinese soldiers?
- W. Smith: They were just—
- DePue: Did they look to be in good spirits?
- W. Smith: Well, they seemed to be, particularly the cooks. But when they go into combat—and, you know, most of the soldiers carry a sleeve of rice or corn or whatever, and when they go into combat, they drop it off, and then the cooks come along and pick it up. That's how they carry their food. But they all

seemed to be talking, and... And of course we were quiet. When the planes would come over at night, everything got quiet, and they run us off the road, put us in the ditch. Then you'd get the all-clear, and then we'd get out of the ditch and back on the road, marching.

DePue: Did any of the Chinese as they were marching past acknowledge you guys, give you looks?

W. Smith: They didn't seem to, because most of it was at night, and you couldn't tell, because a lot of them came by with those chogi sticks and pails, and a lot of them had baskets of stuff.

DePue: Well, tell us what a chogi stick is.

W. Smith: Oh, it's (coughs)—excuse me. It's a stick about, I guess, six feet long, and it's kind of oval-like, and it's used to—on your shoulder, you could pick up a bucket down here and a bucket behind you there and put it on your shoulders, and then you change from one side to the other like that. It's real neat. It works, because you could pick up, say, fifteen to twenty gallons of water here and fifteen or twenty gallons there, and then you can shift it over here. It hurts your shoulders, but other than that...

DePue: So it's a matter of balance as much as anything.

W. Smith: Matter of balance as much as anything else, yeah.

DePue: Do you recall the incident about one of the Koreans, maybe the ROK soldier, who kind of lost himself, lost his mind?

W. Smith: God, there were so many of them.

DePue: This would have been on the march, and I guess he kind of ran.

W. Smith: Yeah. I'll tell you what happened. We had been lugging this guy all night, practically all night, and we stopped for a break. And I lit a cigarette, and I reached down to give him a drag off of the cigarette—I thought it was a G.I.—and it was a South Korean. He had got on the litter before everybody started to march. And when I offered him the cigarette, he didn't know what I was talking about, so he jumped up and ran, and I said, "Catch him," and our decorator jumped a little bit, and they caught him down there and broke his neck and threw him over the side of the road. That was the only one that I remember.

DePue: Broke his neck.

W. Smith: Yeah, they popped his neck like... I said, "Kill him. If you don't, I am."  
(laughs) And they broke his neck and threw him over the side of the road.

- DePue: Who is 'they'? The Chinese?
- W. Smith: No, no, no. Some of the Americans. I'm pretty sure it was some of the Americans—probably some of the guys from 1<sup>st</sup> Cav.
- DePue: Why would they have done that?
- W. Smith: Because I told them to. (laughs)
- DePue: Well, why did you say that?
- W. Smith: Because when he jumped up and run, I knew he was—we'd been lugging that bastard all night, and he jumped up and started running. What's he doing in the litter, you know? And that's why I said, "Kill him, kill him, kill him! If you don't, I will." And somebody up there, about eight or ten people up from me, caught him, and he broke his neck and threw him over the side. (laughs) And I says, "Well, if they hadn't, I would have if I'd have got ahold of him. I'd have killed him in a minute," like stepping on a pissant, you know.
- DePue: Just the whole idea that he was abusing you like that.
- W. Smith: Right, right. We'd been lugging him all night, and he'd been on the litter. Me and Mendell and Spain and Welch and a kid named Wells, changing off, you know. Yeah, I'd have killed him in a minute.
- DePue: Now, you said you were barely getting enough to eat, but you had cigarettes?
- W. Smith: When we first got there. When we first got captured, we had cigarettes, (laughs) and old Batchelor—we was in the house one time, and Claude Batchelor said, "They're searching us again," because he saw them outside, and they were shaking down everybody, making everybody empty out their pockets and put them in a basket out there. This was the Chinese. And he said, "They're searching us, and I got a pack of Lucky Strikes. What am I going to do with them?" I said, "Give them to me; I'll take care of them." (laughs) So I put them under my arm and went out there with my hands up like that.
- DePue: With your arms close to your side here.
- W. Smith: Yeah, and they patted me down and turned me loose, and I went back in, and I had a pack of cigarettes, a whole brand-new pack of Lucky Stripes. (laughs) Old Batchelor thought he was going to get caught with them, you know what I mean. I don't know what I was thinking other than, just don't throw them away, man. What are you talking about? And if I'm going to get caught, let them catch me. All they can do is take them away from me.
- DePue: So the cigarettes wasn't something you were getting from the Chinese as part of the rations.

W. Smith: No, no, it wasn't. We cut them in half, you know, make them last as long as they could. But that was another thing. And then up on the mountain one time we were smoking locust leaves. God knows, it cuts your wind off right here, you know. Take a drag... (laughs) We had stole paper from the—I can't hardly explain it to you. All the houses made out of rice straw and mud, and then they paper them on the inside. Well, we'd steal the paper off and roll up cigarettes when we could steal tobacco, which was very seldom. But we got bombed out of Pyoktong that time—hadn't been there but a day, and we got bombed out and went up on the hill there, and I got some paper and some locust leaves, and I rolled them up, the locust leaves, and rolled them up and made a cigarette out of them. Man, it cut your wind off. I mean, you'd take a drag, and, whew... God, it—you couldn't smoke it. But we tried it. (laughter)

DePue: One time.

W. Smith: We tried it. It didn't work.

DePue: Well, you're still on the move here in this first thirty days, and now you're getting definitely into the heart of wintertime. I know that you ran across a rock slide at one occasion.

W. Smith: Yeah. There was two tunnels—excuse me—(coughs) excuse me—as well as I can remember, we had just come through this. It was a small tunnel, and I guess about halfway to the other tunnel, as well as I can remember, because the moon was shining beautifully that night, the rocks started falling. The mountain fell in this way. Well, everybody stopped except the guys that was up there and got pushed over the side. And then when the rocks stopped, I don't know if—some Chinese might have went over with them, because we had so many Chinese guards there, and when they said go, we had to climb over the rocks to get to the other side, and when we got to the other side, there was another tunnel there. That's why I call them the Twin Tunnels. And I don't know where it was, but it was north, somewhere in there. I don't know how many guys we lost over the side, either, but it was quite a few.

DePue: During all of this movement, what were you thinking your chances of survival were going to be?

W. Smith: You know, I really never thought about it. I was trying to think of how in the world you were going to escape, and which direction are you going, because you might run the wrong way. I didn't really know. It hadn't dawned on me that we had been captured. I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it.

DePue: Did it seem surreal to you, then?

W. Smith: It seemed, well, you're here, but it's not going to last but a little bit because you'll be getting out. But I figured when they found out we were gone, they would push up forward.

- DePue: "They" being the Americans.
- W. Smith: Yeah, but they didn't. They didn't give a shit about us (laughs) more than they would about you or anybody else. They was looking out for themselves.
- DePue: But how about you have incidents, a couple times already, you've survived just by the skin of your teeth—the time when you're first captured and the gun didn't go off when it was to your head, and now this rockslide.
- W. Smith: Yeah, I missed that just a few feet, because I can see those rocks now, and the guys hollering that went over the side, and they was yelling when they went down. And lucky, me and Mendell—"God, Ray," I says, "they're going over the hill." He said, "I know, Smitty, I know." He said, "Just be quiet." And of course we kept quiet until everything settled down and the Chinese said, Come across the rocks there.
- DePue: Did you see any divine providence or anything like that involved with a couple of these incidents?
- W. Smith: I can't say. Things just happened. Just happened. I couldn't believe some of the things, and some of the times, I couldn't believe that we were captured. Your mind plays tricks on you, it does, and especially when you're hungry and thirsty. God.
- DePue: During this timeframe—again, most of that time during the movement, the Chinese haven't launched their attack. Were you seeing a lot of the American Air Force or U.N. air forces?
- W. Smith: A little, but not much on the march. But we could hear the planes at night, and they'd make us get off the road, but you couldn't see anything, you could just hear them hollering, "Get down off the road," because they figured the planes would hit the road. I don't really know what their thinking was.
- DePue: Now, I don't know if this fits into the narrative at this time, but you had a story in the book about Lt. William Funchess.
- W. Smith: Yeah. God, he was a wonderful person. I didn't know him, but he was with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, and they were going to leave him at the schoolhouse there, and I told Ray, I says, "Hell, we can't leave him here." I said, "They'll kill him." So we put him on a litter, and then the litter—the poles wouldn't hold up, and so we started piggybacking him, and we'd change off. And we came to a river—God, I never will forget it—he's holding onto my neck. He's on my back, and I got him like this, and he was wounded in the ankle—he was shot in the ankle. And he hit that water; it just hurt going through there, and God, he was crying like a baby. And I told him, I says, "Take it easy. Take it easy," I said. "We're doing the best we can." But he was still crying because he was in so much pain, and we didn't have anything to give him for pain. And we went on to Pyoktong, and I laid up down on a schoolhouse ground, and I

told him, I says, “Now, somebody else will come and get you from here. I don’t know who or what, but,” I says, “you take care of yourself.” And that was the last time I had seen him. (pause)

When I came back, I was at a reunion in Macon, Georgia, I believe it was. My wife was working the front tables out there, signing everybody in, and (pause, deep breaths) up came Lieutenant Funchess. He’s almost (laughs) seven feet tall. Funchess was about seven feet tall, wasn’t he, honey? God, he was tall. When I had him, he was a little bitty runt, you know. And the first thing I asked him was, “How’s that ankle?” He’s like, “Shit!” (laughter) He couldn’t believe it. But my wife said, “Stand still, don’t move.” (pause) She said, “My husband (pause) has been looking for you (pause) I don’t know how many years,” and, of course, when he signed his name, you know, (pause) she made him stand right (pause)—she said, “Don’t move. Don’t go anywhere.” She ran and got me. I’m sorry. (deep sigh) I went back, and there he was. He was a head taller than me, wasn’t he? I figured he was dead. And I says, “I can’t believe you’re here. I can’t believe it.” Oh, it was unbelievable. It was like a dream. Because I knew that once we left there, they’d been shooting him right and left, and he couldn’t walk, he couldn’t go, you know.

DePue: You were seeing that happen if people were left behind?

W. Smith: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Did you hear the shots?

W. Smith: You’d hear the shots, and then you never saw them again. That’s why I said, “We can’t leave him here. I mean, he’s hurt, but hell, let’s do what we can.”

DePue: So he owes his life to you and Ray. During this whole time that you’re—I’m sorry to put you through this.

W. Smith: Oh, no, that’s okay, that’s okay.

DePue: During this whole time that you’re moving, I can’t believe that you guys had much of an idea of where you were at or what was going on through most of this.

W. Smith: No, we didn’t know. Of course, you could see the stars at night if it was a clear night. That’s why I always thought we were going north. I was trying to follow the Dipper, you know, and I knew that we were going north, or at least I thought we were going north, and then northeast.

DePue: Well, what was the comment then that—we were having a short conversation at lunch—about you thinking you were close to the Chosin Reservoir? What made you think that?

- W. Smith: Because that's where they were fighting, and later on, some of the guys that they captured at the Chosin Reservoir was put in the camp where I was, some of them that was caught. In fact, one of the Marines that was captured there, Hinojosa and—I'm trying to think of the name. Hinojosa was one of them, the little one, but—
- DePue: If you can't remember the names now, that's fine, because you're going to have a chance to look at the transcript and get this stuff incorporated into the transcript if you need to. So it sounds like you're not entirely sure, though, that you were close to that area.
- W. Smith: No, but we thought we were on account of the fighting that was going on.
- DePue: That you were very close to some fighting.
- W. Smith: That we were very close to the fighting, and that's why I told Gennaro, I said, "Listen, they're fighting over there. If we can get over there to where they're fighting, we'll be at our lines. We're bound to be at our lines."
- DePue: And he was the one who tried to escape with you, then.
- W. Smith: Yeah, he went with me.
- DePue: Now, you mentioned that you went through kind of a succession of camps, though, and maybe this was shortly after that time: the mining camp, the bean camp—
- W. Smith: The bean camp, and then the valley.
- DePue: Were they just kind of moving you from place to place?
- W. Smith: Moving us from place to place, but all the time, I think we were still going north.
- DePue: Okay, so you'd stay in these for a few days and move again?
- W. Smith: A few days and move again until we came to Pyoktong the first time, and that camp was on a peninsula, and they moved the civilians out and just put a barbed-wire fence across it and put us there, because we were surrounded by water, you know.
- DePue: Now, we should mention—anybody who's looking at the map here—Pyoktong is the location of both Camps Five and Two which are going to factor in very important to your story, but it's also right on the Yalu River, the border between China and North Korea.
- W. Smith: Yeah, and that's why I said we buried a lot of the guys over here across the river.

DePue: In China.

W. Smith: Yeah, we dragged them across the ice.

DePue: Do you have any idea when you got to Pyoktong? Would that have been after the first of the year?

W. Smith: No. I'm thinking the first time was—we'd left the valley, because I was in the upper valley, and we marched about twenty miles over to Pyoktong, and we were only there a day, and we got bombed out. And we went up on the mountain that day, and when nighttime came, they moved us back to the valley.

DePue: And that's how far away from Pyoktong, you think?

W. Smith: I think it was about twenty miles. I'm just guessing.

DePue: Was this just a village?

W. Smith: Pyoktong was a village.

DePue: But how about the valley?

W. Smith: The valley, there was nothing there. There were houses. There was a house down here, like a compound that I was telling you about, and then up on the hill was a house because I was up there the first time. It was by itself, but it had at least two rooms, because there was guys next to us. And of course when you got about twenty to the room... But that was in the upper valley, and the lower valley down here was a big compound.

DePue: How many do you think—you said there were roughly 750 who were moving north on that—

W. Smith: No, that was out of the school down there where they had gathered everybody at a schoolhouse, and I can't see here where it would have been.

DePue: Well, it had to be fairly close to Unson, though.

W. Smith: Yeah, it was close to Unson.

DePue: And that would have been at the beginning of the march. How many did you have at the end of the march, once you got to Pyoktong?

W. Smith: About 250.

DePue: So two thirds of these people died?

W. Smith: Died or was gone somewhere. I don't know what happened to them.

DePue: Dying of what?

W. Smith: Some of them were shot, I'm sure.

DePue: Some from the rockslide.

W. Smith: Some from the rockslide. I don't know what happened to them. Really, I don't know, but I know we didn't have near as many as we did. One of the officers said that we had about 250 when we got back.

DePue: Were some of them dying from exposure or...?

W. Smith: Exposure. Pneumonia.

DePue: Hunger?

W. Smith: Yeah, hunger and pneumonia. Some of them couldn't eat the cracked corn and millet in the valley, and—well, a lot of them, when we got to Pyoktong, couldn't eat the food.

DePue: Were some of them possibly taken other places?

W. Smith: They could have been taken other places, but according to the lieutenant, (pause) at Pyoktong—the second time, I guess—was when they split us up. See, everybody was in one group, all the prisoners, and then they split us up, put the officers in one area, the sergeants in one area, the peons in another area. And of course they separated the ROKs from us.

DePue: How far into it did that happen?

W. Smith: That was after we were at Pyoktong for a while—after the first winter. After the first winter, '51—'50, '51.

DePue: Now, did we read a story about an interrogation where a lieutenant was being questioned?

W. Smith: Yeah, when they took him out and shot him, yeah. They took this lieutenant out, and they asked him—we were down on the lines then—and they asked him how many men was over the mountain over there, and he gave them the name, rank, and serial number. And they ask them the second time, and he gave them the same thing. He asked him the third time, and he told them, and he just pulled out a Mauser, about this long, and just blew his head right off. Well, they dragged him out of the way, and he went in and they got a sergeant and brought him out, and he said, "How many men is over the mountain over there?" He says, "A whole damn regiment," which would have been around three thousand men.

DePue: Which was not the case.

W. Smith: Not the case. Hell, that sergeant didn't know what was over that damn hill any more than anybody else, but he had sense enough to make up something, because he'd already seen—I'm trying to think of the lieutenant. Slominski?

DePue: Did you see him actually get shot?

W. Smith: Yeah, but I can't remember his name. Slominski? Pollock.

DePue: Again, we can get that name later on.

W. Smith: I don't know. (laughs)

DePue: So that was an attention-getter, wasn't it?

W. Smith: Yeah, that kind of shook everybody up. But that happened all along the way. They'd take them out and they'd shoot them. I can't explain it. They'd take them out for no reason at all, and they would never come back.

DePue: Do you remember Christmas?

W. Smith: I remember real well Christmas, because we stole the dog, skinned him and eat him, put him in a pot (laughs) with the—

DePue: Were you already at the valley area?

W. Smith: We were in the valley. Each man in my squad got a little piece of meat, about like that.

DePue: About two inches.

W. Smith: Not even. They said the best meat they ever had. Best meat they ever tasted. You know, I never did tell them it was dog. I told Little Smith. Mendell said, "Don't ever say anything about it. Don't ever say anything about it." We had a time getting rid of that damn hide, though. We took that hide and pushed it way back behind the firebox, as far back as you could push it, which was halfway back, under one of the houses. God.

DePue: Were you living in farm shacks, then, at the time?

W. Smith: Yeah, we was in that compound.

DePue: What did you have for stoves or something to keep you warm?

W. Smith: Nothing. We had just that thing going down through there. That was all.

DePue: Now, what was this firebox, though, you were talking about?

W. Smith: Well, they had the cooking house right here—the cooking room, really. You stepped down into it because big vats, as big as this table—there was two in

there. You'd build the fire underneath them, and then you'd cook the cracked corn, see.

DePue: Well, tell me about the cracked corn and the millet, you said. Is this hard corn like you get from the field here?

W. Smith: Yeah, only it was cracked. It was all cracked up, you know.

DePue: Ground up?

W. Smith: Yeah. It was just mashed up, let me put it that way. Cracked up. For a long time we only had the cracked corn, then later on we got millet, then later on we got some soybeans. You had to put the soybeans out in a big pot today. Well, you wouldn't cook them until tomorrow, but you'd soak them overnight, and they'd swell up a little bit, and then you'd cook them like corn.

DePue: Did you do the same thing with the corn and the millet?

W. Smith: Yeah, only the corn and the millet, you just cooked it; you didn't have to put it out overnight like you did the beans.

DePue: But you cooked it?

W. Smith: You cooked it in water, yeah. You just cooked it.

DePue: As far as the prisoners were concerned, was the millet better than the corn and the soybeans better than the millet?

W. Smith: The soybeans was best of all, really. But the millet had no taste—well, the corn didn't have much of a taste—but it fills your stomach up.

DePue: What size portion are we talking about you'd get a day?

W. Smith: I would say at least—let me see—at least a couple handfuls like that.

DePue: Okay, a couple normal handfuls. Was the corn something that the Koreans and the Chinese would have eaten themselves?

W. Smith: Yeah, they were eating it. That's about the same thing they had, only they had more of it than we did, because we had an allowance of it. And if a guy died, we kept his body for a couple or three days so we'd get that extra bowl of cracked corn, but after three days you had to get rid of the body because it smelled so bad.

DePue: Once you got to the camp, did you have Chinese or North Koreans as prison guards?

W. Smith: Mostly Chinese. Mostly Chinese.

DePue: How would you explain the difference between the two groups? Did they treat you differently?

W. Smith: Well, the North Koreans were more brutal, I think, than the Chinese. A lot of people say the Chinese were more brutal than the North Koreans. It depends on where you were, I guess. But I always thought the North Koreans were more barbaric than the Chinese. I had a Chinese doctor, a pediatrician, in China that was raised by American missionaries, and he was a little lenient with you compared to the rest of the Chinese, and he would talk to you, but when another Chinese come around or North Korean come around, he hushed up; he wouldn't say anything.

DePue: It almost sounds like he didn't want to be in there any more than you did.

W. Smith: No, he didn't. A lot of them didn't want to be there, but they had no choice. They got caught between those ropes, I guess, (laughs) and that's what happened.

DePue: Okay. For the experience of prisoners, especially in Germany—much less so the case in Japan—but in Germany, the normal chain of command was functioning. Did the normal chain of command function in your camp?

W. Smith: No.

DePue: Why not? What happened?

W. Smith: I don't know. I saw a major cut his wrist to keep from carrying the wounded. Kind of makes you disappointed with the officers. You know the little can opener you get with the C-rations, cut his wrist like that and put his field jacket up over it like that, let the blood flow a little bit. Nobody would ask him to carry the wounded. You had to be there.

DePue: Would they have tolerated if the NCOs and the officers wanted to have some discipline and unit cohesion?

W. Smith: They probably would have appreciated it, to keep all the troops in line, but nobody stepped forward to do anything. I had one lieutenant—God, he was a little man, first lieutenant—on the march, trying to keep everybody in line, keep them quiet, and keep them where the Chinese wouldn't be so hard on the whole group, and he was out on the side trying to get everybody lined up and stay in line, and he was one that sticks out in my mind that tried to do something, a little bit of leadership. But that's why I say I was so disappointed with most of the officers. I hate to say it, but they were just not what they should have been because they didn't step forward and try to take control over anything. I mean, they were just there like us. But they didn't try to do anything. I couldn't understand it.

DePue: I would think the sense of disorientation and uncertainty was as bad as a lot of the other treatments you were getting, then.

W. Smith: Well, you never knew what was going to happen, and particularly when they come in and get you at night and take you out, maybe some of them you might see again and other, you'd never see again; you don't know what happened to them.

DePue: Once you got to the camps, did you see civilians?

W. Smith: Very few civilians.

DePue: Now, there were quite a few civilians that were captured in the first month or two of the war, which would have been several months before you guys were.

W. Smith: They would have already been moved north from us. I remember I was on a cart one time going back to the camp, and I saw six American women—well, they said they were Americans—and a priest in a field, you know, down—I was on a road—

DePue: A rice paddy or something?

W. Smith: They were in the field down there, and it looked like a garden or something or other. They waved at us. And of course the guards on the two-wheel cart I was on wouldn't let us holler or do anything, but me and Willie Krobath were on the cart going back to our camp. We had been down to a sick compound and we were going back on a two-wheel cart back to our camp, and that's when we saw the missionaries that had been in Korea before the war started and the priest, but I don't know names. I don't know who they were or what.

DePue: During that first winter—

W. Smith: But they were white women, you know.

DePue: Nuns, perhaps, then.

W. Smith: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking, they were nuns.

DePue: During that first winter, what would you say was the worst of it?

W. Smith: Starvation. I mean, besides the cold. It was zero to sixty below. The cold weather and no food was about the worst because the guys died like flies. Some of them just laid down and died. No excuse.

DePue: Did you tell when somebody—had they just given up, or they...?

W. Smith: Some of them just given up, and then when they start talking like go out there and get that bag of food, that box of fruit that's sitting right out there. Don't

you see them oranges and apples? Within an hour, he'd be dead. They were hallucinating. (deep sigh)

DePue: What did you do with the bodies?

W. Smith: We kept them for three days if we could, because we could always hold the head up and get that extra bowl of cracked corn. After three days, you had to get rid of the bodies—they started smelling bad—then that's when we drug them across the ice.

DePue: Is that where the Chinese told you to take them?

W. Smith: Yeah. We took them across the ice and we buried them across the river from—

DePue: Across the Yalu River.

W. Smith: Across the river. They say it was the backwater of the Yalu River. Where was Camp Five? Let's see.

DePue: Well, here's Camp Five again, Pyoktong, Camp Five.

W. Smith: Pyoktong, yeah. I got a feeling like we were right in here, because we were surrounded by water, and we dragged them across the river there, buried them in China.

DePue: Do you know, was there some logic involved with taking them across the river?

W. Smith: That was the only place to take them. We couldn't take them over here because that was in the woods, and all of this was frozen over. The ice was forty feet thick. And the reason we knew it, because when the summertime came, we could see where the ice had been in the crease, you know, and we knew it was forty feet thick, I mean, high.

DePue: Well, if you took them across the river, and the ground's got to be frozen solid, were you even able to dig graves for them?

W. Smith: We tried to, but we mostly covered them up with rocks. We'd strip them of their clothes, the clothes they had on them, and we buried them naked because we needed the clothes; it was cold. We just put rocks around them as best we could. And in the summertime, they—this is not in the book—they'd turn the hogs in on them and they'd eat them.

DePue: The Chinese did.

W. Smith: The Chinese or North Koreans. It had to be the Chinese over that way. Well, I didn't put it in the book..

DePue: What did you have for a water source?

W. Smith: We had one spigot there at Camp Five, which was at the bottom of the hill, and that was the only source of water, but it was enough. We had to have it to cook with and everything, but it was all the water we had.

DePue: Do you have a feeling for how many were in that camp in the first winter that you were there?

W. Smith: The first winter, probably about three thousand. I would say roughly three thousand we started out with, but summertime, we—oh God, we drug sixteen to twenty-two hundred across the river.

DePue: That many had died.

W. Smith: A minimum of sixteen hundred. More like twenty-three hundred, I think.

DePue: The diseases that you have in these situations are pretty typical. Dysentery a problem?

W. Smith: Dysentery was a problem, yeah, but we learned to take a stick and burn it and make charcoal out of it, spray it with water, make charcoal out of it, and eat the charcoal. It stopped the dysentery. It works.

DePue: Where did you hear that? Where did you learn that?

W. Smith: I don't know. Somewhere along some doctor passed it off that that's what to do, and that's what we did. In my display out there, I got a stick to show the kids. Just a regular stick, you know, part of a limb. You burn it real good, and when it gets real hot, pour water on it, and that makes charcoal. And so you eat that charcoal, it stops the diarrhea just like that. It's hard to eat, but I tell you, your life depends on it, and you'll do it.

DePue: Did they allow you to collect wood for the fires that you had?

W. Smith: Yeah, they would send us off on wood details, but God, it was hard to find and, too, the guys that'd go off, some of them would come back and drop dead. Just cold, freeze to death, and just die. I don't know why. I don't know why I'm still living, to tell you the truth. I don't know. (laughs) I've got no idea.

DePue: I know another enemy you faced that first winter, probably the entire time you were there, were lice.

W. Smith: Lice were so bad. The doctor told us one time that within three days, less than three days, they can drink twenty-two ounces of blood out of your body. God, they were bad. I might have told you—my buddy said he threw a field jacket out in the yard, and it crawled off. (laughs) I didn't see that, now. There's so

many lice on it. But see, when one of them died, the lice leaves the cold body and go to the next person that's warm. And if a guy died next to you, the next morning you woke up, you was full of lice.

DePue: How did you cope with that? How did you deal with that?

W. Smith: We killed as many as we could, and then we got these sticks—

DePue: I don't even know what a—I know they're very tiny, but—

W. Smith: About like a grain of rice, a head of a grain of rice, is about the size of them. And some of them get real fat because, you know, good blood. They'd get real fat. You'd pop one, and blood would fly everywhere. But we got a stick and burned the end of it, took our pants off—because they lay eggs in the seams of your pants—we'd take that stick and burn them eggs out. But you had to do it every day, because if you didn't, they would hatch out and triple the number of lice, but if you did it every day, you could keep them down pretty well. It worked. It worked. I know it sounds unreal, but it's a fact, and if you every get in that situation, you just keep them burning, and you can burn them right up.

DePue: Well, that's the problem with hearing these stories, William; I don't know if anybody can really comprehend unless you've been there.

W. Smith: It would be hard to. Like I told the children, if you were telling me, I wouldn't believe you either.

DePue: How many latrines did you have, and how did—

W. Smith: Down at Camp Five, we had one on the end of the point.

DePue: Close to the river.

W. Smith: Yeah, close to the river. It was up from the river. It was only one place there. And, of course, we put logs across, you know, and that was it. And of course in the summertime, they sold that to the North Koreans in those buckets, honey buckets, to put on their farm.

DePue: So much of what we're talking about here, these are serious medical problems. What kind of medical care was available? Was there any?

W. Smith: No. I felt sorry for the doctors. We had a British doctor and an American doctor there. We had a couple of American doctors. One of them moved out—I don't know what happened to him—Anderson. And then we had a Doc Shaddocks and an English doctor, and they had some charcoal pills was about all they had. They didn't have anything to doctor you with, they just didn't have it. Give you advice is about all, talk to you.

And they pulled one of my teeth. I don't know if I told you or not, but I went up there with a tooth—oh, it was giving me a fit for a couple of, three days—and I went up there and told the doctor, I said, “Dr. Shaddocks, you've got to do something.” I said, “Yank it out of me.” He said, “Sit down over there.” I sit down in the chair, and the British guy got across my knees, and he got behind my head, and he went in there, and he pulled it out, and it broke jawbone and everything out, you know. Because some of your teeth, you know how they grow crooked around like that. He said, “That's about all I can do,” but, you know, it felt better when he got through. But God, it did hurt. It hurt like hell. I went down and told my buddy Joe, (laughs) I said, “Joe, you got a toothache, you got to go up and see Dr. Shaddocks. Now, he can fix you right up.” (laughs) The next day Joe went up. (laughs) He come back, his jaw was out to here, his eye was black, (laughs) he had a rag tied around his head. And he says, “If I could get ahold of you, I'd kill you.” (laughs) I never did tell him it didn't hurt. (laughter) But it did. It hurt like hell. But I never did tell Joe it didn't hurt. “Boy,” I says, “Man, it didn't hurt at all.” I said, “Doc Shaddocks is the best.” (laughs) God, it liked to killed him. Oh, man. Some of the things that happened—you wouldn't believe them.

DePue: And I know this is tough, but you're talking about all the people who died, especially that first winter. It sounds like half or more than half of the people who were in that camp the first winter passed away, died.

W. Smith: Yeah, they did.

DePue: Was there some way to keep track of who was dying?

W. Smith: No. I was trying to keep a list of them, but the Chinese took it away from me. But unless you had a good memory. That was the only way. We was dragging them across the ice fifteen and twenty a day, and isn't no way in the world you could count them.

DePue: Did you have any kind of a service?

W. Smith: We'd say a prayer over them was about all you could do.

DePue: They would let you do that?

W. Smith: Well, they wouldn't go across the river with us. They had guards up there, but we went across the river by ourselves. The guards didn't go with us to bury them. Hell, they wasn't going out there across that ice when they didn't have to. I mean, I didn't blame them at all. But of course they could see us from where they were. They could look across the river and see us all the time. God, we were dragging them across the river like I says, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five a day—I mean every day. Damn. And then we stacked them up.

DePue: Did you kind of have to numb your emotions to all of this?

W. Smith: You do. You have to step aside. I don't know—you convince yourself that you could do anything that needs to be done at that point in time, and you become rigid until it doesn't bother you—just another body—no soul, no person, no nothing, you know, just there. I guess that's the way I looked at it. I mean, say a prayer over him because you knew his spirit had already gone; he's just bones and meat—what little meat there was. We come close one time to eating legs. I had the knife ready, but I couldn't do it. No. (Deep sigh)

DePue: I know another one of the things that you guys had to endure was various sorts of punishment or torture. Now, I don't know how much they did on the initial march to the camps. Was there some of it going on at that time?

W. Smith: Just beatings mostly. That was the main thing on the march. Of course, after the march—the lectures were torture, really. But they would hang you up, and they'd make you stand on the ice. I got caught stealing shingles off a guard shack to build a fire with, and I had to stand on the ice for about eight hours holding the shingles over my head. But after the first hour or two, you become numb like you're not there. I mean, you're there but you're not there, you're just numb, and that way, you don't know, you're just there, hanging. And after eight hours, they let me down, but they took the wood. And then you'd go back to the hut and the guys wondering where you were. (laughs) You know, your buddies that were in the hut with you, and the ones that didn't see you down there or didn't know, they was wondering where you were.

DePue: Were they looking for confessions or...?

W. Smith: They would want you to confess for everything. I never did confess anything because I didn't do anything to confess. I never confessed anything.

DePue: But I would guess plenty of other prisoners confessed even though they hadn't done anything.

W. Smith: Hadn't done anything at all, but they would get up before and say, Yeah, I did this, and I'm sorry I did this, and I'm sorry I did that.

DePue: What kinds of things were you talking about?

W. Smith: Well, say, stealing food. Yeah, I stole the food, and I'm sorry I did, but Comrade Lim—we were supposed to call them "comrades"—Comrade Lim, who was the chief instructor of the indoctrination process, Comrade Lim said for me to apologize to you and confess that I did this—whether they did it or not, you know—and then he wouldn't have to go to the hole, he wouldn't have to stand up, he wouldn't have to do anything. That was all just confess, you know. And a lot of times they'd have to sign a confession. (laughs) I never signed anything. I never confessed anything either.

DePue: Well, think back to your comments about how you couldn't keep rank when you were in Korea in Japan.

- W. Smith: Japan. I could make it, but I couldn't keep it.
- DePue: I see some similarities here of the way you were reacting to the treatment you were getting in the prison camp as well.
- W. Smith: Yeah, some things you just can't take.
- DePue: Do you think having that kind of an attitude that caused you problems when you were in the peacetime army was helpful when you were a prisoner of war?
- W. Smith: You know, I've tried to think about that, and I guess my stubbornness... I disliked the Chinese so much, I disliked the enemy so much, that I don't know. Anything I could do to ruffle their feathers, I did it.
- DePue: Well, I'd like to kind of go through the litany of various kinds of torture or mistreatment that you were given and have you respond, and I'm sure you've got stories in some of these cases as well. But let's start with this question before we get to that: You were in a chemical mortar battalion, and I know that the Chinese were really big on this concept that the Americans were fighting germ warfare.
- W. Smith: Germ warfare.
- DePue: Did they know you were from a chemical unit?
- W. Smith: Yes, because all of our equipment had (laughs) 'the 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion' on it, you know, that they captured.
- DePue: So they had that much paperwork, they knew—
- W. Smith: They had that much on us, me and Mendell and Spain and Welch and Lieutenant Deakin.
- DePue: Did they try to get you to confess to germ warfare?
- W. Smith: Yeah. And I put up on the bulletin board one time, I said, "Be careful, and watch out for tonight. Small germs wearing white tennis shoes will sneak in after nine o'clock," and I put that on the bulletin board. (laughs)
- DePue: You guys had a bulletin board?
- W. Smith: Yeah. They put it up because they wanted people to come up and, you know, see what they was thinking with their minds. I just went out there, and I says, "Wear tennis shoes for quiet approach." (laughs) Them bastards went haywire. Oh.
- DePue: They come looking for whoever did it?

W. Smith: They come looking for whoever did it. Yeah. And the thing about it, what makes it so bad, most of the time somebody would squeal. They'd tell on you. They'd squeal on you.

DePue: Did that happen in that case?

W. Smith: That happened, yeah.

DePue: What happened after they found out it was you who put it up there?

W. Smith: They took me up, tied me up, threw me in the corner of a mud shack. I only stayed there a couple of days, I believe it was, and I still didn't confess to it, you know. I swore I didn't do it, but I said, "Somebody told you wrong. Somebody told you a lie." They didn't like the word "lie" either.

DePue: Were there enough guards who understood English?

W. Smith: There was enough of them around there because we had educated them, you know, for Chiang Kai-shek. You know, when Chiang Kai-shek was in power, we educated a lot of his men over here in Harvard, Yale, and so forth. And when we were sitting out there one day—I think I may have told you—we were having a lecture, and one of the guys said, "Why don't we get mail?" Did I tell you about that?

DePue: No.

W. Smith: He said, "According to the Geneva Convention, we're supposed to get mail from home." They says, well, you don't get mail for the simple reasons the planes come over and they bomb everything. Even the little dog on the road, they bomb it. And I said, "Well, he was probably pulling the 105 howitzer," and the guy behind me spoke perfect English, and he knew what I was talking about—Harvard graduate, you know. He jerked me up and turned me around like that, spit in my face, and when he did, I kicked him. Reflex, you know. I shouldn't have, but that's what happened. So he took me up to the instructor, and the instructor says, "W.W. Smith, I should have you shot for this. I could have you shot for this. I may have you shot for this. Get down on your knees and pray to me that I don't have you shot." I just backed up, stood up (pause) as tall as I could and said, "Shoot me! I pray to no man." And two of my buddies, that's when they came up and dragged me away, hollering in Chinese, "Bioki, bioki"—it means, "Sick, sick, sick." They hollered "Bioki, bioki, bioki," and they dragged me off, and then that night, they came and got me, and that's when I spent four months in what they call the vault.

DePue: Solitary confinement?

W. Smith: Solitary confinement. The FBI was telling me where the vault was, and I stayed there four months. Then when I got out, I couldn't hardly talk, I

couldn't hardly see, I guess it took me two weeks to get halfway back to normal with the guys I was in the squadron with.

DePue: Can you describe the vault?

W. Smith: As far as I know, it was pitch dark, and it was metal. I think it was metal, because I got to see when the guards came in and handed me the cracked corn, and then after the cracked corn, I'd get a bowl of water. I got that twice a day, I think. But other than that it was tin or it was metal. It seemed metal to me.

DePue: What time of the year was this?

W. Smith: It was in the wintertime. I'm thinking maybe January, February, March, and April.

DePue: Of '52, maybe?

W. Smith: Of '52, yeah. Yeah, it had to be '52 because the last of '52 is when they moved us out to another camp.

DePue: Was there any heat in this at all?

W. Smith: No, no, nothing. That's why I say I was numb most of the time.

DePue: Was it big enough that you could stand up and stretch?

W. Smith: Oh, yeah, you could stand up and stretch. You could walk around in it. And I used one corner for a latrine.

DePue: Didn't get out for four months.

W. Smith: Four months.

DePue: Never saw anybody other than when they passed the food to you?

W. Smith: Except the guard.

DePue: What did you do to keep your mind occupied?

W. Smith: Well, I kept building things in my mind—building roads, building houses, putting up power lines, dragging down power lines, making up poetry, disassociating myself—in other words, stepping out of my body, doing what I wanted to, and then step back in. I don't know how to explain it. I don't. I don't know. You can more or less hypnotize yourself and go into just a stupor and just be there.

DePue: Was that maybe the worst of the experiences that you had?

W. Smith: Other than getting beat. That was one of them.

DePue: A couple of the other things that you talk about in the book a little bit: Chinese water treatment.

W. Smith: Now, that was rough because they put you on a table and tie you down and put a bucket over your head with a string in the bottom of it. They'd pour water in there, and that water would drip down on you, and when that water starts dripping there, after about an hour—

DePue: Right on the top of your forehead.

W. Smith: Yeah, you go about nuts, and you can't get away from it. It drives you nuts. It drives you nuts.

DePue: We're going to talk about more, but all these things that you're going through, was there a purpose for a lot of this?

W. Smith: I don't know what they were... It was just a punishment, because I didn't know anything. I mean, I was a BAR man, a peon, you know what I mean? I didn't know any military secrets, or I didn't know what they were doing in Washington. They would always say, Truman this and Truman that. And I'd say, "Well, he's my president." They said, Truman's no good. I said, "So what?" I mean, I didn't give a shit one way or the other what they thought, and I told them so. They expected a lot of us to come back and raise sin against the government and protest everything that come along. When they killed Willie McGee<sup>2</sup> in Mississippi, they read that for about a month, why he shouldn't be killed. They electrocuted him, I think, or gassed him or something or other.

DePue: Willie McGee was—

W. Smith: Willie McGee, he was—I don't know what they had him for, but he was in Mississippi. Evidently they were sympathizing with him, and we hung him or gassed him or electrocuted him, I don't know, but killed him. And he was in prison, and he must have been a good friend of theirs or something or other, but anyway, they harped on it for over a month.

DePue: Was he black?

W. Smith: I believe he was. I believe he was.

DePue: Did you have black prisoners with you?

W. Smith: Yeah, but they segregated us.

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<sup>2</sup> **Willie McGee** (died May 8, 1951) was an African American from Laurel, Mississippi, who was sentenced to death in 1945 for the rape of Willette Hawkins, a white housewife. McGee's legal case became a *cause célèbre*. William Faulkner wrote a letter insisting the case against McGee was unproven. U.S. President Harry S. Truman came under international pressure to grant McGee a pardon.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willie\\_McGee\\_\(convict\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willie_McGee_(convict))

DePue: They did?

W. Smith: Yeah, they put the blacks in one place—they put the blacks up in the first company, the sergeants over here, the Brits down here, the Americans here, and of course the officers out in their place and the sergeants out in their place.

DePue: But this is all at Camp Five initially?

W. Smith: Yeah.

DePue: And they didn't expect you to associate with these other groups?

W. Smith: No. We had lightning strike a black guy one time. (laughs) It's nothing to laugh about, don't get me wrong. But I was on hard labor up at the sick compound, me Joe Ascue, and we had a hell of a thunderstorm, and a big pop of lightning. I told Joe, I said, "God, somebody just been hit by lightning." And we were watching them out on the parade ground. We weren't allowed to go out there because we was on hard labor, but they were out there. And this kid had a spoon in his pocket, a metal spoon, and they said that lightning hit that spoon, just (snaps) cooked him just like that. We saw the smoke go up. I told Joe, I says, "God knows he burned up." And he was a black guy.

DePue: What kind of things did they have you doing on hard labor?

W. Smith: I had to take care of the sick up in the—we had a sick compound. Now, this was in Camp Five, before we got to the temple—have you ever heard of the temple?

DePue: Yeah, I got quite a few questions on the temple, so we'll wait a little bit on that.

W. Smith: Anyway, but this was before I went to the temple. We had a sick compound there, and they put me on hard labor up there, me and Joe, and we had to take care of the sick, and we cooked for them, cleaned them up, kept them clean as we could with what we had, and fed them, and that was the extent of it. But we couldn't go mingle with the other troops; we couldn't go down in the camp.

DePue: Now, you've mentioned Joe several times. What's Joe's last name again?

W. Smith: Ascue, A-s-c-u-e. He passed away about—how long has Joe been dead, honey? About five years ago, I guess.

DePue: Well, can you tell me about him? Where did he come from?

W. Smith: He came from a place in West Virginia, and he was the one that I was in camp with most of the time—I was on hard labor with. And he was the one that we

promised if we ever got back together, we'd celebrate, and that's when we went on a drunk for a week. We celebrated. I had three hundred and something dollars, and we spent it all on whiskey, ABC store.

DePue: What unit was he in originally?

W. Smith: He was with the 1st Cav. I believe he was with the 7th Cav, if I'm not mistaken. He was either the 5th or the 7th Cavalry.

DePue: What was it about Joe that clicked between the two of you?

W. Smith: We were on hard labor together, and we got by stealing stuff from the Chinese, because where we were cooking up there, the Chinese had their cooks, and the officers of the camp was right next to us, and we used to steal food from them. And when our buddies down there were sick, we found out somebody was sick, we used to steal stuff, and we had a liaison, Joe Adams—he's gone now, too—and Joe was on a sanitation detail, and he had more maneuverability about the camp, and when somebody was sick real bad and needed food, me and Joe would steal it from the Chinese and give it to Joe Adams and he would take it down and feed it to the guys that was about to die. Whew. God, some of the things we did! (laughs) Whew.

DePue: Boy, you had a lot of risk in all of this, I would think.

W. Smith: Yeah, but you don't give a shit one way or the other, you know. So what? I mean, what are they going to do, kill you? Shoot you?

DePue: Is it Joe Ascue or maybe somebody else that you had such a memorable first encounter with that didn't go well?

W. Smith: When I came back?

DePue: No, no, when you were there. I think it had something to do with being in line for water, perhaps.

W. Smith: Oh, yeah, that was the limey, yeah. And Joe was behind me—that's when I met him.

DePue: Joe Ascue.

W. Smith: Joe Ascue was standing behind me, and we were down at the water fountain, and I had a steel helmet getting water. And this big limey came up and pushed me aside, and when he did, Joe just jumped all over him. They fought for about three hours. They fought all around there and all around the compound over here and back around over here. Joe just beat the hell out of him, and the Chinese didn't do a thing; they let them fight. Come to find out he was the best man in the Ulster Rifles of the British army, (laughs) and Joe beat the hell out of him. And me and Joe became best friends right then and there, because

I wasn't able to do anything, but Joe took up the fight. And that's where I met him. In fact, he was the best man at my wedding. Whew. God.

DePue: Sleep deprivation was another way that they tortured you. Did you personally go through that?

W. Smith: Went through some of that, some of that. But, you know, you can more or less hypnotize yourself and it doesn't bother you as bad as—at least it didn't bother me as bad as they thought it was bothering me, I guess. I got by with a lot of stuff that ordinarily I probably shouldn't have. But I had a lot of respect from a couple of the officers, Chinese officers there, because I didn't do what they said.

DePue: Did you feel like you had a higher tolerance for pain or suffering than some of the other guys did?

W. Smith: I believe I did, and the fact is, I still do as far as that's concerned. But a lot of the guys, I don't know what happened to them, I really don't. They just couldn't take it; they couldn't make themselves do things. They just laid down and died. I never did understand.

DePue: Did you not have respect for those kinds of people?

W. Smith: I respected all of them. I loved every one of them. God knows, I used to hold them in my arms and let them cry and die. (deep sigh)

DePue: How many times do you think you went through beatings? Was it just that first encounter, or were there other times as well?

W. Smith: Oh, there were other times. I was knocked around quite a bit. But I was knocked around for just saying things, you know, like I did about that damn dog, "He's pulling the 105 howitzer," you know, just things that pop in your mind and you say it and you don't really think. I should have paid more attention to what I was saying, but things just come out, you know. Boy. I said, "If you don't behave, I'm going to send Chiang Kai-shek after you," talking to a guard, not realizing that he understood what I was saying. I mean, things like that, you know. (laughs) You walk by them and say, "Freeze to death, you son of a bitch," and then he understands English. Just little things like that. I can't explain it.

DePue: Do you remember going to the rafters?

W. Smith: Yes. Yes. They'd hang you up about four or six inches off the floor, but after a while your shoulders would go out of their socket.

DePue: What were they tying you up with?

W. Smith: Rope, like hemp. Rope. You was just there, and after a while you become numb. You hurt like hell, but after a while, the hurt quits and you're just there. You're just out in space. You just take a space walk. (laughs) I mean, let me put it this way, you project yourself out here somewhere. Your body's back here. You're not a psychiatrist, are you? (laughs)

DePue: No.

W. Smith: Anyway, you project yourself out front there, and you leave your body back over here. It's weird, I know, but that way you get away from the pain, you get away from everything.

DePue: Were they waiting for the moment when you say, "I'll confess, I'll confess"?

W. Smith: I guess, yeah, and they would want you to write out a confession, and they would read it. That's what threw me when I got to—we're getting ahead of the things—but when I got to Tokyo the general came in with those papers wanting me to sign them, not to talk to anybody. I wouldn't sign them. He'd say, "Okay, you don't get on the plane." I was speechless. I couldn't believe it. I'm sitting at a hospital in Tokyo, and they said, before you go to the States, you have to sign these papers not to talk to anybody except the FBI with their credentials. Man, I lost it almost there. I almost hit that lieutenant in the mouth.

DePue: Yeah, we do need to talk about that later. I'm dying to—

W. Smith: I'm sorry.

DePue: —ask some questions about that, but I think it might be better to wait until we've talked about a lot of these other things first, so I apologize for that.

W. Smith: It's okay.

DePue: Russian roulette. I mean, you hear stories, but I'm looking at the guy who actually lived through it.

W. Smith: Oh, it makes your hair stand out on your head, and you shiver all the way to your feet, and you hear that click, and it goes completely through your head. It goes right through you. Then you take a breath. And they're asking you questions all the time, and you don't know the answer.

DePue: Didn't they know you didn't know the answers?

W. Smith: Sure they knew, but they ask them anyway, like, Formosa is an integral part of China. We want it back. I said, "You have my permission. Go get it. I don't care about Formosa." Those things happen. I couldn't...

DePue: Sometime when they had you in the rafters, how long would they leave you hanging there?

W. Smith: I'm thinking maybe five or six hours. Enough to grow numb and hurt.

DePue: In terms of Russian roulette, did you ever know anybody who actually died under that torture?

W. Smith: Some of them were shot, yeah. I don't know their names.

DePue: So were you convinced there were bullets in these pistols?

W. Smith: Well, pretty well, yeah. Pretty well. They would roll it around like that right in front of you. But sometimes, now, the Mausers they had, God, they were this long.

DePue: Mauser pistols.

W. Smith: Pistols, yeah. They called them Mausers.

DePue: You're saying it was like two feet long.

W. Smith: Yeah, it was that long. Huge things. And they looked heavy. I never did touch one, but they looked awful heavy. And they'd walk around and put them right between your eyes and pull the trigger, and that's when the pain would shoot right through you. It'd be like somebody taking a sharp knife, a little blade, (makes zipping sound) right through your head. That's the way it felt.

DePue: Well, you had mentioned the story before with the 105 and the dog and say "Shoot me." Were there other times like that you were resigned that it was your time?

W. Smith: I would argue with the people when I shouldn't. I would say things that I shouldn't have said, and they would back you up against the wall, and you knew you were going to be shot. You know, you just knew it. And then all of a sudden, you turn around and you're by yourself. It's psychological warfare, I guess is what you'd call it. Some of the things they would do to you just didn't make sense at all. And what the hell would I know? I didn't know anything, and they knew I didn't know anything. I mean, I'm just a BAR man, soldier—that was it. I didn't know a thing.

DePue: Talking about when you were growing up, the family was pretty religious. Did you look to God when you were in camp?

W. Smith: All the time. I never learned how to pray, but I learned the Lord's Prayer, and I said the Lord's Prayer every day that I was conscious, every night, and I still do. Other than that, I guess I had it in my mind you didn't need any other

prayer; that was his prayer, you know, and you don't need any other prayer, and that was it. Maybe I'm stupid.

DePue: Were you ever questioning why God would allow this to happen?

W. Smith: Yeah. They said, "If God is so good and he's so good to you, why is he leaving you here?" I says, "He's watching you." They would go berserk. Man, they would jump up and down. They'd walk and they'd turn around about three times. I said, "He's watching you. That's why I'm here," and God knows they would go berserk. And I always would just look at them and laugh. (laughs) I'd just look at them and laugh.

DePue: Did you ever wonder yourself, though, why God was putting you through this?

W. Smith: No, it didn't bother me. For some reason or other, I never questioned it. I guess that's why I'm stupid. I don't know. Now, Joe did once in a while. Joe would say, "God, why is God leaving us here like this?" I said, "Well, I don't know, he's got his reasons," but it never bothered me. Why, I don't know.

DePue: You almost found a reason to turn God on them, then.

W. Smith: Yeah, because, see, they hated—that's why they hated Father Kapaun so bad. Oh, man, they hated him. They let him die.

DePue: Tell us about Father Kapaun, because he's important in your story.

W. Smith: I was not on line with him, but the guys that I was in prison with, he was in their company. He was with the 1st Cavalry Division. He got him a Korean bicycle and he would go around to each of the companies, and he would hold communion for the men.

DePue: Was this before they were captured?

W. Smith: Before they were captured, yes, sir. And the reason Father Kapaun was captured was because he wanted to stay with the sick and the wounded there. He wouldn't leave them, and they captured him with the wounded, and he stayed with them. The first time I remember of him, we were in the valley, the first valley, and one of my jobs was to take a basket of cracked corn up on the hill where they had some more prisoners. And when I got up there, they had Father Kapaun in a room by himself, and of course the other guys told us that Father Kapaun was in the room, and they were interrogating him again, and that's the first that I knew of Father Kapaun. And when I went back down to my hut, I was telling two of my buddies about Father Kapaun being up there, and they knew him real well on line, and they says, By God, you mean he's still living? And I said, "Yeah, he was then." That was in the wintertime, and it wasn't too long after we were captured. When I say "too long," within a month or so. But he had a reputation, and he had a chalice and so forth that he

gave communion, and somebody stole it. I don't know who stole it. They never did find out who stole it. His reputation got around the camp, and the Chinese just hated his guts because he had too much influence on the troops, being a priest. And they segregated him out. And when I was on hard labor up at this temple where he died. He had a bowl of potato soup sitting out there on a porch, a wooden porch, a guard standing over it. Father Kapaun was about halfway out the door, and they wouldn't let him get to the soup, and he died. That was at Camp Five. (pause) And I read some paper a while back that he was buried in a mass grave, but he wasn't. They took him out by himself. Nobody knows where he was buried.

DePue: Someplace in North Korea.

W. Smith: Someplace in North Korea. They might have even took him over to China to keep the troops from trying to find his body. But up at the temple underneath, they had a Chinese headquarters, underground, because we used to see the officers come out and smoke.

DePue: Well, of course the Chinese officially were atheist, but I suspect a lot of the Chinese troops and the North Korean troops, had their own religion they were raised with, and probably some of them were superstitious. Do you think they were superstitious about Father Kapaun?

W. Smith: Probably were. You had Buddhist, Shinto,— four or five different kinds of religion there with the Chinese.

DePue: Did they allow you to have any kind of religious services in camp?

W. Smith: They didn't at first, but we used to go around and have little prayer meetings in the huts, about six or seven guys would meet in another hut. We'd meet in your hut one day, two or three days later we'd meet in another hut, but we always knew where to go. And we had this kid called Tracy, he was the preacher.

DePue: Was he an ordained preacher?

W. Smith: I don't know if he was or not. He could have been. But he always led the prayer meetings. And then it got to where they couldn't control everything, and of course they moved me out on hard labor. But before we left there, from what I hear, they had a cross up on the hill above Pyoktong there and they were having religious services every Sunday. I never did see it, but that's what they said they had. The Chinese let them have it in order to keep them under control, I guess.

DePue: How often were you able to bathe—I mean, really take a bath?

W. Smith: Not until the summer of '51. We got to go in the Yalu River down there.

- DePue: But we're talking four or five, six months after you were captured?
- W. Smith: Yeah. Let's see, it would have been... Let's see, Jacob Malik started the peace proposals in June—
- DePue: July.
- W. Smith: —or July. That's about the time we got to go in the water in Camp Five.
- DePue: Okay, you started at a hundred and ninety-something?
- W. Smith: A hundred and ninety-three.
- DePue: What do you think you were at that time?
- W. Smith: Oh, probably about maybe a hundred, maybe 120. I don't know. I could feel my ribs pretty well, but I was in pretty good shape compared to a lot of them. I was in excellent condition compared to—
- DePue: You were about, what, twenty-two at the time, something like that?
- W. Smith: Yeah, I guess so, because I was a couple of years older than most of the kids that were in there, and they looked up to me as the old man. (laughs) Well, I was twenty, I guess.
- DePue: You would have been twenty-two in 1951.
- W. Smith: Yeah, well, '51 I was twenty-two, and then most of these kids was eighteen at that time, eighteen and nineteen. They'd always come to me. They thought I knew everything. And you know what? I didn't know anything. I didn't know one thing, except what they knew. But they would always come to me with their problems, and I would always try to satisfy them and give them an answer or something or other. They really looked up to me for some reason or other, and I do not know why. I'll never know why.
- DePue: Were you getting in more trouble than a lot of the troops?
- W. Smith: Oh, yeah, I was always into trouble, and then I was accused of a lot of things that I never did.
- DePue: You think maybe they were looking up to you in part because you were—
- W. Smith: Kind of a...
- DePue: —you were not buckling under to the Chinese?
- W. Smith: Under to them. It could have. But I only did what I thought at that point in time that I could do and get by with. I wasn't going to buckle under them or kiss nobody's ass for anything.

- DePue: Well, apparently you weren't doing a real good job because you kept getting into trouble, sounds like.
- W. Smith: I know. I stayed in trouble all the time, and I got blamed for a lot of stuff that I didn't do, and of course when I did something, I always denied it if they didn't like it. I'd say, "No, I didn't do it."
- DePue: I know you went to the hole one time, too. What did you do to get yourself in trouble that way?
- W. Smith: There wasn't so many times I was segregated out.
- DePue: I got the impression this was a different time than going to the vault.
- W. Smith: Yeah, the hole is different. The hole was really a hole in the ground, and it had a tin roof, about a four by eight sheet of tin, and they pulled it over the top. In the wintertime you froze to death, and in the summertime you'd burn up.
- DePue: When were you in the hole?
- W. Smith: It was in the summertime that time. But the damn thing would get hot.
- DePue: Could you stretch out in that?
- W. Smith: You couldn't stretch out. You had to squat. You couldn't stretch out, stand up, or lay down.
- DePue: How long were you in there?
- W. Smith: I think three days is about the most I was ever in that hole. And some—
- DePue: —were you bringing food?
- W. Smith: Yeah, my buddy, They had powdered sorghum tops. You've seen sorghum grown, and you've seen the tops. Well, when you make a flour out of the top of the sorghum, and then they put it in a ball and steam it, and then that's what you eat. They used to steal that and bring it to me.
- DePue: Well, if you're in this hole, there's nowhere to go, I guess you're defecating and urinating on yourself?
- W. Smith: Right there, right there in the hole. Right there in the hole.
- DePue: Did you have a way to wash your clothes after something like this?
- W. Smith: Well, when you come out, yeah, you could. You could go out in the river.
- DePue: But they didn't let you take a bath in the river.

W. Smith: No, you couldn't take a bath, not at that time. If you were coming out, you didn't go where everybody went in swimming, you had to go over on this side where nobody went and wash your clothes. Same water, but it was a different side of the thing there.

DePue: What did you and your buddies look like when you finally got that first bath?

W. Smith: Oh, God, I don't know.

DePue: Had you had haircuts or shaves before that?

W. Smith: No, no, no. We had one guy, Red Brown—God rest his heart, rest his soul in peace—he (laughs) went out, and they shaved everybody—they clippered them, you know, with the clippers—

DePue: Who's "they," the Chinese?

W. Smith: The Chinese did. They sent a North Korean barber in there, and they clipped us with—he had a pair of clippers, with one hand—he could shave with one hand. Like that, he'd clip you off. And old Red Brown got his beard all—he come back, and they wouldn't let him in the room (laughs) because they didn't recognize him. And finally I recognized his voice, and I say, "Red, is that you?" He says, "Damn you, you know it's me. I've been here for two hours now. Let me in this damn..." (laughs) I can see him now. His chin looked like it was about a half a boiled egg. Oh, God, it was so funny. But nobody recognized him. We recognized most of the other guys, but they didn't recognize Red. God, he was a good person. Boy, he was a good person. He used to scrounge and steal stuff and bring it to me when I was about halfway sick. Yeah. I owe him, too.

DePue: Some of these guys you probably remember better than people you met a year ago or a week ago.

W. Smith: Yeah. I remember them well.

DePue: I know another one of the afflictions once it got a little bit warmer in the summertime were flies.

W. Smith: Yeah, flies, man, were everywhere. They [the Chinese] had a saying going around, that said each student must kill forty flies a day. Well, me and Joe was trying to make some whiskey. We took rocks out of the wall, got us a crock, and stole some stuff from the Chinese and put it in there and let it sour. We was going to make some whiskey, you know. And we put the rocks back over there. Well, in the summertime when the sun hit that thing and that started fermenting, flies just swarmed over there. The guys would come by and just reach your hand out, and you could get forty flies no problem at all, and then take them up to headquarters and come back, and they'd give you the forty flies, and you'd take them up to the headquarters and get your little tobacco

ration, and then come back and give the forty flies to somebody else. God knows.

DePue: Did they allow you a garden or anything like that in the compound?

W. Smith: They said that they did when I left there, but they didn't have the room. Some of the guys said that they grew some vegetables, but I never did see any.

DePue: Okay, we're probably about at the time where we should be thinking about stopping today. I've gotten you up to the point—now, I know we're kind of crossing this chronological boundary, perhaps, but you had talked quite a bit about the valley, and you had mentioned Pyoktong many times, but do you remember roughly when you moved from the valley to Pyoktong or Camp Five?

W. Smith: The 20th of January of 1951.

DePue: Okay, so most of the really tough winter of 1951 was at Camp Five.

W. Smith: Camp Five, yeah. That's where we lost most of the men.

DePue: And kind of framing my conversation, I know again, we crossed this chronological boundary, but in July of 1951, you've already alluded to the start of the peace talks, and that's kind of where I want to pick up our story next time, because now not only are you prisoners after that point in time, but my understanding is you are political pawns of the Chinese.

W. Smith: Political pawns, right.

DePue: Of the communists. And that part is especially fascinating to me and important for us to understand, so I'd like to kind of pick it up with that discussion next time if you don't mind.

W. Smith: Okay, yeah. Can I ask you a question?

DePue: You may.

W. Smith: Do you believe that a person can be brainwashed?

DePue: (pause) I don't know. You have already described lots of times when you disciplined yourself and you found ways of coping yourself, but I also know that a lot of soldiers didn't do nearly as well on that as you did, apparently.

W. Smith: Yeah, and I don't know why.

DePue: I think the Army certainly thought that soldiers could be brainwashed, didn't they?

W. Smith: Yeah, I guess they did, because we had twenty-one that stayed over there.

DePue: And that's an important piece that we want to talk to you about, is what happened after you were released and you came back to the United States and went through an awful lot of questioning yourself. So, again, these are all very important things that we need to be talking about. Any final comments for today, then, Bill?

W. Smith: (pause) No. Are we getting to what you want done now? I don't want to give you things that you want to hear just because you asked the question, but I want to be truthful, and I want to be... am I doing right?

DePue: Well, my goal is for you to be as truthful and as honest as you can, and believe me, Bill, I know this is not an easy thing for you to do, and I appreciate you bearing with all of this.

W. Smith: But in order to let the people know and to not let (pause)—not let my buddies down (pause) that are still buried somewhere there. (pause) That's all I want to do: let the people know what happened.

DePue: Thank you, Bill.

(end of interview #2)

## Interview with William Smith

# VRK-A-L-2010-008.03

Interview # 3: March 4, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, March 4, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, I'm the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and I'm back with William Smith. Good morning, Bill.

Smith: Good morning. How are you?

DePue: Good. We spent the last time, about a week ago, I believe—maybe it was a little bit more than that—talking about your experiences during the Korean War and especially about your experiences as a prisoner of war, which is why this interview is so important to me and to everybody who wants to have a better understanding of what it was actually like. I don't know that any of us can really truly understand what it was like, but I certainly appreciate you suffering through the questions and taking time to try to explain to us and give us a little bit better perspective. We basically got you through that first year of prison in North Korea under the Chinese most of the time. What I wanted to start with, though, today is ask you about your parents and how much they knew about your situation. So when did they find out that you're a prisoner of war? How did that happen?

Smith: I think the first time they got a KIA. Some guy told the CO or the company clerk that they saw me get killed. Well, it went from there (clears throat)—excuse me—and then later on, I believe eighteen months later, they got a list from the Chinese that saying I was a prisoner of war.

DePue: Did they get an official telegram from the government that you had been killed?

Smith: I think they did. I think they did, because our postman—we lived about eight miles out of Rockingham, North Carolina, and the postmaster went and got a neighbor and took him when he delivered the letter to my mama.

DePue: The telegram that no mother ever wants to get. Has she told you the stories about that experience?

Smith: She didn't say much. She had a heart attack and was in the hospital for a few weeks afterward.

DePue: After she got that news?

Smith: After she got the news, yes, sir.

DePue: How about your father?

Smith: He was always quiet, and taking care of the farm, and we had a well-drilling outfit which required a lot of men, and doing that. He never did say much.

DePue: About what his feelings were?

Smith: No, he never did say much. He had heard one guy by the name of Pinkerston—who was a progressive—make a statement to the *Charlotte Observer* of how good he was treated, and the old man came home one night and said something to me, and I said, "You don't understand." And I said, "If

you got anything to say to me, say it now, because in the morning I'm not going to feel like listening to you, so get out of my face," and I hit him.

DePue: Hit your father?

Smith: Yes. And if you would have said that to me at that point in time, I would have hit you, so that was the way it was.

DePue: Okay, so this is obviously long after that time period that you came back afterwards.

Smith: Right.

DePue: Were both of your parents, and the family resigned to the fact that you were dead?

Smith: I'm thinking they were. Yes, everybody thought that.

DePue: How did they find out—

Smith: Except the guys down at the pool room. They thought I'd been up in Detroit working on cars. (laughter) You know, that's how people are.

DePue: How did your parents find out that you were actually a prisoner?

Smith: They got another telegram. No, it came over the television, and my aunt heard my name being released.

DePue: Do you know how the government or the television station got that information?

Smith: No, I don't. I had written a couple or three letters, and on the, I guess, good side, trying to get the letters out, but I don't know—they never did say much about them to me.

DePue: Okay, so you said they found out eighteen months after you were captured.

Smith: Yes.

DePue: So that would put it in the middle of 1952.

Smith: Yes, uh-huh.

DePue: Wow. You mentioned letters. Did you ever receive any letters?

Smith: I think I got one letter, and it took eighteen months for it to go because the Chinese that brought the letter to me, said, "Now, this is how good your International Red Cross is." It had been held up in Switzerland somewhere for eighteen months before I got it. (laughs)

- DePue: Well, then that had to be very close to the time you were released.
- Smith: I was getting ready to be released at that time when they came in and got me and said, you're going to a hospital.
- DePue: Do you recall what was in that letter?
- Smith: Not really. It was one page. Everything was fine, as far as I know. I can't really remember.
- DePue: When you wrote your letters, what kind of information did you put in yours?
- Smith: That I was doing okay and for them not to worry about me. That was about it. It was I guess a half a page.
- DePue: Now, there was a variety of reasons why you would probably want to say you were doing okay, but what was going on in your mind when you were writing that letter?
- Smith: (laughs) I was cussing the Chinese. (laughter) So I was thinking one thing and writing another and wondering if I could get by with it to make sure that the letter went out, because I knew if you put anything derogatory in there, the letter wouldn't go.
- DePue: I have read other accounts where people who were receiving letters, that usually it was they weren't receiving all of the letters that were written; they oftentimes received letters that had bad news in them.
- Smith: I received that one letter that I remember, but there was nothing much going on at that point in time.
- DePue: When you were in prison, what were your thoughts in terms of your parents? Did you wonder if they knew what had happened to you?
- Smith: I wondered occasionally, but really and truly I made up my mind there—I figured in my mind, they're ten thousand miles from me. I can't help them. So you kind of wipe them out of your mind and you don't think about it.
- DePue: You just said you don't think about it, but did it ever bother you early on to think, My gosh, they have no idea what happened to me, and how are they ever going to find out?
- Smith: I thought about that, but at that point in time, there was no way of contact, there was no way of telling them the truth, and the fact is, both of them died and they never did know anything about my experiences, even though my company commander came down, he and his sidekick, the ones in the Battle of Unson

- DePue: That made it out.
- Smith: They made it out.
- DePue: They came and visited your parents?
- Smith: My company commander did, yes.
- DePue: When was that?
- Smith: He was at Wake Forest as an instructor for the ROTC, I believe, Major Cooper. That had to be in '53.
- DePue: While you were still a prisoner?
- Smith: No, no. I mean, when he came down to see them, I was already home. He came over from Fort Bragg one weekend, and he told me what he was doing. He was an instructor at Wake Forest College.
- DePue: After that first winter, you get into the summer timeframe. Were you at Camp Five at that time?
- Smith: Yes. Fact is, we opened up Camp Five.
- DePue: It was that first winter that was so especially brutal, wasn't it?
- Smith: It was brutal because it was the coldest winter in the North Korean history. It was anywhere from zero to sixty below. Guys froze to death. We dragged them across the ice. We buried them in China. And of course we buried them naked because we needed their clothes. And you know we had so many lice—I think I told you—the doctor said the lice within thirty-two hours could drink every pint of blood in your body, twenty-two pints. But the lice won't stay on a cold body. They look for warmth, you know.
- DePue: I wondered if you could describe the basic layout of Camp Five. Now, in the book you mention uptown and downtown and the temple, three different areas—
- Smith: Three different areas there. Camp Five was on a peninsula, and they ran the civilians out of the huts and put a barbed-wire fence across the end of it, and of course we were surrounded by water except for that barbed-wire fence. That was at Camp Five.
- DePue: It was—
- Smith: The town of Pyoktong was north of there, and then the temple was, I would say, northeast of the town.
- DePue: It was very much separated from the rest of the camp, then?

- Smith: Yes, it was. Because I was on hard labor up there. And they had a communication post dug underground around that temple, because we used to see the North Korean and the Chinese officers coming up. They'd just pop up from nowhere, you know, and that's why it dawned on me they had a base underground at the temple.
- DePue: What was the purpose of the temple? Why was that—
- Smith: The temple was a sick compound. The guys who were sick and the wounded that was in bad shape, and when I was assigned to them the last time, I was sentenced to, I believe, life imprisonment with their kangaroo courts, you know.
- DePue: Yeah, we'll talk about that a little bit later here.
- Smith: But that just popped up in my mind.
- DePue: No, that's fine. That's fine. Who all was in this camp?
- Smith: At first we had officers, enlisted men, we had British, Turks, five Frenchmen, and they said a couple or three Australians, but I don't know; I didn't see them.
- DePue: Were there any South Koreans?
- Smith: South Koreans were in a different area.
- DePue: Of Camp Five?
- Smith: They were way off from us. When we were segregated out, we passed by the South Korean camp going to the officers' camp. Eventually they stayed at Camp Two, the officers' camp. And then I was sentenced the last time to Camp Two, and we called it the annex, and ended up being Camp Two, Company Three where we were the last time.
- DePue: Were both of these camps basically near or in Pyoktong, which was the village?
- Smith: They were fairly close. I'll say they were within ten miles, roughly.
- DePue: You know if the officers were treated differently?
- Smith: I have no idea. I don't know. But I talked to my officer one time that was pulled down at a lecture, and he had tried to escape, and his hands was all broken and beat up and bleeding. But other than that, he was the only officers I ever knew that was at the officers' camp.

DePue: How closely did you mix with the other nationalities, with the Brits, the Turks, some of the other nationalities?

Smith: Well, I got along with them all right. I had a few fights with them.

DePue: With....?

Smith: With the British. Yeah, the limeys, yeah, we did. We fought like hell. But that was one of those things. You're thrown in there. They used to blame us for them being there, and I would always tell them, "Well, there'll always be an England as long as America can afford it." (laughter)

DePue: I can't imagine why they would be upset with that statement. How about the Turks? Do you remember much about the Turks?

Smith: Well, the Turks, they were good fighters, too, but they only had one interpreter, and he could speak English, but he couldn't speak Chinese. And of course the Chinese could speak English, couldn't speak Turkish, and so they had to communicate with English.

DePue: Did that make it better or worse for the Turks, you think?

Smith: I don't know, but when anything happened to one of the Turks, it happened to all of them, because they stuck together like you wouldn't believe. We finally got a light bulb for the cabins, and one of the Turks did something that made the Chinese mad, and they took away their light bulbs—took away his light bulb in that particular compound. All the rest of the Turks took their light bulbs out and took them to the Chinese. (laughs) They were that close. Boy, I got to take my hat off to them. They stuck together.

DePue: The huts that you were in, how many people did they put in these huts?

Smith: Well, there was twenty in a hut. I'll say it was about a nine by twelve room.

DePue: That doesn't sound like enough room for people to even lay down.

Smith: Well, everybody laid on their side. You couldn't lay on your back. And you slept kind of spoon style, and everybody turned over at the same time, which was kind of—that's the way it went.

DePue: That's the way you slept for a year and a half, two years?

Smith: Yep, that's the way it was.

DePue: Was there any heat in these huts?

Smith: We had some heat, and I don't know if I explained to you how they would dig a trench and put rocks around it, and that's the heat that came up through, but

it came up through the center of it; if you was way on this side or this side, you didn't get much heat.

DePue: So was there a routine that people knew that if you were in the center, it was warmer?

Smith: It was warmer. We changed over, yeah. We changed over and traded places.

DePue: I don't think anybody who hasn't gone through that experience can even begin to comprehend.

Smith: It's really hard to explain it, but most of the huts that I was in—I was in just a few of them—but most of the guys really were taking care of each other.

DePue: What happens if you have to relieve yourself in the middle of the night?

Smith: You just get up and crawl over everybody and go out to the banjo, you know. Did I tell you about (laughs) in the valley there was a urine stack out there three feet high and about thirty feet in diameter, because every time you went, you had to back up to pee, you know? It was so cold it froze when it hit the ground and before it hit the ground. And (laughs) I've often talked to my wife about when the farmers came back, wonder what they did with all that urine, (laughs) you know what I mean, because boy, there was a stack up—this was in the valley, the lower valley.

DePue: This was before you got to Camp Five?

Smith: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Well, I hear lots of stories about the Korean practice to use human feces and urine on their fields in the summertime for fertilizer.

Smith: Yeah, the Chinese would sell them what we had in our trench there, in our latrine. They would dig it out and put it in a big tin pan with a man on each end of it like that, and they would haul it and put it on their fields, because that's what they used for fertilizer.

DePue: Now, we already talked a little bit about the food that you got in the previous conversation, but did it change markedly from going from the valley and these really brutal conditions to Camp Five, which is still horrendous but not quite as bad?

Smith: The only change that I remember—in Camp Five, we got some beans, soybeans, but in the valley, we didn't have any; we just had the cracked corn. And in the Camp Five, we had the millet that we didn't have in the valley with the cracked corn.

- DePue: Does that mean as far as the Chinese were concerned, you were eating a little bit better?
- Smith: Yeah, they thought we were. They thought we were eating fine.
- DePue: Any idea how many calories you guys were getting a day?
- Smith: (laughs) I have no idea. Well, you'd take a little bowl of corn.
- DePue: You're holding your hands together here.
- Smith: Yeah, a little bowl of corn about like that. I don't know how many teaspoons full maybe twelve teaspoons full or so.
- DePue: How many times a day did you eat?
- Smith: Twice. Twice a day.
- DePue: When?
- Smith: It was in the morning and in the evening, late in the evening.
- DePue: Were you expected to cook this yourselves?
- Smith: We did. We had our own cooks, and they cooked it in big vats and stirred it up, and we took the crust—you know, it will burn after so long a time—and after they took all the corn out of it or the millet or both, they left a crust on the side of the big vat there about that thick, which we burned.
- DePue: About half an inch thick or so.
- Smith: Yeah, and we poured water in there and made coffee. It was black, and, you know, it wasn't bad. (laughs) We used every bit of it.
- DePue: Where'd you get the water?
- Smith: We had one faucet at (clears throat)—excuse me—Camp Five. And in the valley, we had to go to the branch. There was a creek down below there. But in Camp Five, we had one faucet up out of the ground, and everybody got water out of that one faucet.
- DePue: Now, my understanding is Camp Five, you're talking about a peninsula. The peninsula was jutting into the Yalu River.
- Smith: Into the Yalu River. It was backwater of the Yalu River, yeah.
- DePue: Was that suitable to be drinking?

- Smith: A lot of people drank it. We drank it, but we usually would boil it. We'd boil it in helmet liners, you know. And of course when they cooked it, they boiled it before they threw the cracked corn in there.
- DePue: So water wasn't a serious shortage for you.
- Smith: No, not really.
- DePue: It was just the quality of the water you had.
- Smith: The quality of it, you know. But it's a wonder most people didn't die, getting dysentery.
- DePue: Did they allow you to do any kind of gardening at all?
- Smith: Not the first year or so because there was no room. You didn't have room to do a garden.
- DePue: The huts were pretty close together, then?
- Smith: The huts were right next to each other, and of course little sections over here, like I guess families, [looking at map] and I didn't see any gardens. Some of the guys said they had a garden before the end of the war, but I never did see one. I don't know where they got anything to plant.
- DePue: The huts that you were in used to be civilian homes?
- Smith: Used to be civilian homes.
- DePue: Did they build any new construction there?
- Smith: No, no. We built a couple down there by the water fountain that flooded out one time, and we had to repair that, and we used straw and mud and put it back together, but other than that, that's the only construction I ever saw.
- DePue: Were you guys expected to work?
- Smith: Well, they would go out on wood detail, and we'd go across the ice and gather wood, and other than that, you'd sit down and listen to lectures all the time. The lectures were horrible.
- DePue: Well, that's a great segue, because that's exactly what I want to spend quite a bit of time talking to you about here next. What were the lectures all about?
- Smith: All about how good communism was and how bad democracy was, and they could never convince me that their way of living was better than ours because I had seen both sides, and it didn't take a genius to figure out which was the best. Anybody that had lived in the United States and then go live in North Korea, there's no comparison.

DePue: How often were you getting these lectures?

Smith: Every day.

DePue: For how long?

Smith: As long as you were there. A year and a half, two years, until I moved to Camp Two, Company Three, and we made a deal with the Chinese: you stop the lectures, and we'll do the work.

DePue: And that's when you went to this reactionary camp.

Smith: Yes, sir.

DePue: And we'll get to that as well.

Smith: Yeah, I'm sorry, it just pops up in my mind, you know.

DePue: No, no. I'm going to pause here real quick to make an adjustment on the microphone.

(pause in recording)

DePue: My apologies on that.

Smith: That's okay.

DePue: You were getting these lectures every day, lasting several hours a day—

Smith: Hours on hours. From sunup to sundown, and sometimes during the night.

DePue: Who were giving these lectures?

Smith: They had one prime lecturer who was really in charge—they called us “students,” and we were supposed to call them “comrades.” And there was one guy named Lim—small, short, I guess weighed 130 pounds, had big glasses, bigger than his face, and his neck looked like about six inches around it. And spoke in English real well and knew a little bit about the United States because he had worked for Chiang Kai-shek. A lot of those had worked for Chiang Kai-shek. We had a sailor that took one of Chiang Kai-shek's ships and donated to Mao Zedong, with a whole crew and everything. I don't know, they evidently got a bigger bowl of rice out of it. I don't know why they went. But the instructors were well-educated.

DePue: Sounds like you were expected to participate? There was class participation by the students?

Smith: Yes, we were supposed to, and they wanted us to swallow that communist propaganda and then come back home and stir things up. That was their idea.

And I couldn't go along with that, because—and I never signed a confession. They were big on confessions. If you did anything wrong, if you signed a confession and read it before the rest of the troops, they were real happy about that.

DePue: People were doing that?

Smith: Yeah, they were doing that.

DePue: In the process of attending these lectures?

Smith: Yes, and I used to tell them, I said, "Boy, if you ever live to get back to the States, somebody going to bust your butt." Even Batchelor and Dickerson—I tried to talk to Batchelor about it, but he just wouldn't listen. Walk around the compound there with a book of Karl Marx under his arm. I don't know if he could read it or not, but he always had that book with him. Oh, damn....

DePue: Were the Chinese—during these interrogations, were they telling you about what was going on in the war?

Smith: Well, the only way you could tell what was going on in the war was by the reactions of the guards. If the guards were jolly and talking to each other and laughing and so forth, that means that our end was getting pushed. Now, if they were solemn and arguing with each other, that means that we were pushing them. You had to read your body language.

DePue: Did you know enough Chinese to—

Smith: I knew enough Japanese, and all the older ones spoke Japanese, you know, because they had been occupied by Japan for so long, they knew—

DePue: Well, the North Koreans had been, not the Chinese. Well, some of the Chinese, too, you're right.

Smith: Except the little doctor we had that had been raised by missionaries, and I met him in Camp Two, Company Three. He was good to us, and he seemed like he hated the Chinese because they drafted him and put him in the army, and he was a pediatrician, (laughs) so it didn't set too good with him. But he would talk to you as long as there were no other Chinese around.

DePue: Okay, but I'm going to put you on the spot here. I want you to, the best you can, paint us a picture of what these classes were like, and as best you can, tell us—recite the things they were telling you guys. Paint the picture first of all.

Smith: Well, you're sitting out there on the dirt, on the ground—the rocky ground, too—and you're sitting there cross-legged, freezing to death, and a Chinese is standing up in front of you, walking back and forth, telling you how bad your country was and how bad Truman was at that time. And they would say

Formosa—at that time, that was the name of it, before Taiwan—Formosa is an integral part of China, and we want it back, and I would say, “You have my permission to go get it,” and that didn’t go over too good with them, but I told them just exactly how I felt.

DePue: In the class itself?

Smith: Yeah. I would tell them. And a lot of the guys would never speak a word. They wouldn’t say anything, and they’d just sit there. But me, sometimes I’d let my mouth overload my ass, and it’d just come out. You could only take so much. Like I think I told you about the guy saying why we didn’t get any mail, and he said, “You don’t get mail because they bomb everything, and even the little dog on the road,” and I said, “But that little dog was probably pulling a 105 howitzer,” which is a cannon. And the guy behind me was educated at Harvard; (laughs) he spoke better English than anybody else in the camp. He jerked me up and twisted me around and spit in my face, and I kicked him, and he took me up before the instructor, and the instructor said, “I should have you”—I think I told you—“should have you shot” and so forth, and I just backed up and told him to shoot me. I pray to no man.

DePue: Did you have any classes where they got deep into the theory of communism, Marxism?

Smith: Well, they would talk about Karl Marx and [Friedrich] Engels, but by talking to the average G.I., he really didn’t care anything about Karl Marx or Engels or communism, he was starving to death and freezing to death. How could you concentrate on something like that, even though they were lecturing you day in and day out on it? You don’t think about that, you think about food.

DePue: I know there is the 24th Infantry Regiment, which was a black regiment. I believe they had an awful lot of people who were captured in those early months of the war before you even arrived in the July and August timeframe, and there would have been other occasions to capture blacks as well. Did you have blacks in the compound?

Smith: We had blacks in the compound, and that’s when they segregated us. They had the blacks up in the first company, the English over here, and the Americans in between. And they were always trying to pit the blacks against the whites and the Americans against the English and vice versa.

DePue: In the lectures?

Smith: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: What were they saying about the English?

Smith: They were saying the English were so good, so good, and that’s when I told them that there would always be an England as long as America could afford

it, but that didn't go over too good either, even with the British. But I don't know, you say things like that without really thinking it out, because otherwise you'd keep your mouth shut. But a lot of that stuff, I couldn't take.

DePue: What were they doing as far as the blacks were concerned?

Smith: They were lecturing them, but I think on a different level. They were telling them about Mao Zedong and how good everything was in China, and how good it would be if they were under communism—you know, everybody would be equal and so forth.

DePue: Were they talking about slavery and about how bad the whites were?

Smith: How bad it was and how bad everything was because the blacks had been treated so bad by the white, and they would try to stir up stuff like that.

DePue: Was it effective?

Smith: I don't think it was too effective, because, well, the blacks had lived in the United States, (laughs) and they couldn't compare with North Korea. There's no comparison. But we did have a couple of blacks stay there out of the twenty-one that did stay. But I don't know, I never did have any problem with them.

DePue: Did you have opportunities to mingle around with the blacks and with the Brits and some of the other—

Smith: Sometimes, yeah. We used to go out and scrounge together, and then when tobacco was hard to find, hard to get, and the Turks were pretty smart. They would go get old cabbage out of a place, and then they would roll it up there, and it looked like marijuana, and they were selling it to the G.I.'s, and it was cabbage leaves, dried out.

DePue: Do you think the African-Americans who were there as prisoners were either more or less susceptible to be influenced?

Smith: I don't think they were. Maybe like us they had a few weak ones, but other than that, I don't think so.

DePue: Was one of the themes they were talking about deal with Wall Street?

Smith: Yeah, oh, yeah. "The Wall Street warmongers." (laughs) Every third sentence they said was something about the Wall Street warmongers, and we were cannon fodder for the Wall Street warmongers. I'd just look at them and laugh. Who cares? I mean, we're ten thousand miles from home. Who gives a crock about Wall Street or anything else? I didn't. If they couldn't live where they were living, I couldn't help them. (laughs) That was my way of thinking—nothing I could do for them.

- DePue: Well, I don't know how to say this except to say this. You weren't exactly the best-educated person in the camp—you hadn't completed high school. In your view, were the people who had less education more or less susceptible?
- Smith: They were more susceptible, but they were ignorant, they didn't know.
- DePue: But you didn't....
- Smith: Well, I had to figure out things for myself. I knew what I liked and what I didn't like, and I didn't like their way of living.
- DePue: Would you say at the time you were captured you had a really strong understanding of what capitalism was?
- Smith: I knew pretty well what it was. You make a buck; you try to make a buck. And communism, everybody was in the same boat.
- DePue: Did you have an understanding at the time you were captured what communism was?
- Smith: I understood what communism was because we had run into it in Japan when they ran Chiang Kai-shek off of the mainland and put him off on Hainan Island. We had good lectures on that, and then we had maps and so forth as to what he was doing before they ever ran him over to Formosa. So that had to be in '49 and early '50.
- DePue: Well, classic communism at that time was also atheist. Did they try to convince you there wasn't a god?
- Smith: Yes. They'd say, if your god is so good, why is he leaving you here? I says, well, he's watching you, and they would go ballistic, knowing that somebody was watching them that they couldn't see, until some of the better-educated Chinese would pull them off to the side and talk to them. But they never shattered my faith one ounce. It didn't. I was brought up from this high all the way up through a Southern Baptist church, and you don't change that, particularly if you're a foreigner. (laughs)
- DePue: But you're stuck in a prison camp, and you realize life isn't fair, and you got the raw end of that deal, and I'm sure people were thinking, Well, God obviously doesn't care about me.
- Smith: It never dawned on me to think any other way. I'm here, and I'm supposed to do what I was supposed to do, and that's it.
- DePue: How much did they tell you about the peace talks that were going on at Panmunjom by that time?
- Smith: Well, the Russian that started that—[Jacob] Malik, I believe was his name—

- DePue: Yeah, you've got it mentioned in your book. I can't recall the....
- Smith: And he mentioned that, to begin the peace talks, he made the first proposal, the way I understand it.
- DePue: This is from what they told you.
- Smith: This is from what they told us. And we had a Burchett to come through there, a French correspondent who was communist, and tried to explain a few things to the people. I didn't pay any attention to him. And then we had an Allen Winningham, which was a British communist.
- DePue: Ellen?
- Smith: Allen Winningham. And then we had a Monica Felton—was a woman—and I believe she was English. And she came into camp and gave lectures to some of the guys. I never did hear her. I knew she was there, and I knew that somebody stole Burchett's shoes one time, and they had a hell of a time about that. Some of the guys stole his shoes, because you had to take your shoes off before you went into the Chinese headquarters, you know what I mean. Everybody went in there barefooted. And some of the guys stole his shoes. Man, they had a field day with that. But other than that, I don't know, that was the only three correspondents that I remember coming into the camp.
- DePue: Well, you say correspondents.
- Smith: They were war correspondents.
- DePue: Were they talking to you?
- Smith: They were talking to some of the guys, yes.
- DePue: Giving lectures?
- Smith: Giving lectures, yeah. I never did hear them except—
- DePue: So doesn't sound like a war correspondent.
- Smith: No. But they were dedicated communists, but I never paid any attention to them, we always knew when they were there because the Chinese made such a big to-do over it. They had somebody that looked like us talking communism.
- DePue: You mentioned that you did know a little bit about what was going on at the peace talks. Did you know what was bogging down the peace talks? Did they tell you that?
- Smith: No, and one thing, they couldn't agree on a table to start with, or the size of the table, and then they were arguing about the treatment, and other than that,

I didn't know. And they wanted Formosa back. But other than that, we didn't have much news from the front.

DePue: You certainly have become aware of almost all of this stuff I'm going to be asking you about well after the war, but the issue, from my understanding, that really bogged down the talks and made them last not just a couple months but for two years was the issue of repatriation, where so many of the Chinese and North Koreans refused, did not want to go back to the north.

Smith: Yeah, and from what I gathered, Syngman Rhee, who was the president of South Korea at that time, nationalized all of the Chinese prisoners that didn't want to go back. That's the way I think....

DePue: The North Koreans. Excuse you, the North Korean prisoners.

Smith: Yeah. They nationalized all of them that didn't want to go back, Chinese and North Korean.

DePue: That actually happened after you were released.

Smith: After I was released. But they were still arguing about it.

DePue: Well, here's my question for you, Bill: one way to understand why you were getting lectures every single day, all day long, about the greatness of communism and the evils of capitalism is—now, you'd said one of them, they wanted you to go back to the United States and stir things up there—

Smith: Right. That was what they were halfway counting on, I think.

DePue: —but they also obviously wanted to turn some people and convince them that they wanted to stay in China or North Korea. Were you aware that that's what had bogged down the peace talk, the repatriation issue?

Smith: Not really. Not at that time.

DePue: What did you think the goal was for these daily, incessant lectures?

Smith: Just to learn more about communism and how bad democracy was, but you kind of tune it out. I mean, day in and day out and day in and day out, hour in and hour out, and you're freezing to death and starving to death, and they're trying to tell you how good their system is—that's a crock, as far as I was concerned. In no uncertain terms, I let them know that I thought it was a crock.

DePue: Did you suspect that part of the treatment was to get you to the point where you're so weak and so susceptible that you'd do anything and say anything?

- Smith: Some of those guys were, and some of them died, but they were trying to convince them that their system was better than ours because they had what they call a 'lenient policy.' If you look at the history, you'll find out that the Chinese always bragged about their lenient policy towards prisoners. And (laughs) I never saw any leniency from my end of the deal, but really they tried to exploit that, and some of the guys I guess believed them.
- DePue: Were they trying to tell you things about how their prisoners in the south were being abused?
- Smith: Yeah, in particularly on Kojedo Island and all of this, because they had had riots over there.
- DePue: Well, that was Kojedo Island.
- Smith: Kojedo, yeah.
- DePue: So you were hearing about that, the riots down at Kojedo Island.
- Smith: Yeah, yeah, and we was hearing something about they were fixing to electrocute or gas William McGee, which was a black guy from Mississippi—I believe it was Mississippi—yeah, I'm sure it was—and they was wanting everybody to write letters home and tell them not to execute him.
- DePue: This is somebody in the United States.
- Smith: Yeah. Yeah, Willie McGee<sup>3</sup>. He had the death penalty, and it was in Mississippi, I'm sure, and they harped on that for weeks until they did kill him, you know, and of course they told us the sad news, and I told them I didn't give a rat's...one way or the other. I couldn't help the man. Where I was, I couldn't help anybody.
- DePue: Well, that would be one I think they would especially be pushing on the blacks who were there.
- Smith: They pushed that to no end.

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<sup>3</sup> Willie McGee (died May 8, 1951) was an African American from Laurel, Mississippi, who was sentenced to death in 1945 for the rape of Willette Hawkins,<sup>[1]</sup> a white housewife.<sup>[2]</sup> McGee's legal case became a *cause célèbre*.<sup>[2]</sup> William Faulkner wrote a letter insisting the case against McGee was unproven.<sup>[3]</sup> Bella Abzug brought his appeals in Mississippi and the Supreme Court in one of the first civil rights cases of her legal career.<sup>[4]</sup> Other notable people spoke out: Jessica Mitford, Paul Robeson, Albert Einstein, and Josephine Baker.<sup>[2]</sup> U.S. President Harry S. Truman came under international pressure to grant McGee a pardon.<sup>[2]</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willie\\_McGee\\_\(convict\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willie_McGee_(convict))

- DePue: What was the term you guys used for the incessant lectures, day in and day out?
- Smith: We just listened to them, and then all I said is it's communist propaganda. It's a bunch of bull.
- DePue: Well, I think it was during the Korean War that the term "brainwashed" came into vogue.
- Smith: Yeah, they came in brainwashing people. I didn't understand what brainwashing really was. I mean, you wash your head, you wash your brain at the same time as far as I was concerned. (laughs)
- DePue: Did you hear that term while you were a prisoner? Among other prisoners?
- Smith: Among other prisoners and the Chinese, and once in a while we'd have a North Korean general come around and say, "Look at the destruction that your country has caused," because everything was flat where they'd bombed. And I'd look at him, and I'd say, "But it's war." He owned the Chinese Gardens in Seattle, Washington, one of the Chinese sisters. And I told him, "Go to live with your sister for a year and then come back and tell me how bad things are." I couldn't help but speak out sometimes.
- DePue: Well, that's one of the reasons—we talked last time about all the various types of punishments you were getting. That was the reason for it, oftentimes?
- Smith: Oftentimes it was. I just couldn't keep my mouth shut.
- DePue: You mentioned in your book, you had a couple stories about Lady Ling, and I wonder if you could share those.
- Smith: Yeah, she was a psychiatrist that came over from China, and she took me down to the river there, and we were sitting on a rock, and she was asking me about the family and this, that, and the other, you know, and I propositioned her, (laughs) and that ended our lecture right there. But every day I would see her, she'd wave at me. She was a pretty little thing. Oh, man. But—
- DePue: Do you think the people who were giving you the lectures sincerely believed what they were talking about?
- Smith: Most of them did. Now, I have my doubts about some of them because their lectures were so light and different from the hardboiled communists. I don't know how to explain it, but you could tell the difference. When they'd raise their voice and try to push things out on you there, I got the feeling that they were not really interested in what they were talking about, but they had to repeat it over and over and over. And once you've heard one lecture, you've heard them all until something would come up about Taiwan or Willie McGee or something like that, something special that they were harping on, all of

them were the same—Karl Marx and [Frederic] Engels<sup>4</sup>, this is the way it's got to be, and this is a perfect system. And I would say, "Bull," you know.

DePue: Earlier we were talking about the Turks, and you talked about how much you admired the Turks because they stuck together.

Smith: I really did because they really did stick together.

DePue: Well, another aspect of your experience and the POW experience, though, is that it seems to me the Chinese, North Koreans, were trying to divide you guys among yourselves.

Smith: That's true. They'd pit, like I said, the English against the Americans and the white against the blacks, Puerto Ricans, and everybody. Of course, we only had five Frenchmen there, but I didn't have anything to do with them.

DePue: But ultimately I would think the ultimate dividing line was—the terms that came out of that experience were progressives and reactionaries. So give me a definition of those two terms.

Smith: Well, the progressives, the way I understand it, were the ones that favored communism, and they would come around and try to talk to the guys and tell them how bad the situation was there, but it would be better under Chinese rule or communism.

DePue: Are these prisoners?

Smith: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: And so they would have prisoners trying to convince you—

Smith: Trying to convince you to—yeah.

DePue: What motivated those guys.

Smith: I don't know. More food, better food, I would think.

DePue: Avoid punishment?

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Engels (German pronunciation: 28 November 1820 – 5 August 1895) was a German-English industrialist, social scientist, author, political theorist, philosopher, and father of Marxist theory, alongside Karl Marx. In 1845 he published *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, based on personal observations and research. In 1848 he co-authored *The Communist Manifesto* with Karl Marx, and later he supported Marx financially to do research and write *Das Kapital*. After Marx's death Engels edited the second and third volumes. Additionally, Engels organized Marx's notes on the "Theories of Surplus Value" and this was later published as the "fourth volume" of *Capital*.<sup>[1]</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yakov\\_Malik](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yakov_Malik)

Smith: Avoid punishment. I don't know, I never did understand them. Some of them were just damn ignorant as far as I was concerned; they didn't know any better. Edward Dickerson from Cracker's Neck, Virginia, he and Batchelor was the main two that I remember real well at Camp Five.

DePue: Were they both—

Smith: Dickerson was just an ignorant person. He was just an ignorant hillbilly, but Batchelor knew better, or at least I thought. Right after I was captured, I was put in a hut with Batchelor, and coming around checking us down were the Chinese soldiers, and he had a pack of Lucky Strikes, and he said, "What am I going to do with these?" He said, "They're going to catch me with them." I said, "Give it to me. I'll take care of it." So I put them under my arm, went out with my hands up like that, and they patted me down, and I went back into the hut, but I still had the cigarettes with me.

DePue: Underneath your armpit.

Smith: Underneath my armpit, yeah. The only thing he could have done was taken it away from me. When you look at it that way, you just have to give them up.

DePue: What was worse, to have these progressives go around and try to convince you communism was better, or to have the progressives who would basically turncoat on you?

Smith: A lot of them would. I suffered a lot from people going and telling things on me talking about the Chinese and so forth that I never did say. I didn't do anything, but they would always point me out as one of them that was causing trouble, you know what I mean, or I said this or I said that—I didn't say a thing.

DePue: Well, you talked yourself about the various tortures. Did they torture people trying to get them to confess about other prisoners?

Smith: Yes, and trying to admit that we were wrong by supporting Chiang Kai-shek, and our government was wrong. And I told them, I says, "What does a G.I. know about the government? Those people up in Washington do what they want. We don't have anything to do with them." And that's why they say, You're cannon fodder for the Wall Street warmongers. I used to crack up. (laughs) I mean, half of those guys didn't even know what Wall Street was. They didn't know. I don't know.

DePue: How did you feel about the progressives who—not a progressive. Let's just say you had a prisoner who was taken away and tortured, and maybe their threshold of pain was different from other people, and they broke, and they told names, and repercussions come down on you and others. How did you feel about those guys?

- Smith: I didn't feel too good about them, because I figured if I could stand it, they could. I was probably wrong, but I didn't have any sympathy for them. So what they got beat? Hell, we'd get beat every day. We stand on the ice every day. Hell. I didn't think too much of it, to tell you the truth.
- DePue: If you were to put a percentage—and this is an unfair question, perhaps—but how many would you think really were classified as progressives?
- Smith: I would think very few, very few. But the majority of them, believe it or not, they walk around in a stupor. I don't even think they knew how to get home. That was my way of thinking. Our men that we had were young boys, and they had never really—they had taken orders, but they had never really left home in their mind. I would always try to warn them, "Be careful what you say to the communist because you know how they are, they got the gun," but some of them, you couldn't reach, you couldn't tell them anything.
- DePue: Was the label "progressive" a term that the communists were using, or was that the term among yourselves?
- Smith: Among us. Among us. I never did hear a communist mention anything about progressive. We had a communist newspaperman come there, and he spoke perfect English, and he would really get out there and lecture, but I never heard any of the Chinese say anything about progressives. We always passed it around, who was and who wasn't, you know.
- DePue: That's interesting because—
- Smith: We had our own clique. (laughs)
- DePue: Because in American society at the time, "progressive" had a completely different meaning from what it had for you guys.
- Smith: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. But there, you can't compare that with the American society, with the society of the American people, because it's altogether different. Everything is different. And some of those young men that left home and got out mama's apron strings, well, they didn't know hardly how to handle themselves.
- DePue: In the book you mentioned at one point in time the camp leadership had picked you out to be in some kind of a leadership position within the prisoners themselves.
- Smith: Yeah, they thought that I had organized the KKK,<sup>5</sup> (laughs) I knew of the KKK, but I've never had anything to do with it, but they said, he organized the KKK out in Camp Five. They even talked about that in the conventions anymore. (laughs) And I told them, "I didn't have anything to do with that

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<sup>5</sup> KKK: Ku Klux Klan

crap,” but I surely got blamed for it. I should have told them, “Yeah, I organized it,” but I didn’t.

DePue: So was that another opportunity for them to drive a wedge between the whites and the blacks?

Smith: Yeah, because the KKK, they did hang a few blacks in their time, but I didn’t have anything to do with it. I didn’t know that much about it.

DePue: One of the things you mentioned, they had asked you to be a monitor at one time and then a squad leader?

Smith: Yes, when we first went at Camp Five there, the first couple of weeks we were there, they called me up to headquarters and they said—you know, we lived in the huts, and each hut was called the squad, you know, in our squad—and they put me as a squad leader, which was all right with me, because I was a couple of years older than most of those kids, but they would come to me with their problems, I would tell them what I thought, and they had to make up their own mind.

DePue: “They” being the prisoners?

Smith: “They” being the prisoners, yeah. And then after a week they called me back to headquarters, and they wanted to know what the prisoners talked about at night—what did they say? When they talk among themselves, what did they say? I said, “They don’t say anything.” They said, “It can’t be.” I said, “Well, they never say anything. What am I going to tell you? They don’t talk.” And after about five or six hours, I convinced them that they didn’t talk. So they called in the monitor and they made him squad leader and they made me the monitor. And I told them the same thing.

DePue: The monitor is the one who’s supposed to be telling them everything.

Smith: Supposed to be telling them everything, yeah. I told them, I said, “The men don’t talk. What am I going to tell you? They don’t talk.” But I must have said it a thousand times. And after so many hours, I guess I convinced them that they didn’t talk. I don’t know how the other monitor got along with them, though. I never did know.

DePue: And your particular squad, your group of—how many people would be in this hut?

Smith: Say, twenty.

DePue: Was that a pretty tight group?

Smith: Pretty tight. Some of them kind of fell by the wayside, but—

- DePue: What do you mean?
- Smith: Of course, a lot of them died, too.
- DePue: What do you mean, fell by the wayside?
- Smith: Well, they would go up to the headquarters and stay a couple of, three hours, and they'd come back and they'd eat.
- DePue: So they went up on their own volition?
- Smith: No, they came and got them and took them up there, but they come back and they had cigarettes, which, you just don't have cigarettes—we didn't have any—unless you did something for them, because the Chinese didn't do anything for nothing, or that was my way of thinking.
- DePue: This was all the Chinese, though, not the North Koreans, by this time?
- Smith: No, because the North Koreans occasionally would come through the camp, mainly officers, but I think I told you, the North Koreans were in charge of the camps but the Chinese were in charge of the prisoners, so we had more dealings with the Chinese than we did with the North Koreans.
- DePue: As far as you were concerned, which one did you have all your angst against?
- Smith: Mostly the Chinese. The North Koreans, they never did stand a chance. But the Chinese.... And some of them knew better because we had educated them.
- DePue: Meaning they had been educated in the United States.
- Smith: They were being educated in the United States, and they knew better, and they knew that part of that stuff was bull, and I told them so, too, and they'd just shake their head and walk off.
- DePue: As far as you're concerned, they agreed with you, and they just couldn't—
- Smith: They just couldn't hack it, or they wouldn't admit it.
- DePue: Do you think they were afraid themselves?
- Smith: Probably was because they watch each other so much. You got three of them out there, and they're afraid to talk because one of them will go tell on them. It was tattletale all the time. I never seen anything like it.
- DePue: On one side of this spectrum you have progressives. What's on the other side?
- Smith: Well, you had the reactionaries, and then you had people that were just there. I don't know how they got along. I don't know. They never did do anything.

When they'd follow us out, they would fall out. They didn't know what was going on around them, I don't think. I don't know.

DePue: Just folks who were just trying to survive?

Smith: Trying to survive as best they could.

DePue: Well, let's talk about the reactionaries, then.

Smith: Well, I really didn't know I was a reactionary. (laughs)

DePue: Whose term was that? Was that the—

Smith: That was some of the Chinese, I think, that billed us that way because they couldn't explain it to where we could understand it, let me put it that way.

DePue: Understand communism?

Smith: Communism, yeah.

DePue: So if you didn't understand it and accept it, you were a reactionary?

Smith: You needed more schooling on it so you would understand it. And what was there to understand? I knew my way of living was a lot better than theirs, and no matter how much they talked or how many lectures I had to attend, they never convinced me that their situation was better than mine. It just wasn't, you know.

DePue: Were the reactionaries then the people who were more vocal?

Smith: Most of us stood up and told them what we thought, and we paid the price for it, too.

DePue: Well, I don't want to be coy about this at all. You were clearly identified as a reactionary, and we'll get to that pretty quickly. Were you proud of having that title?

Smith: Not really. What other title would there have been, you know? It didn't dawn on me. I knew what I had been taught growing up, and I knew that communism was against capitalism, and their way of life was nothing like our way of life, because I had seen both sides, and they could never convince me that theirs was better.

DePue: Was there a point in time or a conscious decision on your part, I'm going to do everything I can to resist this, or was it more just a matter of survival and then reacting to them?

Smith: I guess that's the way it was, reacting to what happened to you, and particularly when they'd come around and get you at night and take you up to

headquarters and lecture you for two hours, and you'd just sit there and listen, and then they'd walk around you with a pistol and snap it, and that was mental torture. But I never gave in to them because they couldn't change my mind, and still haven't.

DePue: A couple specifics here in terms of ways that you guys did resist or cope, perhaps. You mentioned having religious services.

Smith: Um-hm. We used to go around to the huts. It'd be the five or eight of us—that's about all you could get in a hut other than the guys that were already there. We had one guy named Tracy, I never will forget. He was kind of a lay minister, and he—

DePue: That was his last name?

Smith: I guess it was because we called him Tracy. We didn't know anything but Tracy. But he was more educated about the Bible than any of the other guys were. I was pretty well educated on the Bible; I knew quite a bit of it. But he was more or less the leader, and we would go to one hut over here and have a prayer session, and then we'd send somebody out reconnaissance, see where the Chinese were and so forth, and then we'd go to another place. That's the way we did.

DePue: In other words, you were not supposed to be having religious service.

Smith: No, no, we were not, but I heard before the war was over that they let them put a cross up on the hill there at Camp Five. That's what I heard. I never did see it, but I heard it was there. They were—

DePue: After you had left Camp Five?

Smith: Um-hm, and they were having religious services, too.

DePue: Well, then that would have been closer to the time you were repatriated.

Smith: Right, right.

DePue: I got a note here about the bell, and I don't remember the specifics of that story. Does that ring....?

Smith: Yeah, they had about a six- or seven-foot big pipe, and they put it up on a tripod, like, and they'd come down and beat that thing. You could hear it for a long ways.

DePue: The Chinese did.

Smith: The Chinese did. And somebody took it one night and threw it in the river, (laughs) threw it in the water. They never did find it. And of course they never

did find out who took it, either. I never did hear about it, but I know we got rid of it, because it was right outside of our hut, and when they'd ring that thing, it would ring in your ears like you wouldn't believe.

DePue: You mentioned a couple names of people who you certainly identified as collaborators. Any specific incidents in terms of what they were doing that really caused problems?

Smith: Well, Batchelor would walk around trying to talk to the other guys, and I would tell him—he's the one that had the Marx and Engels book under his arm—and I would say, "Batchelor, you know better than that. You know better than that. Why are you doing this?" He said, "No, this is"—he was convinced that he was right. And every time I passed by him, I said, "Boy, if you live to get back to the States, somebody will take you out of the picture," but he kept it up.

DePue: Did he tell the captors about you saying that, making threats to him?

Smith: Yeah, I guess he did, him and Dickerson both.

DePue: What happened in that case?

Smith: Well, I stole some stuff one time. Some guys wanted to escape, and I was on hard labor up at the sick compound—now, this was the sick compound that was at Camp Five, not the temple. I stole some food and gave it to five guys that was trying to escape. And the night they picked to escape, the moon was shining bright. My goodness, you could see them. We saw them take off and go through the sergeants' compound. You couldn't have picked a worse time. And then they got caught and somebody told them that I had stolen the food, had given them the food, because they got caught with it, he asked where he had got it, got it from W.W. So they came and got me. I said, "I don't know nothing about it." I denied it right down to the end. (shudders) They just....

DePue: How do you steal food?

Smith: Well, the Chinese kitchen was right there next to our kitchen at the sick compound, and they used our kitchen partly to cook the Chinese food, and we would steal eggs from them because it was right there close. They brought all that stuff in there one time from the barges, and we just stole what we could. I never did steal too much; I just stole enough to where they wouldn't miss it.

DePue: If you guys hadn't stolen even a little bit of food, would that have made the difference between life and death?

Smith: In some cases it would have. I used to take food at night down to a guy named Joe Adams, who is dead now, and he was on what they call the sanitary committee, keeping the place clean, and he knew all the guys that were about to die. And me and Joe Ascue would steal stuff and give it to Joe Adams, and

he would take it and give it to the sick guys down in Camp Five. We did a lot of that.

DePue: It almost sounds like in the Chinese mind, if you go to the sick camp, they had no intention that anybody would ever come out of it.

Smith: Exactly, because we stacked them up like cordwood. When they died, we couldn't bury them; we stacked them up behind the hut.

DePue: Well, that first winter that you guys were in the valley—winter of '50-'51—that was especially brutal. I know that close to half or maybe more than half of the prisoners died that winter.

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: It sounds like you continued to have lots of death and disease in the camp.

Smith: We did. We did quite a bit, because we moved there up in January, we moved up to Pyoktong, and we got bombed out, and then we had to go back to the valley, and that's when I went to the lower valley and stayed there until, oh, goodness, pretty much stayed there till spring.

DePue: Of '51?

Smith: No, no, we didn't stay there too long, until the twentieth of January. The twentieth stands in my mind as when we went back to Pyoktong after getting bombed out. As well as I can remember that's before we were segregated, too.

DePue: Okay, so this would have been early again—

Smith: Early, yeah, real early. Early in '51.

DePue: I've got some other things here I just want to ask you, and hopefully this triggers a memory for you. A comment here about protecting Sam.

Smith: (pause) Yeah. We had this kid named Rittenauer, which is Sam in the book. He was from Virginia, up near Washington, somewhere around Fort Belvoir. And he wasn't too sharp, but he always ran to me for protection from the other guys because they would kind of beat him up and kick him around. And he really didn't know much about what was going on, and he would always run to me for protection, and I always told him when the Chinese come around and bothered him, I'd say, Rittenauer, just be quiet and don't say anything, and do what they tell you to do, and you'll be okay. And I don't know why he attached himself to me, but I had a few of them like that.

When I was at Walter Reed, he came there, and he looked me up. He used to come and sit by my bed. I had hepatitis, jaundiced, you know, yellow. He would come every day and sit by my bed and just talk, ask me a few

things. Then he told me he was going to get married when he went home. I said, “Do you love the little girl?” He said, “Yeah, we’re going to get married,” and I guess he went home and married her. I don’t know whatever happened to him. But later on I did meet his brother. I believe Everett was his name, Everett Rittenauer. And later on I met his brother’s wife, and he [Sam] was in a nursing home in South Carolina—Columbia, South Carolina—and we went down to see him. And we all went out to dinner with his sister-in-law, because she had his power of attorney and she was getting his checks and everything, and nothing to do, but he paid for lunch for us. And one of the boys that we was with came up from Florida and met us there and that was the last time I ever saw him. He died right after that.

DePue: Bob Cavanaro.

Smith: Yeah. Excuse me a minute. What? Oh, yeah. Rittenauer got caught one time drinking ink. Somebody told him it was good to get a high on it, and they stole a bottle of ink from the Chinese, and he drank it, and it got everywhere. It was coming down here. It was all over. And he come to me and asked me if I wanted some. (laughs) I said, “No, God knows, Rittenauer,” I said, “you’re going to die. This stuff will kill you,” and I made him drink water and try to vomit it up. He would do things that people would tell him to do. He didn’t know any better. He was in a fog of his own. And he drank that ink, God knows. It didn’t kill him, though.

DePue: How about Bob Cavanaro?

Smith: Cavanaro, yeah. I met him I believe—he says the valley, but it was at Camp Five, because he was across the compound from me, and he was in the compound with Batchelor, Claude Batchelor, and a kid named Bradley. Bradley was Batchelor’s ammo bearer. Batchelor was a BAR man, same as me, and Bradley was his helper, and Bradley died, and right after Bradley died is when Batchelor just did an about-face and started listening to the lectures and the communist thing. That was at Camp Five. And where were we?

DePue: We were talking about Bob Cavanaro.

Smith: Oh yeah. (laughs) I had a steel helmet full of water, and I was washing my feet, because, oh God, they were crusted—we hadn’t had a bath in ages. And I was washing my feet, and this kid kept walking around me, and he’d got glasses—he’d broke his glasses and then got glasses off of a dead guy and he’d wired them together across his nose there, and he kind of looked at me after walking around. So I asked him, “What do you want?” He says, “I want that water when you get through with it,” and I just looked up and said, “Get your own damn water,” because—he’s one of my best buddies now, but at that time, you didn’t know if they’d take it away from you, because he might have had five guys that were waiting to jump me and get my water. And so that’s why I jumped at him first to get out of the way and leave me alone. But

that was one of the times, and that was when I knew Bob Cavanaro. But I knew when we were having lectures, he was always one to speak up. Now, he could bring things up that I had never heard about. Evidently they were right, because the Chinese didn't like it at all.

DePue: So he wasn't bringing up stuff as a collaborator; he—

Smith: Oh, no, he was just the opposite. (laughs) And I ended up in the camp with him, the reactionary camp with him. But—

DePue: Do you remember some of the things he brought up?

Smith: He brought up about Chiang Kai-shek and them running him out of Hainan Island over to Formosa at that time, and he says, "But you don't understand the American way of living. You have one ruler, which is Mao Zedong, and you believe everything that he says, but you don't believe his wife." He would bring things up like that. Cavanaro was something else, especially when they had the peace talks. He would say, "They're not talking about peace. Nobody wants peace." He said, "You don't want peace; otherwise you'd turn us loose." And boy, they would go ape. But yeah, he was kind of a radical— (laughs) a good one though, you know. (DePue laughs) He was good. Oh, God.

DePue: Tell me about the pig. You got a pig that you got to serve up as a meal.

Smith: Yeah, we stole a pig one time. This was out at Camp Two, Company Three.

DePue: Okay, so that would have been later, but go ahead.

Smith: Been later, yeah. That pig strayed in there from somewhere, because Camp Two, Company Three there, we were out from the officers' compound, and we were right next to a Korean school, a schoolhouse where all the little Koreans were there, and somehow or other they was chasing that pig, or maybe two or three of them, and that pig came through our barbed-wire fence, you know. (laughs) And, of course, he was dead when he hit that fence, (laughter) he just didn't know it. And they wrapped him up in a field jacket and held his.... And we took him back in the back right there and killed that pig. Yep, and we cooked him, too. Boy, oh boy. They went around there, and they never did find him. But evidently they had more, because they were having a problem with keeping them together. But oh, my.

DePue: Did that feel like a feast at that point?

Smith: Yeah, it was. It really was. It was really a feast. It was better than the dog we had back in the valley.

DePue: What part of the pig did you guys not eat?

Smith: Everything but the squeal. I think—

DePue: Intestines, stomach?

Smith: Everything. We cleaned those things out and eat everything. We turned the guts inside out—you know how you scrape them—and boiled them and chopped them up. Yeah, we ate everything—except the hair. We didn't eat the hair.

DePue: Now, I'm trying to recall that it was hard to get the skin off of this pig.

Smith: That was a different pig. That was one that the Chinese brought into Camp Five for their first of May holiday. You know, that was the beginning of the communist movement, I think, with Mao Zedong. May Day. That was their big celebration, and we was going to have pork, and they brought that pig in there, and this British guy was in charge of the detail of cleaning up the pig and getting him ready to cook. And I told old Murphy, which was a British guy there, I said, "Murphy," I says, "you're leaving him in the water too long." I says, "Hell, he's cooking." And he—"No, no, no, no, no. You blokes don't know," you know. I said, "Bull." So when we pulled the pig out, we couldn't get the hair off of him because he let the hair set. You know, he'd put him in there too long. And I told him, I says, "I told you, you damn limey, that if (laughs) he was in that water too long, scalded water," and I said, "You've cooked the hair on him." And we had to shave the pig. You couldn't pull the hair out, so we had to shave it. And the chink comes around and looked and wanted to know what happened, and I told him, I says, "Well, nature did it." Well, he felt everybody out looking for nature, you know. I mean, it's just one of those things that happened. I don't know. But they wouldn't listen to you long enough for you to give them a good explanation for anything. You know, it was always their way, the communist way, which was to them the right way. And I'd just shake my head. Like talking to the wall—you can't convince them of anything.

DePue: I think this might be a good place for us to take a break, get some lunch, and then come back. We still have quite a bit more to talk about. When we get back, I want to ask you about being court-martialed—that seems very peculiar—and getting transferred to the reactionary camp, and then you're released. So I look forward to that. Thank you, William.

Smith: All righty.

(end of interview #3 #4 continues)

## Interview with William Smith

# VRK-A-L-2010-008.04

Interview # 4: March 4, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, March fourth. This is my second session today with William Smith. Good afternoon, Bill.

Smith: How are you, sir?

DePue: Great. Thank you for lunch. That was wonderful. We spent this morning talking a lot about your experiences in the first couple years as a prisoner of war, and especially I was focusing on the lectures, what some have called the brainwashing, all of the controversy about the collaborators, the progressives and the reactionaries. It's been obvious in talking to you about your experiences—and you've already said you're a reactionary; I know that's the case—you were not one of the most cooperative prisoners there. And what I wanted to go into next—I believe you were court-martialed three times, is that right?

Smith: Yes, sir.

DePue: And was it the third court-martial that sent you to the reactionary camp?

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Okay. I wonder if you could tell us about the first two experiences—what the reasons were and what that process was like.

Smith: The first time that I was caught (clears throat)—excuse me—stealing shingles off the guards' hut to build a fire.

- DePue: Okay, and I think we talked about that.
- Smith: We talked about that, and they put me on the ice. And the second time one of the reporters were there, Richard [*sic*] Burchett, a French reporter, was there, and I got blamed for stealing his shoes.
- DePue: Okay; you told us that story this morning.
- Smith: Yeah, and they sentenced me then to nine months hard labor.
- DePue: Did you actually go through a court-martial proceeding?
- Smith: Oh, yes. It was a kangaroo court, like. You had five officers over here, two guards, and—
- DePue: These are all communist.
- Smith: All communist. Everyone communist, yes. And I don't think the guards really knew what was going on, actually, because it was in English. He asked me why wasn't I doing better with the men in my squad and wanted to know what was I doing causing them trouble, and I didn't think I was causing them trouble. And the things that they would ask—"Well, why aren't you happy? You don't smile."—well, isn't nothing to smile about. So it was just one of those things, and then when he says, "Well, you're going back for hard labor," I says, "That's all right with me. You know, it don't make any difference."
- DePue: Did you have a chance to present your side of the case?
- Smith: No. I didn't say nothing. Well, you couldn't explain anything to those people. They wouldn't give you time to explain anything. And so I just hushed; I wouldn't talk to them.
- DePue: Well, this is a ludicrous question, I'm sure, but I have to ask you. Did you have representation yourself, as if you would in a real court-martial proceeding?
- Smith: No, just me. Just me. I didn't have any sidekicks or anybody to vouch for me on anything.
- DePue: Did they take the attitude in something like stealing this gentleman's shoes, which they were blaming you for, that they looked upon that as a crime?
- Smith: As a crime, and I was guilty of it. Not only that, for I was talking about him and I kind of decorated it up a little bit, if you know what I mean, and they didn't appreciate that, but I was telling them what I thought of him, which wasn't too favorable at that point in time.

- DePue: What did they consider you and the rest of the prisoners? Did they consider you to be prisoners of war?
- Smith: They said that we were their students and that we had been misled by the Wall Street warmongers and been duped into fighting for the Korean people and destroyed their country.
- DePue: Well, does that mean that you were something lower than a prisoner of war or different from a prisoner of war?
- Smith: I guess because we didn't see eye to eye—well, we didn't agree with anything except it was cold. I didn't agree with them on anything that they came up with. They would talk about Malik and his peace proposal later on when they started that and what I thought about that, and I told them it was all a bunch of...as far as I was concerned; because I wasn't there, I was not a witness to what was going on. To make a comment on it, you'd have to know what was going on, and they wasn't given me any information, and so therefore I couldn't make a decision.
- DePue: Did they consider you guys to be political prisoners more than prisoners of war?
- Smith: In some sense of the word, I guess they did, because they were always bringing politics into it, and they would always talk about the warmongers of Wall Street more than they would Truman and his lackeys.
- DePue: Lackeys.
- Smith: His lackeys, yeah. And I'd say, "Well, that's his business. That's none of my business."
- DePue: What was your punishment the second time, again?
- Smith: The second time, I was put in the hole. That's a hole in the ground, and it had a piece of tin that they pulled over you.
- DePue: Yeah, we talked about that punishment last time when we were together, so that was what precipitated that.
- Smith: Exactly. I was supposed to have done something to embarrass one of their comrades—and I told you we were supposed to call them comrades I say, "Well, that's the day 'comrade' became a dirty word as far as I was concerned," and they didn't like that. I was blamed for so many things—things that I didn't even know about and things I didn't do.
- DePue: One of the other things I wanted to talk to you about—I know you spent some time in the temple, which you explained to be the place where the prisoners were getting medical treatment, but it was separated from the rest of the camp.

Smith: Yes, it was in the upper part of town altogether. It was a Buddhist temple that they had turned into a hospital. And when I was sentenced, I had to go up and take care of the sick, and fact is, I was doing their cooking for them.

DePue: Was that hard punishment, was going up to the temple?

Smith: Yeah, going to the temple because I had to work seven days a week, twenty-four/seven. But it didn't make any difference for me, it made it easier for me because I'd rather be busy than listening to their lectures down there, you know.

DePue: After that, you didn't have to listen to lectures?

Smith: No, no, when I was up at the temple, I didn't listen to lectures because it was only three of us there. It was a Sergeant Black, a British named Evans—Bob Evans, Robert Evans—and me and Little Smith. There was four of us, and all of us was there for different reasons. Except I think—I won't say it, though—I think the British was there to spy on us.

DePue: You weren't sure, then?

Smith: Wasn't sure, because he never did any work. He was always with the Chinese; however, he didn't have much to do with us. He reported to them.

DePue: In the book you described this as hard labor.

Smith: That's what they said, it was hard labor, but for me, it was easy because I was taking care of the sick no matter where I went. When I ran into a guy that was sick, if there was anything I could do for him, I'd do it. I washed his rear end, washed his face, cleaned his clothes. I'd take his clothes down to the river and wash them for him and bring them back—anything I could do that I thought he needed and I was able to do it. Now, I'm not trying to make a martyr out of me, don't get me wrong, but when you see a guy that's sick and just basically dying, you do what you can for him. You know, you do everything in the world for him that you can.

DePue: Did the prisoners who were in the temple have decent food there, better food than the rest of the camp?

Smith: They had a little bit better food than they did down in the camp, because up at the temple we had potato soup, and then we had the bok choy, Chinese cabbage, with just water, boiled.

DePue: Did that mean you got to eat a little bit better as well?

Smith: I got to eat a little bit better because I was up there with them. The food wasn't that much better, but it was different than the cracked corn and millet that was down in the camp.

- DePue: Did you sleep up in the temple area as well?
- Smith: Yes. Me and Little Smith, the little kid from Louisiana, and this Sergeant Black was in one room, and I don't know where this British kid slept. I never did know.
- DePue: You mentioned in the lower camp, the main camp in Camp Five, they also had a hospital of sorts.
- Smith: Yeah, they had a sick compound.
- DePue: So what was the difference between that and where you were at in the temple?
- Smith: The temple, you could come in and there was one big bed all the way across here, a walkway of about four feet, and it was one bed all the way around. It was about two and a half to three feet off the floor, and that's where they—
- DePue: But what was different about the patients between the two?
- Smith: There was not a great deal. The ones up at the hospital sometimes were sicker than the ones that were down there, but they were all dying of malnutrition because they wasn't getting enough to eat. The sick compound down there, they didn't have room—let's see—you only had three little huts for the sick, and up at the Buddhist temple, they had more room. They had a lot more room. And they had a small hut over here and a hut over here where we did the cooking, and we stayed right there in that room above the kitchen, or right at the kitchen, really.
- DePue: When prisoners were sent up to the temple, was that just a matter of time before they died, or did some of them go back?
- Smith: Most of the time, but see, when they—I don't know if I explained to you about the chicken livers.
- DePue: No.
- Smith: Okay. They had a system that they had gotten from Russia that they had been using for five thousand years in China. They would take a chicken and kill it. They would take that chicken liver and mash it, make a pâté out of it, dip it in penicillin, then they'd cut your side this way and this way and—
- DePue: A big X right in there?
- Smith: Yeah, they put that chicken liver in there, and they'd sew it back up. And the thing behind this was that that chicken liver was supposed to drain all of the poison from your body into that, and then it was supposed to dissipate. But we lost so many men that they quit using it. Obroff's still living, isn't he? Obroff

and a kid named McMillan from Pennsylvania They're still living. Now, they had chicken livers put in.

DePue: Who was performing these operations?

Smith: The Chinese were. And one of my jobs was—me and Little Smith—this was another Smith, Clifford—we had to take them down on stretchers to a schoolhouse where they had an operating room set up. They had a big, long table in there with a white cloth on it, and we took the guys down there if they needed to be operated on and laid them on the table. We waited outside for them, and then when they finished with them, we took them back to the temple.

DePue: Tell me what you think about the physicians, the Chinese doctors. Do you think they were actually trying to save these people?

Smith: I think they were trying, they were doing the best they could, but they didn't have anything much to work with. They had very little medicine at all. In the wintertime I think one time they put out coal tablets, they called them, which was charcoal tablets, made out of charcoal, and other than that, that was all I ever saw. I didn't ever see anything else.

DePue: Did they have any anesthesia or any painkillers they were able to use?

Smith: Not to my knowledge. I never did see any if they did have. I'm sure they might have had some, because the guys wouldn't have hollered as loud if they had—I don't think they would have. Because we could hear them hollering outside, and we were waiting right outside for them.

DePue: So during the operation, they were screaming?

Smith: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, they hollered like hell. That's why I know that if they had anesthesia, they didn't have much, because otherwise they wouldn't be hollering.

DePue: You mentioned Dr. Shaddish. Tell me about Dr. Shaddish.

Smith: Yeah, he was an American doctor, and he was telling us about the lice, how much blood they could drink in so many days and so forth and so on. And he and there was a British doctor—and I don't remember his name—but they kept them together up there at the sick compound at Camp Five.

DePue: Not the temple.

Smith: Not the temple, no. He was the one who pulled my tooth. And then he was trying to explain to me why Joe hurt so bad and I didn't hurt quite as bad was because he said sometimes the tooth will clamp itself around the jawbone like that, and it makes it harder to pull. He was trying to explain that to me.

- DePue: Do you know what happened to Dr. Shaddish?
- Smith: He came back to the States. He came to one convention in Louisville, Kentucky. He told me about the tooth growing around the jawbone. I was asking him about the teeth, and that's when he was trying to explain to me that sometimes they grew crooked, you know. But that's the only time I ever saw him.
- DePue: Since he had a specific, important job to do in the camp, was he also exempted from going to the lectures?
- Smith: As far as I know..
- DePue: Okay. A couple other props here for you, and see what memories that brings back. Turkish parasite.
- Smith: (long pause) Oh, yeah. We had one Turk there at sick compound in Camp Five, he had a tapeworm—116 feet long. (laughs) I know it sounds impossible, but we measured it with a crutch.
- DePue: Holy cow.
- Smith: But it was 116 feet long, because he'd walk around there; he looked like he was pregnant. And then when he passed that tapeworm, (laughs) he looked like a beanpole.
- DePue: He passed it through the—
- Smith: He passed it. He passed it, yes.
- DePue: Whoa.
- Smith: Yes, sir. And it was big as a—we had a pan, and he'd fill that pan up. We had a pan like a wash pan that you wash your hands in, and that worm looked like spaghetti. The head was about sixteen feet long—flat, you know—and then the round worm. That was a bitch. (shudders)
- DePue: I can't imagine he'd eat enough food just to keep the parasite alive.
- Smith: Yeah. He was eating all the time or trying to. When they brought him to us, he was pretty sick, but he couldn't digest food, for one thing—I guess it was too full. When they'd give him something to eat, give him some potato soup, it'd just come right back.
- DePue: I know you—
- Smith: Because I had to feed him.
- DePue: Spoon-feed him?

- Smith: Yeah. Had to open his mouth like that and pull his mouth open and then shove it down, and then a few minutes later, everything come back.
- DePue: You had Chinese doctors. Did you have any nurses?
- Smith: We had two South Koreans, in the South Korean army, but they were nurses.
- DePue: Female nurses.
- Smith: Females, yeah, because we would see them out there. They had to boil those bandages—they reused all the bandages, and they would boil the water and steam the water and then wash the bandages in that and reuse them because they didn't have enough bandages.
- DePue: Well, I hate to ask you, but a prisoner of war camp, you've got now these South Korean women nurses who are in the camp. Men being men, the situations that you had—I think you know what I'm getting at.
- Smith: Yeah, one of them was pretty as a doll. God knows she was pretty. Had pigtails down along here. And of course she had that face, you know what I mean. But she was cute as a button. And they used to come down to the kitchen where I was, boiling water, and they would come down and get water to take out and put it in the steamer there to wash the bandages with. They were not really nurses, I don't think, but they took care of the sick and did the washing of the clothes and the bandages and so forth. That was all I saw.
- DePue: Did some of the guards take advantage of those girls, you think?
- Smith: We had one guy that was a mule skinner that (laughs) I think he made a pass at one of them, and they threw him in the room with us.
- DePue: Was this a communist?
- Smith: This was a Chinese man, yeah. He was what they called a mule skinner. He run the mules in the two-wheel carts. And he made a pass at one of those girls, and evidently they told on him because they beat him and then they threw him in the room with us, with me and Little Smith. And I asked him what was going on, and he'd just shake his head. "No good, no good, no good. Shim pan ai, shim pan ai. [Don't worry about it.]. It took me a while to figure out what had happened, because he had said the girl told them, boo hau [no good]. Well, I can't put it in English.
- DePue: Did you occasionally see when you were in Camp Five American or U.N. aircraft flying overhead?
- Smith: Occasionally, yes. They would come up north and fight the Russians, and when they would fly back over the camp, they would tip their wings.

- DePue: So this is right on the border with China.
- Smith: It was right on the border with China, yeah.
- DePue: Was this what they considered to be MIG Alley?
- Smith: I guess it was, because the Russians would just come down so far, and our men had to go up that far to fight them.
- DePue: Were you guys—
- Smith: We'd see a lot of dogfights. Boy, they was shooting like hell. Them damn red tracers always followed them, and once in a while we'd see a guy get shot down. And then later on, when I was up at the temple, I talked to a couple of fliers who had got shot down. One of them—
- DePue: They passed through the temple for—
- Smith: They would come through the temple, and we had to feed them. We had to cook for them, and that's why I know they were fliers. They still had their gear on. Fact is, we saw one shot down on a Sunday evening, and about Tuesday or Wednesday, he came through the temple up there. And I says, "Did you get hit on Sunday?" and he just shook his head, and I said, "We saw you." We saw him bail out, we saw the parachute.
- DePue: Any idea what happened to them?
- Smith: As far as I know, they would stay there and then were moved to the officers' camp, as far as I know. That's where they were supposed to move them. Now, whether they did or not, I don't know.
- DePue: Well, there's rumors. I'm sure you've heard after the war a lot of those pilots were taken to Russia. Do you know anything about that?
- Smith: I've heard that some of them were taken, and then I also heard that they took five hundred of our American boys to Russia.
- DePue: Were those rumors that were going around the camps while you were there?
- Smith: That was something that was going around the camp. You wonder how they knew, but we had Chinese coming through there all the time. You know, they were coming through the camp, and particularly in the wintertime. They moved those armies on the ice with their oxen and their cleated feet. First time I'd ever seen an ox with a shoe on that had a steel bottom, the hoof, and it had steel there, and then they had cleats on that where they'd stand on the ice. Kind of neat.

- DePue: I want to go back to watching the dogfights. What were the emotions of the people in the camp who were watching it?
- Smith: Oh, we were exhilarated. I mean, we were out there shouting. We were having a good time. (laughs) Only when they dropped the tanks—when they dropped the tanks, boy, everybody scattered because, see, the Chinese thought they were bombing them. Of course, we see the tanks turning end over end the way they do.
- DePue: These are the fuel tanks.
- Smith: Yeah, and I just left them laughing, you know, let them go, because I knew what it was, but the Chinese didn't know.
- DePue: Did the Chinese get mad at you for whooping and hollering?
- Smith: Yeah, they would get mad, and they'd run all around the headquarters getting the suckers, you know, and hell, we just standing out there watching them. They didn't bother me. I was glad to see them.
- DePue: Did they ever strafe the camp?
- Smith: No. Only the first time, when we had left the valley and went up to what became Camp Five the first time. They strafed and they hit an ammo dump out there at Pyoktong, and when they hit that ammo dump, hell, everything started blowing up. We took off and ran across the road and up the side of the mountain, and some of the guys we'd been hauling for five and six and seven days on stretchers, when the planes came over, hell, they jumped up and started running. I could have killed them. We'd been lugging them on stretchers for four or five days, and then when the planes come over and hit that ammo dump over there, hell, they were the first ones up the side of the mountain. They beat me up there. I could have killed every one of them.
- DePue: A couple other stories. I think this is a connection when you were working up in the temple area: digging a pit, a very deep, large pit.
- Smith: We dug a pit one time that you could put a tractor-trailer in, and they were bringing in supplies from China, mostly Chinese cabbage, bok choy or whatever it's called.
- DePue: Why such a deep pit for that?
- Smith: Well, in the wintertime, see, it would freeze. It was deep enough where it wouldn't freeze.
- DePue: And that was something that you were doing while you were up in the temple area?

Smith: Yeah. Of course, they helped us. Now, they helped us dig it because they were in a hurry getting it done. Everybody worked.

DePue: But as far as you're concerned, apparently, that was better than listening to the lectures, huh?

Smith: That was much better than the lectures.

DePue: Does the name Vince ring any bells to you?

Smith: Vince was my buddy. He's dead now. Vince Simonetti. And then there was another guy there named Vince. I didn't know him hardly at all. I knew him, but I didn't know him like I knew Vince Simonetti.

DePue: What was the nature of the rapport you had with Vince Simonetti?

Smith: Well, I was in the valley with him to begin with. He was in the room in the hut next to me. I was in a room in the valley that had a little cubbyhole in back and that's where I was put. But you had to come through the big room to get into the little room. Vince was in the big room, and I was in the little room. And later on, when we went to Camp Five, I was put into a squad that was right next to Vince's, and we got to talking about this, that, and the other. And Vince was always having migraines, and when they pulled me out of Camp Five, he was sitting on a rock wall holding his head, and when the two guards came and got me, I walked by him, and I said, "Vince, don't let them SOBs get the best of you," and that was the last time I had seen him until—when did we see Vince?—1972 is the next time I saw him from sitting on that wall, rubbing his head.

DePue: It had to be pretty special when you run into these guys after a lifetime.

Smith: Run into him. Somebody came in and says, "Vince Simonetti is out in the hall there." I said, "No, Vince is dead," because I didn't think he'd last three days. And they went out and told Vince that W.W. (laughs) is in the next room, and he didn't believe them either. Finally about midnight they convinced us to go out and see him, and it was Vince. And after the get-together there with him and his family, about seven o'clock in the morning the phone rang and says, "Come on, now, let's go down and eat breakfast." That was the first time we'd gone down with them, I believe, wasn't it? We was up the better half of the night. And we went down and had breakfast with them, and we stayed pretty much in contact until he passed away about five years ago, didn't he? Five? Twelve years ago? Has it been that long? We were in Hawaii, and my daughter called and said that his wife had called. He'd had a heart attack and died. I hated that, because he was a good old boy. He was one of those that just sit there and never did anything don't you know.

DePue: Kept quiet.

- Smith: Yeah, kept quiet.
- DePue: Well, from what you've explained, though, you had great disrespect for the guys who were labeled the progressives, but you didn't have a problem with the guys who were just kind of trying to survive.
- Smith: They were trying to survive. They were doing what they thought they could do, and they'd get by with it. I had no qualms with him whatsoever. I wished them luck, you know, if they could get by without getting beat or anything. I would have had it easier, I imagine, if I'd have kept my mouth shut. I just couldn't take some of that crap they was handing out. I couldn't handle it.
- DePue: Well, that gets us to the point about the third time you were court-martialed.
- Smith: That's when I was sentenced to life.
- DePue: What precipitated—
- Smith: What difference did it make? (laughs) What difference does it make, I mean, you know, whether it's life, nine months, two months? It doesn't make any difference. You're still there; you're still their prisoner, you know.
- DePue: I got to tell you it's beyond my comprehension—you're a prisoner of war, and they're court-martialing you, and then they're sentencing you to life in prison—life at hard labor.
- Smith: Yeah, never to go back home.
- DePue: What precipitated that sentence?
- Smith: The last time, I—I couldn't put it all together to save my life. What did I—did I tell you what they got me for the last time? I remember being at Camp Five and them coming and getting me.
- DePue: We should mention here that Bill, quite frequently you're looking to Charlotte to answer some of these questions because she's the one who put together the book for you.
- Smith: She put together the book, right.
- DePue: So we're going to have a chance to interview her in a future time here. But anyway, shortly after you got that life sentence at hard labor, was that about the time you were moved?
- Smith: Oh, that's when I escaped the last time. That was when they caught me, yeah.
- DePue: Well, you got to start with the beginning of that story, then, Bill.
- Smith: I didn't tell you about that?

DePue: I don't think you have yet.

Smith: Shall I tell you now?

DePue: Yeah.

Smith: Some of the guys saw some logs coming in from China, and, like I said, we were on a peninsula there, and logs were coming uptown. They were tied together, and they were bringing them uptown.

DePue: You mean just drifting down the river?

Smith: Well, they was bringing them in a tugboat up to town, the Chinese were—or North Koreans, I don't know which ones were doing it. And I told one of my buddies, I said, "Boy, if we get ahold of those logs, we could take off at night, and we could maybe get out of here." And so we got two guys to go up—in fact, there's one of them still living—go up and cut the logs loose, and when they brought the logs back, we got them and started down the river on them. And I was holding the log around my legs like that and like this, and we were going down the river—

DePue: With your hands on top of the log?

Smith: With hands on top of the log like this. Log was like this, you know.

DePue: Were you behind the log, then?

Smith: I was behind the log, yeah, and it was in front. And my log evidently hit another log, because it hit me right in the mouth, and it broke my teeth right across there. Broke my teeth out. I spit them out in the water and was so numb it just floored me. And not knowing we were going down the river—we were making pretty good time—and then the long bend around there was a lock and dam that we didn't know anything about. And, of course, we couldn't get by it and then that's where we got caught the second time. They took me in and threw me in the mud hut there, threw me in the room there, and then the next day they took me out, and that's when they court-martialed me for the third time and said that I was not a good student, I did not obey their orders and I didn't take advantage of their lenient policy towards prisoners of war. And of course I just sit there and listened to them. I didn't argue with them, I didn't try anything and that's when they says, "W.W. Smith, you will never go home. We will take care of you. You are sentenced lifetime—**lifetime!**" He hollered, you know, like I couldn't hear him. And I said, "So what?" It didn't make a bit of difference to me: lifetime, thirty minutes, thirty months. I didn't care. (laughs) I mean, you're still their prisoner; they still got the guns. What are you going to do?

DePue: Bill, I got to go back to the motivation for doing this in the first place, and maybe it's a sign of just how desperate you all were. You're in a prison camp

along the Yalu River, what, 150, 200 miles north of the front lines, and your thought was to get to the open ocean and navigate your way down there on the open ocean on this log?

Smith: Yep.

DePue: Did you really think that you'd be able to do that?

Smith: I thought we would run into some of our men, our lines, you know.

DePue: Were you looking for maybe the Navy to pick you up someplace?

Smith: Well, not really. I was looking for more of a fisherman, you know, the Korean fishermen out in their little boats is what I had in mind. If we could get out that way, some of them would pick up or call our soldiers, which they would do if they spotted us; they could call our soldiers and they would come get us.

DePue: Did they get paid for doing that?

Smith: I think some of them were. Some of them were paid for that, and of course they dropped leaflets on them.

DePue: You mean the Americans would.

Smith: The Americans would drop leaflets on them, yeah.

DePue: Was that part of the scuttlebutt going around at the camp, that you could do that?

Smith: That was the scuttlebutt that was going around the camp, yeah. There was always rumors flying around everywhere, and you never knew where they came from.

DePue: About this time you're sentenced, you'd been there two years basically—maybe a little bit short of that. Did you think you were ever going to get out of this?

Smith: I really didn't think we were, but in the back of my mind, I said, well, maybe, if we live long enough, we might, but if you just give up, I knew we wouldn't. I don't know what all went through my mind, because, you're living from day to day, but you're always thinking about a way to get out. I never give up on (laughs) thinking about a way to get out. It always stayed with me.

DePue: What happened to you after that third sentence, the third court-martial?

Smith: That's when they put me on the hard labor and put me down in the camp, and I was there for about three days. They had built a new jail up on the hill and then they took me up there and put me in that. And I stayed up there for about

two weeks, and then they put us on a truck and moved us out to Camp Two, Company Three, the last camp I was in.

DePue: Who's "us"? When you say—

Smith: Well, it was me and Mendell, Caprin, Joe Adams, a guy by the name of Banks—a black guy by the name of Banks, Beasley, a black guy, Becker, A.J. Becker, from Waco, Texas.

DePue: What was different about you guys from the rest of the prisoners?

Smith: Well, I don't know. They collected us all up there. At one time or another we'd caused the Chinese problems or something. I never did know, actually, what we were being punished for. I told this Chinese that a prisoner of war is supposed to try to escape. I mean, that's what he's living for. And he agreed with me, that that's what we had been taught: name, rank, serial number, and—

DePue: That's part of the Geneva Convention.

Smith: It's part of the Geneva Convention, yeah. He said, "But you don't have the gun." I said, "No, I don't." (laughs)

DePue: Did you get officially labeled as a reactionary, then?

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: With all these people you mentioned?

Smith: With all those people I mentioned there, yeah. All of them were, the ones I named off, they went out to Camp Two with me—Camp Two, Company Three.

DePue: So that's pretty elite company you're with now.

Smith: Oh, yeah. Out of all of the prisoners that were taken in Korea, that was where the worst ones ended up, according to the FBI.

DePue: The worst ones?

Smith: The worst ones—the students that were (laughs) unruly or had caused trouble for their captors and so forth and so on.

DePue: Was it part of the Chinese rationale that if they took all of you reactionaries out of the camp, they'd have control?

Smith: They could control the other guys better. They would have a better chance of indoctrinating them into their system.

- DePue: Were you close enough to the other camp to get rumors, to get news passing back and forth between the camps?
- Smith: Not the last camp, no. We had no way of getting there. We had one North Korean barber that came in there with the clippers that cut hair, and that was the only outsider I ever saw. That was in '52 and '53, really, because I left Camp Five I believe it was the summer of '52—August of '52, I think, and when they put us up in Camp Two, Company Three, we never had any contact with anybody else.
- DePue: How was life different in that new camp?
- Smith: Well, we didn't have lectures, but we had to go out and work on the roads, pick rocks out of the roads, what roads there were, and go on a wood detail, and other than that, that was all we had. We didn't have any lectures or anything.
- DePue: When did that happen?
- Smith: We went there in August of '52 as well as I can remember. I may be wrong about the date, but somewhere along there, summer of '52.
- DePue: This is about a year and a half, a little bit more than that, into your time as a prisoner of war.
- Smith: Um-hm, yeah.
- DePue: Did you have any sense at the time what was going on at the front lines, or it was just all kind of a blur in that respect?
- Smith: Not really, because we had no communication with anybody. We couldn't even pick up rumors, you know. (laughs) It was just awful. But one time I got really sick and they thought I was having an appendicitis attack, and another kid there named Krobath from Pennsylvania, and they took us down to Pyoktong to the temple to see a doctor. And I stayed down there for just about a week, I believe it was, and they were giving me shots of adrenalin, and after about a week everything seemed to be okay, and so me and him was on a two-wheel cart going back to Camp Two, Company Three, and that's when I saw what I thought was the nurses.
- DePue: You mean the nuns?
- Smith: The nuns that were working in the field down there. We hollered at them, and they waved at us, fact is, and we saw that they were white, not Orientals. We were that close to them, not too far. Of course, the mule-skinner that was driving the cart there turned around and hit us with the whip, you know, that he had to hush up, because he couldn't understand what we were saying either. He couldn't understand anything.

DePue: It's probably hard to determine, but did it look like they were in the same desperate straits that you were?

Smith: No, I thought they were working in the field, in a garden, is what they looked like. They looked like they were working in a field.

DePue: So they were relatively well-fed and they looked okay?

Smith: They looked okay. They looked fine. They looked pretty strong, yeah.

DePue: Were the guards different at this reactionary camp?

Smith: Yeah, they were a little bit harder on you. They would holler at you more. We had heavier barbed wire around us up there than we did down at Camp Five. And then we would go out and put camouflage every other week or every ten days we'd go out and pull limbs and everything. The camp was kind of like this—

DePue: Rectangular shape, or...?

Smith: Well, like this, like kind of round like that, and then the front road was here, and here was the gate. And—can I show you? I made a dummy of it.

DePue: Yeah. I'm going to make sure that we pause for just a second and unhook your microphone before you do that.

Smith: Okay.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, we're back after a very brief break. Bill, you brought in what looks like a diorama of I guess this Camp Two, Company Three area that you're talking about, so why don't you go ahead and show us what we're looking at here.

Smith: That is the cage. That's the tiger cage.

DePue: We're going to have to get a picture of this that we can include in the collection as well.

Smith: And this is the huts like we stayed in. And you see here, the way they built that, this was open with the rocks in it that I was telling you about.

DePue: That's the ondol heating you were talking about.

Smith: Yeah. They would build a fire here, and the smoke would come out up here, and it would heat the center of the place.

DePue: And this right here is the gate?

- Smith: That was the gate, and then we'd put this around here because when the planes come over it, it would look like a Korean village or Korean farmhouse and so forth.
- DePue: So what you've got is broken branches that are used as camouflage here, then.
- Smith: Right, that was all camouflaged. You had to change it, because when it died, you have to put fresh out there.
- DePue: Well, that would mean you have to be marched out into the woods to do this.
- Smith: You had to go to the woods to get it, yeah.
- DePue: Were they giving you axes and saws and hatchets?
- Smith: Yeah, the guards had them, and we used them. Yep. Machetes, really.
- DePue: Did you guys get tempted to use them on the guards?
- Smith: Oh, yeah; oh, yeah; oh, yeah. You'd feel like cutting them down with them, but the other guys had the guns, and some of them were pretty good shots. I saw one hit a hundred—let's see, from here—God, I would say at least seventy-five yards. He hit a pig that was running with a rifle, and he dropped him. (laughs) They were good shots.
- DePue: You also brought in this—well, it looks like a cardboard box, but in the front of it it looks like you've got a grill in it.
- Smith: Yeah, that's the cage.
- DePue: Do I have it right, laying flat like this?
- Smith: You have it—well, it really should be this way.
- DePue: Okay, so that it swings—
- Smith: I think. No, let's see. This way, because the door would swing out.
- DePue: Swing to the left here.
- Smith: Yeah. And you'd stay in there until they got ready to... It was really a mystery to me because you never had a time limit to stay anywhere. You know, they didn't say three days here or a week over there; they'd just put you in there and forget about you until the time come—
- DePue: Go ahead.
- Smith: —the time come for them to take you out.

- DePue: But this is what was up at this new camp.
- Smith: At the new camp. They had one of these down at Camp Five, too, but it was kept away from the other prisoners because they had a prison within the prison at Camp Five up on the hill. That's kind of hard to explain, too, because we had guys up there that were in isolation, and for one reason or other, they were separated from the troops. A lot of us, they said that we had too much influence on the troops, and particularly the young men that were just being captured and brought in.
- DePue: Was it hard for the new ones who were just arriving to camp?
- Smith: Yeah, they couldn't believe it. One of them died. The fact is, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division came in there, a lot of them from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the winter of '51—'50—'51—and they was about half-dead when they brought them in there. And we had three in my squad there, and they didn't last a week.
- DePue: Those guys would have been coming in—a lot of them would have been running the gauntlet at Kunu Ri when they were captured, I would suspect.
- Smith: Probably, probably. I know there were a lot of them. They had the yin-yan head patches. That's why you was 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.
- DePue: From what I have read, there was about 115 of you prisoners who were labeled as reactionaries and taken to this new camp.
- Smith: Taken to the camp up there.
- DePue: Was there a group of Turks included in that?
- Smith: No, I never saw a Turk; I never saw a Frenchman. There were maybe five or six Englishmen, and the rest was Americans.
- DePue: Well, you'd mentioned earlier though the Turks seemed to have better cohesion, hold together better.
- Smith: They did. Down at Camp Five, they were segregated from us, and when one of the Turks did something wrong and was punished, all of the other ones went to his aid and—
- DePue: Took the punishment with him?
- Smith: —and they would take the punishment with him, yes, sir.
- DePue: Okay. Was it there that you were working as a cook, now?

Smith: Yeah, I worked there as a cook at the sick compound at Camp Five, and then up at the temple, which was the hospital at Camp Five, and I worked up there, too.

DePue: But not once you got to this new compound?

Smith: Once I got to the new compound out there, no. I was appointed to cook by the guys when we first started building this camp because everybody knew that I was a cook (laughs) and I could cook, and I cooked there a long time, at Camp Two, but you can only cook what they brought in.

DePue: Well, there was an interesting story you've got in the book about the time they brought in a horse.

Smith: Yeah, that was when we was at this camp, and they said we was going to have meat, and they said they—down the road down here. So, believe it or not, they gave us a sledgehammer—big, long sledgehammer. Let's see, me and Rowley. I think Rowley and I are the only ones, maybe a Puerto Rican kid, maybe living or not. But anyway, there was five or six of us, Wheeler(??), that went down to get the horse, went down to get the mule—no, the horse. And Wheeler, this kid we had from Indiana, (laughs) he went around to the front of him and he opened up his lips like that and said, "Smitty, come and look! Come and look," he says, "He's not even three years old yet." I mean, he was a horse trader, you know what I mean; he knew all about them. He said, "Look at those teeth." He said, "He's not even three years old." I said, "Wheeler, we're not buying the damn thing; we're going to eat him." Worms were coming out of every orifice. I walked around behind him, and the worms were awful—and that's why they were giving him to us. And I told the guys, I said, "If we take this horse and take him back," I says, "they'll have more worms in them than they've got now."

DePue: Are we talking about maggots or...?

Smith: Yeah, and really worms, really long worms. And Rowley, he kind of agreed with me, and then Wheeler agreed with me and wanted to leave the horse no matter how old he is. And they said, "No," says, "We'd better not. We'd better not eat that meat because it's too bad." And so we went back and told the Chinese that we passed on it, and then they called the ROKs, South Koreans, down, and buddy, they went down there and skinned that baby and brought him back. We saw them taking him back up on the post that evening, later that evening.

DePue: Now, you haven't mentioned the ROKs very much. Were they not in the same neighborhood for the camps as you guys were?

Smith: No, no, they were in different camps.

DePue: What's your guess in terms of how the ROKs fared versus you guys?

- Smith: You know, I think they fared pretty well, because I think they were used to not having food all the time. You know what I mean? They were scroungers. They were trying to survive just like everybody else. And even in the army, even in the ROK army, they weren't treated too good. Their officers didn't treat them too good. That's the impression I got.
- DePue: Did you have officers in this camp?
- Smith: No, no. We had one sergeant that they voted to come in there and help with the cooking after I quit, but we didn't have any officers at all.
- DePue: Well, speaking of that, did you trust that everyone who was in that new camp was who they claimed to be?
- Smith: Nope. No, because you never knew. You never really knew who you were talking to. That's including the British, even the two black guys—three black guys—Cook, Beasley, and Banks. They were the only black guys there.
- DePue: Over time, how were you able to determine who you could trust and who you couldn't trust?
- Smith: I could trust Mendell, the kid that was captured with me, because he'd been through a lot of the same stuff I had been, but all the rest of them, you were always skeptical—even Rowley, one of my best buddies that's living now, you have your doubts about them. You just really can't let yourself go. You just can't do it.
- DePue: Well, to a certain extent, then—
- Smith: Everybody's a suspect. (laughs)
- DePue: —the Chinese won in that regard, didn't they?
- Smith: Yeah, yeah. But you had to—how can I put it—you had to trust yourself because you may be the next one taken out. You know, you go out of camp at night, you never see them again, so you don't know what happened to them.
- DePue: That did happen, then?
- Smith: That did happen. Oh, yeah, that happened. That happened a lot down at Camp Five.
- DePue: Do you remember any specifics, maybe an incident and then somebody just kind of disappeared the next day?
- Smith: God, there was several of them disappeared, never did see them anymore. They brought in a kid there named Fox from East Orange, New Jersey, and he tried to escape, and I don't know, they brought him back and put him back in

our squad, and then that night, he died, so I don't know whatever—I don't know how—of course, I know if he had escaped, well, they beat him up pretty well, but he died that night when they brought him in there. There were so many of them they took out. They just disappeared. You never knew what happened to them.

DePue: No one would ask them questions about what happened?

Smith: No, no. Well, they knew better than to question the Chinese because they knew they wouldn't tell them anything. At least I knew better than to ask them about them.

DePue: One of the things that caught my attention was—I think this was also at Camp Two. In doctoring folks up, you guys did find some marijuana growing in camp?

Smith: Yeah. Well, there was two stacks of marijuana—this you won't believe—twenty feet high—at least twenty feet high—thirty feet long and twenty feet wide—two stacks of it, all cured and brown, like that. We would tie our pants leg and cut holes in all—we had pants pockets but no bottoms in the pockets. And we'd split it up, and we'd put it in our pants pockets, and it'd go down there. And this last camp, I had a pillow made out of marijuana about like this. But I never smoked it but one time, and the reason I didn't, it made me so hungry. And I told Ray, I said, “Man, I can't handle that stuff. I'm not going through that again.” It took me three days to get over it—smoked it one time. And I told him, I said, “Man, I'm not...” It made you too hungry. You was already hungry. If you smoke that marijuana, that makes you that much more hungry, and we didn't have nothing to eat.

DePue: Did the other guys have the same reaction to it?

Smith: Most of them did, but a lot of them smoked it anyway. There were two or three of those guys just hopheads from the word go, because they had plenty of it, you know. We had one guy, (laughs) now, he used to go around and he'd find it hid, you know, in little pouches. He'd piss on it, and (laughs) I never did know this was going on until we come back. I met him at a convention, and he would tell me he'd look around and he'd find every marijuana. I said, “Story”—his name was Story—I said, “why did you do that?” He says, “I didn't want those boys smoking that stuff.” We called him “Ma Story” because he was more like a woman than he was anything else. But he was a good old boy, just...

DePue: It bothered him that other guys were doing that.

Smith: It bothered him that other guys were smoking it. It really bothered him.

DePue: Well, I know tobacco was always a challenge, too, because—

Smith: Yes.

DePue: Were you a smoker when you first got captured?

Smith: Yeah. Oh, yeah. The first time when we got bombed out of Pyoktong we got went up on the hill, I was trying to smoke locust leaves. Cut your wind off right here. Boy, I'll tell you I didn't try that anymore either.

DePue: But people found some other substitutes that passed?

Smith: Yeah, anything that they could roll up and smoke, they'd smoke. And, of course, a lot of those Korean huts had paste newspaper on the walls, and they would take that paper down and roll stuff up and try to smoke it, but I never did fool with it. It just didn't appeal to me.

DePue: Well, I've got to believe that alcohol was the other thing that people were wanting but couldn't get.

Smith: Couldn't get. Me and my buddies, I think I told you about making some one time.

DePue: Well, there were two incidents in the book that you talked about, and you didn't go into too much detail. You told me about the one where you guys had it in a pot and you put it in between the wall.

Smith: Yeah, put it behind the rock wall. And (laughs) the sun hit them rocks and heat that stuff, and you could smell it, but they couldn't find it.

DePue: Okay, I'm going to back up here. When you're growing up, you're growing up in a Baptist background. Weren't you taught not to be drinking?

Smith: Well, that's what they taught us, (DePue laughs) but then they was making more liquor down there than anywhere else in the world, you know what I mean? Every couple of miles there was a still. You couldn't go hunting without running into two or three liquor stills.

DePue: But I thought somewhere in our discussion you said you weren't much of a drinker.

Smith: I wasn't. Fact is, I didn't even drink beer, even when I was in service.

DePue: Okay, Bill, then why did you have two times when you were in captivity you tried to make alcohol?

Smith: I figured, well, let's get the stuff and see if we could do it. I wanted to see it. And some of the stuff looked like—do you know what choujiu is?

DePue: Um-hm.

- Smith: Okay, milky like, you know. That's what one of them turned out—
- DePue: It's a Korean alcohol. It's basically—
- Smith: Korean wine.
- DePue: —fermented rice wine, I think, and it's got a whole lot of sediment in it.
- Smith: Yeah. It's not as good as the sake, you know. One of the batches we made was kind of like that. The boys that donated (laughs) stuff to make it, they wouldn't drink it, so me and Joe drank it.
- DePue: But wouldn't it be better off to eat the little scraps that you had that went into the mixings than to try to distill it and turn it into alcohol?
- Smith: It probably would have, but we didn't think about it that way. We just thought, well, we was going to make some whiskey if we could, and we tried it. We tried one time making in a helmet, in a steel helmet, in the hut, inside the hut. So you had to move the mat over, and it was mud, so we dug it out and put the helmet in there and then put the stuff in there, and you could smell it but you couldn't find it. (laughs) Oh, we tried that, and that didn't work either too good. God knows, we tried everything.
- DePue: Did either one of these occasions, did you get enough alcohol in the system to give you a little bit of a buzz?
- Smith: Buzz? No. We drank it and got sick. I never did get a buzz out of it, but we tried. That's all we could do.
- DePue: Towards the end of the time that you're in Camp Two—we're getting into the beginning of 1953 now, get into the spring of 1953—did you guys start hearing more rumors about maybe this is going to end and you guys might be released?
- Smith: We had heard a little bit of it, but at that point in time, you don't believe anything anyway, at least I never did.
- DePue: Now, you mentioned a couple of things—downed pilots when you were in the temple would pass through. Weren't they giving you updates on the war?
- Smith: No, they couldn't talk to us.
- DePue: They were being guarded?
- Smith: Oh, yeah. They had guards on them, and we had guards on us. We would bring the potato soup, which was a delicacy, around to them, and then you've got a guard here and a guard here, and you couldn't talk to them.

- DePue: How about the new guys who were being captured and brought into the camps? Were they telling you what's going on with the front lines?
- Smith: Most of them didn't hardly know. The ones that I talked to, which was very few, fact is, they didn't even know where they were when they were captured. They could tell you what outfit they was with, the 1st Cav or so forth, but they couldn't tell you anything.
- DePue: But at least they could tell you if we're holding our own or losing and running, couldn't they?
- Smith: Yeah, yeah. They said, well, they were at a certain place, but the name of the towns didn't make any difference to us because we didn't know what they were.
- DePue: They didn't tell you much about what was going on at Panmunjom then, either.
- Smith: No, not a thing. They didn't have much news. You would think they would have, but the ones I talked to didn't. They didn't even know what was going on around them.
- DePue: I don't think you were directly involved with this, but towards the end of the war the communists put together an Olympics for the prisoners from various camps.
- Smith: Yeah, I heard—
- DePue: What can you tell me about that?
- Smith: I heard about it, and I saw some pictures of it after I came back, of the Olympics that they had at Camp Five, and they brought in some guys from other camps to play volleyball and races and what they do at the Olympics, but I never did see it or have anything to do with it because we were not allowed to participate in anything like that.
- DePue: Towards the end of the time you were in Camp Two, though, apparently you start thinking about, there's going to be an end of this, and I want to be able to take some names back. You had written about having a little bit of a book.
- Smith: Yeah, I had a little book that a British guy made for us, and it was about two inch by three inches, and it was about an inch and a half thick.
- DePue: What did he make this out of?
- Smith: The Chinese gave us little notebooks and wanted you to write in them, and then they would confiscate them and then go through them and read them. I never did write any in it, but I gave mine to Wing—this British guy, he was

pretty good with his hands. The fact is, he was a prisoner of the Japanese during World War II, and he made this—

DePue: Holy cow.

Smith: Yeah. He made this little booklet for me, and that's what I was writing down the names of the guys that I could remember and the guys that were in the camp with me. And the FBI took it, and I never did see it.

DePue: What was the motivation for writing down the names?

Smith: Well, I wanted, if we ever got out of there, to remember who died and so forth, who was with me.

DePue: Did you try to put down things like died on such-and-such a date?

Smith: Yeah, yeah. And sometimes the reason—was shot or was beaten to death—because I knew if they ever found it, they'd jerk me right out of there. But it was small, and I got out of there with it.

DePue: Were you talking to other people to find out more information, getting more names into the book?

Smith: Getting more names into the book. Got as many as I could.

DePue: Any idea how many names you had in there?

Smith: No, I'm thinking around between forty and sixty, and I may have the sixty mixed up with the letters that they gave me to bring back, because I brought back sixty letters.

DePue: Tell me about that, then, too. I mean, we're obviously getting close to the time when you're...

Smith: Well, they had taken me down, said I was going to the hospital, and then they gave us a lecture, and this Chinese general said that we were being released. Then they moved us down to Pyoktong, but not in the camp, just in the town. Let's see. [Looking at map] We were up here at Pyoktong and our camp was out here from Pyoktong, Camp Two, and they brought us down here at the edge of Pyoktong, and of course they told us we were going home. Well, some of the guys that were in Pyoktong, in Camp Five, were up there at the gathering place, and one of them, one of the guys that brought the other guys up, like a cadre, say, for instance, he went back and told the guys at Camp Five that I was there, because I had been missing since August in '52. And when they found out I was alive and was coming back, they wanted me to bring out letters for them. So he asked me if I would take out letters if he'd get them to me, and I told him, "Yeah, I'll try." So late that evening he came back to me, and he had all these letters. And of course they had changed our clothes

again, and I stuffed the letters all around me, and I remember, I had sixty of them, but I couldn't tell you who they were to or who they were from or anything; I just knew the guys had addressed them to their parents or to their wives or whoever it was.

DePue: Did they have envelopes, or just fol—

Smith: Oh, yeah, they was in an envelope. Well, I think they made the envelope out of the paper they were written on, because they were all folded up and sealed.

DePue: What would have happened to you if they'd discovered this stuff on you?

Smith: Well, they'd have probably got rid of me right easy, the letters, too.

DePue: Once it got to the spring of 1953, I imagine one of the things was knowing what the heck day of the week it was and what date of the year it was.

Smith: The year it was. It was awful hard to keep the days.

DePue: But your winters and summers, you can tell that, at least.

Smith: By the weather changing, yeah.

DePue: So once you got into early spring of 1953, did it seem that your treatment was getting a little bit better?

Smith: I can't say it was getting any better. Let me put it this way: it wasn't getting any worse. My treatment was not getting any better.

DePue: How much did you weigh by that time?

Smith: I don't know. I must have weighed around ninety pounds, at least.

DePue: And how much did you weigh at captivity?

Smith: I got down one time to sixty-four catties, and that was a Chinese scale, and I can't remember.

DePue: Were you like a 190, 195 when—

Smith: I was 193 when I got captured.

DePue: So you're less than half your weight.

Smith: I'm less than half my weight, yeah, then. When I got back, I think I weighed about eighty-something pounds.

DePue: How tall were you?

Smith: Six feet. Six feet tall.

DePue: So here's the reason for my question: if the Chinese know they're getting ready to repatriate you and they're trying to prove to the world that they're taking good care of you, they can't have skeletons walking across that—

Smith: They fed us dojon. Let me explain. We didn't know it, but it's a soymilk. You take the soybeans and cook them, and then you run them through a grinder. There's two big gray wheels, one of them on the bottom, one of them on the top.

DePue: Like grist wheels or something.

Smith: Yeah, and there's a hole there and a bucket of water hanging over them, and then they pour that water and the beans in there, and they grind it up, and it comes out dojon, which is soy milk.

DePue: Which has got high protein and—

Smith: High protein, and they was feeding that to us about three weeks before we—I was wondering about it. It was real sweet. It had to be hot—you couldn't drink it cold. But about three weeks before we got repatriated, they started feeding us that. Of course, they fed it to everybody in the camp. We had milk call in the evening. We didn't know; we just thought that was extra stuff. That was better treatment, yeah, I guess it was.

DePue: So you didn't think, well, this is because we're getting ready to be...?

Smith: I had no clue, no clue whatsoever.

DePue: Okay. Tell me about hearing the news—and you've already started to talk about it a little bit—but hearing the news that you are going to be repatriated.

Smith: Well, I still didn't believe them. Why should I? I couldn't believe them. Fact is, I didn't even believe them when I was on the truck going south, because they took me off and put me in a Korean hut there one time. They kept shooting me with adrenaline in the chest, and we got down to P'yongyang where they was having their last turnover before they took us out to a tent set up out in the field, and you had to go to that tent before you went over to Freedom Village. And they were giving me shots in the chest all the time we was there and had a lot of guys making recordings in there, in the school. I was out in the tent on a litter, but there was a lot of guys I had heard was in there making recordings for the Chinese.

DePue: Okay, I want to back you up here because you weren't repatriated with everybody else; you were repatriated early in what they call the Little Switch.

Smith: Little Switch.

- DePue: Why were you repatriated early?
- Smith: Because they said I was sick. They come around, the way I understand it now—I didn't then—they came around to the camp there, and they said, anybody that's sick and needs to go to the hospital, put their name on the list. And so one of my good buddies (laughs) put my name on the list, Little Smith, a kid from Louisiana, and a kid named Krawbath, and a kid named—God, what was that guy's name? One of those things you can't remember. Let's see. God... I can't think of his name right now.
- DePue: We can get it into the transcript when we get to that point.
- Smith: And there was five of us—Little Clifford Smith, Krawbath, me—maybe there was four of us—Little Smith, William Krawbath, W.W., James Coogan, Major Green, Lieutenant Dean Smith: Maybe there was just four of us. I think it was five. They put us in the truck and took us down to the officers' camp, and that's where they had a big meal set up out on the table, and that's when the Chinese general, the North Korean general, told us we were going home.
- DePue: Did you want to go to the hospital yourself?
- Smith: Not particularly, but...
- DePue: What were you thinking? I mean, a lot of the guys that went to the hospital, you said yourself, never came back.
- Smith: Never came back—they died. And I got to thinking, I said, "Well, maybe it's my turn. Why am I going to the hospital?" But my buddy said, "They said put your name on the list if you thought you needed to go to the hospital." And everybody put my name down.
- DePue: Other people did.
- Smith: Yeah, other prisoners that was with me.
- DePue: Thinking that you needed to go to the hospital.
- Smith: That I needed to go to the hospital.
- DePue: Why did they think you needed to go to the hospital?
- Smith: Because I had diarrhea, and I was pretty sick, and I couldn't eat. They figured, well—
- DePue: Because you were so light to begin with?
- Smith: Yeah.
- DePue: Did you have dysentery?

- Smith: Dysentery, yeah, and they just said, you need to go. You need something. And Little Smith was the same way; Krawbath was the same way.
- DePue: The name I think that was mentioned in the book was Dallas Mossman. Does that ring right?
- Smith: Yeah, he's one of them that put my name on the list. Krawbath, [unintelligible]. I can see that guy's face, but I can't think of his name to save my life.
- DePue: Again, we can figure that out later.
- Smith: Coogin!
- DePue: Koogin.
- Smith: James Coogin. I knew it would come to me.
- DePue: You were working hard for it, too.
- Smith: I was working on it. I was working on it.
- DePue: After everything you've been through, I can't imagine how you could believe what they were telling you.
- Smith: You couldn't.
- DePue: What was going through your mind of all the different alternatives that might be happening to you?
- Smith: Well, maybe we are going to a hospital or something, because we were on trucks going south. (clears throat) Excuse me. Then all of a sudden, the planes started going over, and they were (pause) following the convoy. They was going south, see what I mean, the planes were.
- DePue: The American planes.
- Smith: The American planes.
- DePue: Did they know that this was a convoy with prisoners?
- Smith: I got a feeling that they did because when we got to Seoul, they put us up there in that warehouse, old warehouse, they said that they knew we were coming. I don't know. I don't know how they knew, but I always had the feeling that the planes when they was coming over knew that we—because they followed us all the way from P'yongyang all the way down to...
- DePue: Were you in this convoy in daylight?

Smith: Yeah.

DePue: Well, my guess is that if there's what looks like a military convoy moving in daylight—

Smith: They could have bombed us. (laughs)

DePue: —they're getting shot up unless—

Smith: They knew.

DePue: —that had been part of the negotiations, that they knew and they were there as an escort.

Smith: That's what I'm thinking.

DePue: That had to be a pretty welcome sight.

Smith: It was. It made you feel good, but you looked out and you saw all of these stovepipes coming out of the ground; you see no houses and no people because they were all living underground, and you see these stovepipes with smoke coming out, but you see no houses, no people, and it made you feel funny.

DePue: How long did it take, that trip south?

Smith: Oh, God, all day. Let's see, when we left P'yongyang going south—I don't know. It was several hours, because they stopped at a Korean hut, put me off.

DePue: Didn't somewhere along this process somebody pat you down, search you?

Smith: Yeah, and the thing was, I was on a litter, and they put me in this Korean hut, and they gave me another shot of adrenaline, and they said, we're going to leave you here. And the guys that was on my truck, jumped off and they wouldn't get back on the truck unless (pause) they brought me with them. (pause) I can hear them hollering now, standing around that truck out there. They said, No, if W.W. don't go, (pause) we don't go. They put me on the truck, (laughs) and then everybody got back on. I didn't think I was going to live to get out. God knows, what a time. Whew.

DePue: I want you to kind of take a moment here and then walk me through the process of actually being turned over to the Americans at Freedom Village, what happened, all of the step-by-step.

Smith: Okay. The trucks pulled up at Freedom Village, and me being the last one, they took me off of the litter and put me on the truck, and I was the last one to go on the ambulance, and they had squeezed me in there, and when we got to Freedom Village, they opened the door, and I was the first one to hit the

ground because I'd been pushed in there so tight, I just fell on the ground, fell out of the ambulance on the ground. And this marine came over and two soldiers and picked me up.

DePue: Were these fellow prisoners?

Smith: No, they were at Freedom Village. They were guards at the Freedom Village. And then they took me to a tent, and the first person I saw was a chaplain, a Catholic chaplain. And he sit me down at a table. I must have stayed there maybe five to ten minutes or so, then he took me—and I was walking on my own then—he took me and he walked me down through the tent. Went down through that tent, and they had the Americans here and the North Koreans and Chinese was here.

DePue: Opposite sides of the tent.

Smith: Yeah. Some of them were lined up, though, this way and this way, but half of it was North Korea, and the other half was South Korea, and we came down through the middle of it, through the middle of this big tent. And that's when they put me up on a table. This doctor and nurse was all around, and stripping me down, because they put us in new uniforms, you know, before we left Pyoktong—padded uniforms, thick like that. They got down there, and they started tagging us.

When we went through that tent, they took us outside to another tent, stripped us down naked, sprayed us with DDT, and gave us new clothes. Then they started tagging us. And when I got on the helicopter, because they used a helicopter to take from Freedom Village down to Seoul, I had all kinds of tags. Every time I went by a desk down there, they put a tag on me and led me around. And when I got to Seoul, they had hospital beds there for us and took us... This looked like an old silk mill, and they had made a hospital out of it or converted it for that point in time. They had hospital beds in there. And they put us all on a bed, and then the doctor came around, and then they said, Well, you're going home. I said, "Well, maybe we are." (laughs) I still wasn't convinced, because I figured, well, these could be setups, you know. It could have been a setup, you know. It looked real, but yet it could have been a fake.

DePue: Did you walk into that tent at Panmunjom village?

Smith: Yep. I told the guys, I said, "I walked in here, and I want to walk out." And the fact is, believe it or not, a guy from Quincy is the one who picked me up, a marine named Bob Erickson, and he's out at the Soldiers' Home now. He was a marine that picked me up with two G.I.'s. We got to talking about it. He says—

DePue: This is years later, now.

Smith: Yeah, this is since we moved to Quincy. He says, “You know,” he says, “I remember when you fell out of that ambulance,” because he was there when the ambulance backed up, and I was the only one that fell out and hit the ground on the first day of transferring things over, when we got to talking. I said, “Yeah.” (laughs) And he was the one that told me he helped pick me up with the two soldiers. And I wouldn’t let them walk me in the tent. I told them, “I walked in here, and I’m going to walk out,” so they let me go, turned me over to the chaplain. God knows, whew.

DePue: What happened to the book and the letters?

Smith: I had them all, and after I passed the chaplain, I made a turn inside of the tent, and I saw another doctor, and I told him, I says, “I got a bunch of letters here that needs to be mailed.” I said, “I brought them out of Camp Five,” and I says, “The boys told me to mail them.” And I says, “They haven’t been censored.” Of course, knowing all the time the government was going to censor them, but it was on our side. And I just opened it up (laughs) and threw them on the desk, and that was the last I saw of the letters.

DePue: As far as you know, did they get delivered?

Smith: Some of them got delivered because I was contacted later that their parents—and fact is that they had an article in the newspaper about this family had received a letter from their son named Davis, and they received a (pause) letter smuggled (pause) out of North Korea by me, and it had my address on there, for Rockingham, North Carolina. (pause) And then people that was looking for their son or their husband would write me a letter and say they saw the article.

DePue: Did you realize how important those letters were?

Smith: Yeah. (emotional pause)

DePue: Did you anywhere in this process, especially when you’re at Panmunjom in the tent, did anybody sit down and say, “Do you want to stay in the north? Do you want to be repatriated?” Did you go through any kind of a screening process like that?

Smith: No, no, I sure didn’t, because I don’t know what I would have done if they’d have said anything like that. I’d probably hit him.

DePue: All ninety pounds of you, huh?

Smith: Yep. I’d have waded through him, boy, like a stink on shit. (laughs)

DePue: I think that kind of language is understandable. (laughs) Do you remember the first meal you got?

Smith: Yeah, they tried to feed us rice pudding. I was sitting on the side of a bed down at Freedom Village, and they brought some kind of sandwich in there—I couldn't eat it—and they had rice pudding for dessert, (laughs) and no takers.

DePue: None of you guys could eat it?

Smith: I tried to chew it. I tried to chew that sandwich, but I couldn't. The more I chewed, the bigger it got, and I spit it out in the waste can.

DePue: You think they understood why you guys couldn't eat this?

Smith: I'm not sure. I'm not sure, because they was talking about it was good, and the rice pudding was good, I just couldn't eat it.

DePue: Bill, during all those months that you were a prisoner, I suspect you guys spent a considerable amount of time fantasizing about what you were going to eat when you got back home.

Smith: Some of them would. I never did think too much about it because it made you too hungry, and I would just stay away from it.

DePue: Was there anything in particular, though, that you were really craving?

Smith: I was craving fried chicken and a good pork chop, but I never did let that clear my head. In other words, my thinking was that it would be good if you had it, but that's as far as I ever got.

DePue: Did you see anybody or do you know of anybody who let it get the best of them when they were in the camps?

Smith: A lot of guys. A lot of guys just laid down and died—why, I don't know. I mean, healthy guys just laid down and just died. Of course, there might have been something else wrong with them, I don't know, but a lot of them would just give up, I guess. I don't know. I can't tell you because I don't know. I don't know what was wrong with them.

DePue: What kind of medical treatment did you get during those first couple days?

Smith: When I got back, I got (clears throat)—excuse me—I got everything. I got these roots pulled out of my teeth.

DePue: Well, I mean, just the first couple days while you were at Panmunjom village and then Seoul.

Smith: They just checked us over. They didn't give us anything in particular that I remember.

DePue: Did they put you on an IV or anything like that?

Smith: No.

DePue: How soon did they fly you out of country?

Smith: We went over to Japan, and I was only over there maybe a couple of, three days. They flew us from Japan to Hawaii, and then Hawaii is where I met General...

DePue: O'Daniels?

Smith: O'Daniels. He's the one that—he sent a major up there and got me and a sergeant, and they put us in the library and they says, The general is wanting to talk to you. I figured, well, what the hell have I done now? (laughs) Me and the sergeant either one, we couldn't figure out why we were there. We're standing in the library, and all of a sudden this major comes in, and then the general comes in. He was inquiring about his neighbor's son, a Lieutenant Kilby, and someone had said that me and this sergeant may have come in contact with Lieutenant Kilby somewhere along the line. And they scared me so bad in Tokyo, and when I had to sign those papers not to talk to anybody, had I known anything, I wouldn't have told him. I wouldn't have answered him, you know—that's how scared I was.

DePue: We need to go back, then, and talk about those couple days you were in Japan, because I think it's there that you guys really started to go through a series of psychoanalysis and some serious questioning as well.

Smith: Um-hm.

DePue: Talk about that a little bit.

Smith: Well, I'm sitting on the side of the bed there, and we were out in a solarium, like, a group of us, and they had a group of psychiatrists there, and they were talking about this, that, and the other, and some of the guys was hollering because they couldn't get a pass to go downtown. This was in Tokyo General, and why was two MPs on each door. Things like that everybody was questioning because we were so well guarded, like we had committed murder. (laughs) And we couldn't understand that because we couldn't even go to the bathroom without an aide. Listen, after what we've been through, to come back here and get questioned by our own people? It didn't sound right. And then the sergeant came around and he had these papers, and he says, "Now, I want you to sign these papers." I said, "What are they?" He said, "To keep your mouth shut. Don't talk to anybody." I says, "Well, what am I going to talk to them about?" He said, "Well, we just don't want you saying anything, and if you do say anything, you're subject to court-martial." I said, "Well, I'm not going to sign it." He says, "If you don't sign them, (laughs) the plane's on the tarmac, but you're not going on it." I said, "What?" He says, "No, unless

you sign these papers, you're not going on it." I said, "Well, hand them here," and there was five copies, and I signed them.

DePue: Any idea why they wanted you to sign that paperwork?

Smith: I had no idea whatsoever, except to keep your mouth shut and don't talk to anybody except the FBI with their credentials.

DePue: Was that because most of the prisoners were still back in North Korea?

Smith: A lot of them were still back there. I heard later that some of the things that we could have said might have made it harder on them.

DePue: But that's just a temporary gag order.

Smith: Um-hm, but they scared me so bad, man, I didn't talk to anybody for years. I didn't tell anybody anything except the FBI.

DePue: What was the nature of the questions they were asking you while you were in that hospital in Japan?

Smith: Well, for one, how you're feeling? Are you getting enough to eat? Is there anything we can get for you? Or I remember a general come through there one time and a kid from West Virginia, said, "Yes, sir, general, I'd like to have a good beer." (laughs) And they went out and got a big tub of Danish beer (laughter) and brought it in. Put it right in the middle of the ward. It must have been 250 bottles in that thing, I don't know. It was a lot of them, but everybody got a beer.

DePue: Did you have a beer?

Smith: Yeah, I drank a beer.

DePue: How'd it taste?

Smith: It tasted awful. (DePue laughs) I told them, I said, "This is the worst thing I ever tasted. I'd rather have a glass of milk." And then some nurse must have heard me because she went and brought me a little glass of milk (laughter). And, of course, over there, the milk was made out of powdered milk, you know what I mean? It doesn't have the right taste to it. But anyway, she brought it to me. But so many things were going on through your mind, and then you're still trying to figure out—and some of these guys here are crazy because they're wanting passes, which is unheard of. They want a pass to go downtown. What in the hell they want to go downtown for? There's nothing there. They come up with all kind of questions. I didn't ask anybody anything to my knowledge except, "When are we going to the States?"

- DePue: Were they asking you guys about collaborators, about progressives and about the nature of the brainwashing that was going?
- Smith: Yeah. Now, when we had those quiet sessions with the FBI—
- DePue: And this is in Japan.
- Smith: This is in Japan, before we ever got on the plane coming home. They were asking us about who was doing what, and I was even afraid to talk to them, even with their credentials, you know. And I told them very little, as well as I can remember, because I can remember sitting on that couch and the guy sitting over here with his knees facing mine, asking me questions and asking me about the men that was left behind there, and I couldn't tell him anything except they were just all left. I didn't know all their names. I had a bunch of them, but I didn't know all their names. And I think that is when they got the book from me, I'm thinking that's when—in Japan—when they took my little book.
- DePue: Okay, so they got the letters in the tent at Panmunjom.
- Smith: They got the letters in the tent at Panmunjom, yeah, but they got the book in Tokyo, I'm thinking. Because I never did get it back, I know that.
- DePue: Did they thank you? Did they thank you for bringing the letters out?
- Smith: Nope.
- DePue: Didn't they know the risk you were taking to do that?
- Smith: It didn't faze them. It was like it was an everyday thing.
- DePue: Was this pretty intensive questioning?
- Smith: In Japan? Yeah. They were wanting to get down to the nitty-gritty about—the thing of it was, I didn't know anything. I didn't know what the guys were doing back in Camp Five. Listening to lectures—that's all I could tell them, you know. In Camp Two, basically the same thing, doing the work but no lectures. They were building roads, help building roads and so forth, and they were doing what they were told to do, but that was the extent of it. There's nothing to tell. Like the guy said, "What do you use for toilet paper?" I told him, "If you don't eat, you don't shit. That's the way it is." (laughter) But it's weird, and some of the questions they asked—I can't remember all of them—but God, they asked questions, questions, questions.
- DePue: Did your family know that you were being released?
- Smith: They saw it on the radio, on the television.

- DePue: Oh, they had to be ecstatic.
- Smith: They were. One of my aunts saw it and called my mother, and she turned the TV on, or at least that's what I heard.
- DePue: Did they give you a chance to call?
- Smith: In Tokyo, yeah. I got a chance to talk a few minutes with my mother, and I told her, I says, "There's nothing wrong with me that some of your cooking (pause) won't take care of," you know, and that was about it. I didn't have a heck of a lot to say. What do you say?
- DePue: Do you remember anything that she said?
- Smith: She said, "Son, we've just been praying for you and wanting you to come home," and that was about her extent. I didn't know that she had already been in the hospital with a heart attack. Of course, they didn't tell me any of that.
- DePue: Okay. Then you said from Japan you went to Hawaii, and I think you made a quick stop in Guam along the way.
- Smith: We did. We had breakfast in Guam at a Quonset hut. I never will forget it. Nothing on that place but an airstrip and American flag sticking up on a bunch of rocks at the top of the hill. (laughs) Quonset hut, you know.
- DePue: You wouldn't happen to remember what you had for breakfast, would you?
- Smith: No, I guess it was eggs.
- DePue: Eggs had to be pretty rich food by that time.
- Smith: Yeah, they powdered eggs, and they turned green—you know how they turned green in the pan.
- DePue: Where to from Hawaii, then?
- Smith: From Hawaii we went to Travis Air Force Base in California.
- DePue: Did you stay there long?
- Smith: I stayed there about two or three days, as far as I can remember.
- DePue: Did you get some more questioning?
- Smith: More questioning, yeah. They was all around us, and then we had to sign papers not to talk to the press because there was a bunch of press there. They would follow you around. We'd try to go to the mess hall, and then a bunch of these reporters was hollering at you and coming around. You already were forbidden to talk to them.

DePue: You said it was FBI that was talking to you in Japan, right?

Smith: In Japan, right.

DePue: Are you sure it was FBI? It wasn't military or CIA?

Smith: It could have been the CID [Criminal Investigation Command].

DePue: Well, it would have been, okay.

Smith: It was somebody along that line.

DePue: Were these same people following you on the way back?

Smith: Yeah. Two of them. Fact is, we got to Travis Air Force Base, and then when we left there, they flew us into Lowry Field in San Antonio, Texas. We didn't have any clothes except pajamas, hospital pajamas, and we went to the mess hall down there, and the sergeant ran us out of the mess hall. If I'd have had a gun, I'd have killed him, I'd have shot him.

DePue: He didn't know who you guys were?

Smith: No. He said, "I'm tired of you guys coming in here in these hospital clothes." He says, "Get on a uniform and come back." And I started to hit him. A kid named Moreland from Atlanta, Georgia grabbed my hand. He said, "Don't, Smitty," he said, "it's not worth it. Not worth it." So we just hauled out and went back, and then they had to bring us some food. (laughs) There was a couple of girls there we met that was in the Air Force, and I told them, I says, "If I could find that sergeant"—they wouldn't tell us the sergeant's name—I said, "If I could find out that sergeant's name," I said, "I'd kill that son of a bitch." They said, "You don't want to do that. You don't want to cause any trouble." At that point in time, I would have stepped on him like a pissant. But I didn't do it. Then we stayed there two or three days. A lieutenant had just bought a new car, and he took us around the base in it, trying to calm us down. (laughs) And I said, I'd still like to know who that sergeant was, but they never could tell me. Even that lieutenant never would tell me. I said, "I'd like to go back over there"—and of course when they put us back over, we weren't allowed to leave the ward, then, you know—put the damn MPs up there and wouldn't let us out. We were angry, so we decided we wouldn't fly home, we would just take the train, so three of us took the train.

DePue: The Army let you decide yourself?

Smith: Um-hm. We told them we wasn't going to fly with the Air Force. They treated us so damn bad here, we were not going to fly their damn planes. (laughter) And they said, well, you'll have to stay an extra day. I said, "I don't care." Then they took us, put us in the staff car the next day and took us down to San

Antonio to a rail station and gave us tickets. But we still had two FBI agents on us on the train.

DePue: Were these guys the same guys over in Japan?

Smith: No, these were two different ones. They picked us up there at Lowry. And I didn't notice it until Moreland mentioned it, and he said, "You know," he said, "those guys are following us." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah." He says, "I saw them back at Lowry Field before we left there."

DePue: Oh, so you hadn't actually been introduced or knew who they were or anything like that.

Smith: We were never introduced to them, no.

DePue: They were just always there.

Smith: They was always there, and they followed us. They got on the train with us. They was in the same car with us. And Moreland went somewhere in Texas, and the other kid went—Cotton-eyed Joe—he lost an eye, had a patch over it—he went to somewhere in Mississippi, and I went to North Carolina, Fayetteville, Fort Bragg. But those men stayed with us all the way—they followed me all the way to Fort Bragg.

DePue: What were they wearing, just regular suits?

Smith: Just regular civilian clothes.

DePue: When did you get home, then?

Smith: I got to Fort Bragg, and then a bunch of us met us there, and of course they gave me a letter from the governor and all that crap, and then they took me out to Fort Bragg from Fayetteville downtown, where we stopped the train. Took me out to Fort Bragg, and they gave me a good physical out there, and the doctor—in the meantime, a growth had grown from one side of my nose down to my lungs and cut off the air on this side, and another growth had started.

DePue: Okay, so your left lung had...

Smith: It had already stopped being used because air had already been cut off with this gristle that grew down in there. And this doctor explained to me, he says, "Mother Nature, when your system gets so low and your lungs can't take all the air, Mother Nature provides a cutoff valve for it so you won't take too much air in," and then the one that just started down this way, he says a couple more weeks and it would have cut off all the air to the lungs. And they operated on me there at Fort Bragg and took out all those. Whew, that thing must have been that big around.

DePue: Like your pinkie finger.

Smith: Yeah, they kept pulling that stuff out and pulling that stuff out, and God...

DePue: You were conscious during this?

Smith: Yeah. They'd spray anesthetic, you know, a little bit anesthetic on your nose and just pull, and then they started on this one. And God, it's bleeding like a stuck hog. What got me was a bunch of the officers were around the dentist's chair there, or the guy that was operating with me, and they had their wives with them. (pause) More like a damn circus, you know what I mean?

DePue: It'd be one thing if just the doctors were there, but the wives.

Smith: Yeah, and the wives there, and they were yak-yak-yakking. I could hear them talking, but I couldn't understand what they were saying. But man, they were all around. There must have been eight of them around there. And they took that stuff that they got out here and put it in a little jar, pickled it, you know, and it was on his mantle down there. (laughs)

DePue: Well, that's not the kind of thing I'd put on my mantle.

Smith: Well, he's real proud of it, you know what I mean? He asked me, he said, "Do you see that?" I said, "Yeah, I see it." He says, "Well, that was what was in there causing you not to be able to breathe through that side." God, it hurt like hell, too.

DePue: Had you seen your family at this point?

Smith: No, I hadn't seen anybody that I knew.

DePue: Was that the next step, then?

Smith: The next step was... They were waiting on me out there when I left the chair here where everybody was, all the officers and their wives.

DePue: While you were getting this operation done on you?

Smith: Yeah, and then they took me down the hall, and there was a big room there, and that's where I met the family. But I had seen some of them when I got off of the train. I had met my mother and my daddy and my cousin, but I wasn't with them two minutes because they ushered me away and put me in a staff car.

DePue: What was that moment like, those two minutes like?

Smith: I couldn't believe it was happening. I says, "But I'd like to talk to my mother," and they said, Well, you'll see her later. I mean, I wasn't with them

two minutes, I bet. Boy, they just drug me right off and put me in a staff car. (laughs) And I rode all the way out from the train station at Fayetteville all the way out—which is about ten miles—out to Fort Bragg.

DePue: Did you get a chance to give her a hug?

Smith: Barely. Barely was all. And she was crying. My little cousin was crying. She'd skipped school. Perfect attendance, and they let her go by school that morning and register, because Rockingham was only about eighty-five miles from Fort Bragg, so she went by and registered with the principal (sigh) to be counted present, you know, and that was it. And later on, after the doctor got through with me, I saw my family for just a few minutes, and then they took me to another doctor, which was a psychiatrist, and his buddy. And God, I must have stayed in there an hour, and they were (laughs) trying to make a decision to whether I was able to go home or not, or keep me at the hospital. And I says, "I want to go home." They said, well, we'll decide for you. Of course, I didn't appreciate that a bit, and I told that colonel so. It was a colonel and a major—I guess both of them were psychiatrists. Finally, after about an hour, they says, well, we're going to let you go, but you got to report back—I believe it was four days—well, less than a week—I had to come back to Fort Bragg for an exam.

DePue: Bill, do you really blame them that they're reluctant to let you go? You're less than ninety pounds, you were released early because you are in such bad shape, you just had this operation...

Smith: Yeah, I can see now where they would kind of doubt sending me home, but at that point in time, being so close to home and not being able to get there... (laughs) And then some peon over here saying you can't go? I had heard that enough. But well, looking back, I can understand a lot of it now. But at that point in time, I didn't.

DePue: Out of all these things and coming home—was there something that really stuck with you, it struck you as weird or different or just kind of surreal, perhaps?

Smith: Well, I couldn't believe I was being treated the way I was. I was being treated more like an enemy, let me put it that way, than an ally, even with the FBI and CID at Fort Bragg later on.

DePue: And they didn't trust you?

Smith: Well, I guess they didn't trust me, and I didn't trust them neither. I flat-out told them, you know. "Don't hand me none of that propaganda," I said, "I been through that."

DePue: Did it feel real, or did part of you say what was real was back in Korea?

Smith: Um-hm. Well, it was hard to distinguish because—let me explain it this way. One side, you're fighting a war. The next time, you're facing the civilians, and it's kind of hard to keep it separated. And I still have problems sometimes with that.

DePue: Do you think they had a hard time understanding your frame of reference?

Smith: Probably. But being trained, they should know better, you know? I mean, I might have been dumb, or I might have been born this morning, but I didn't live all day for nothing. I don't know how I've gotten by with it—I really don't.

DePue: Well, here's a different kind of question for you, Bill. You're in captivity for two and a half years. The Army owed you some money. Remember getting paid the first time?

Smith: I remember I signed a voucher one time—this was at Fort Bragg. I was in the hospital because I couldn't stay home. I stayed home two or three days. I stayed home from Friday till Sunday night, and they had to take me back to Fort Bragg to the hospital. But see, they sent me home with no medicine, no nothing. My nerves was shot. And I couldn't be still. We had a family reunion, and then that night I just fell apart, and so my dad and my uncle took me to Fort Bragg, which was close—about eighty miles.

DePue: What do you mean, you fell apart?

Smith: I couldn't be still, and I was about to fight them. I couldn't control myself. And they put me in the backseat of the car and told me to sit down and be still and shut up. I never will forget that. And I said, "Hell, I'm not talking to you anyway. What am I saying?" They took me to Fort Bragg, and of course when I got to Fort Bragg, the first thing they did was come out and (laughs) shoot me full of something to kind of relax me, because I was sitting out there in a waiting room with all them other people, waiting to see a doctor, you know. And this nurse came over, boy—her and one of her aides came over there, and they slapped that medicine in me, and I just sit there and couldn't hardly move. And then finally they took me back to see a doctor, and then the next thing I knew, they'd put me in bed, and the thing of it was they put a restraining sheet on me.

DePue: Tied you down.

Smith: Yeah. That's when I flipped out again. I called them everything but a Chinese aviator. "Why in the hell are you doing this?" I didn't understand. I guess to keep from hitting them; I don't know.

DePue: Was it that first trip back to home that you had some surprise visitors as we

Smith: Yeah. It was on a Sunday evening after everybody had left from the big dinner that they had out there, and all the neighbors and everything had left. Lieutenant Kilby—the man that General O’Daniels had been asking me about in Hawaii—his parents found out where I lived, and they came to the house. And she was more upset than he was, and my dad was kind of talking to him a little bit, and she says, “Can we walk?” And off of the main road, the number one highway went this way, and then there was a country kind of road that went that way, and our house was up here. And we walked down there, and she was talking, and she was wanting to know if I had heard anything about her son, Lieutenant Kilby. She thought that I knew something and wouldn’t tell her, but I didn’t know anything to tell her because I honestly didn’t know the man. I had never heard of him, or even if I’d seen him and fed him, I wouldn’t have known who he was.

DePue: But I would guess that you weren’t saying much of anything about your experience because of the piece of paper you’d written.

Smith: The piece of paper they made me sign not to talk to anybody.

DePue: Wasn’t that kind of tearing at your heart, though, that you weren’t able...?

Smith: Yes, and the more I thought about it, the more I thought, well, they’re not going to believe you anyway. God, it’s still hard to believe, you know. Sixty years later, it’s hard to believe the shit I went through. Boy, a lot of them never survived.

DePue: I want to just take a few more minutes to finish today. I definitely want to have another session where we talk about the challenges you had with recovering, with the experience of meeting Charlotte, falling in love and getting married, and then together the two of you dealing with you being a POW. But I want to finish up with a few other questions about what was going on back in Korea at this time, because you were released I think it was about April.

Smith: April, yeah.

DePue: And it was about a couple months later—and you had mentioned this before, I think—a couple months later Syngman Rhee released something like twenty-five thousand North Koreans. They were in South Korean prison camps, and they just threw the doors open and let twenty-five thousand Koreans walk away and filter into the countryside. Do you remember hearing about that?

Smith: Yes, he declared them Korean nationals or something. I don’t know what he used to do that, but he didn’t call them prisoners of war. He called them civilians, you know.

- DePue: These are some of the people who were a reason that you weren't being released, because Truman and the Americans weren't going to force these people to go back to North Korea.
- Smith: Yeah. And then when Syngman Rhee signed that proclamation that they were—what was it he called them? South Korean nationals? In other words, he made it plain that they were South Korean people at that point.
- DePue: They became citizens of South Korea.
- Smith: They became citizens of South Korea, yep.
- DePue: Well, that caused a serious hiccup in the negotiations, which had been kind of drawing to a close but agonizingly slow, as you obviously know. But it was the middle of July before the main armistice was signed—it wasn't a peace treaty, it was an armistice—and then, of course, shortly after that, the major prisoner exchanges began. And you've got the numbers in your book; I brought another book to kind of give those numbers, and I think it's worth bringing in here. Let me just read some numbers here, if you don't mind.
- Smith: No, I don't mind.
- DePue: Because I think these illustrate a lot. Those who were repatriated—in both the Little Switch and the Big Switch, and the Little Switch was what you went through; the Big Switch was the main prisoner exchange. There were seventy-five thousand North Koreans repatriated—closer to seventy-six thousand—six thousand seven hundred Chinese that were repatriated, and between the Little Switch and Big Switch 3,746 repatriated. Along with you in Little Switch there were 149 U.S., 471 ROK, and then a smattering of a lot of other nationalities. So the vast majority of the Americans were switched in the Big Switch, but what's especially illustrative here, I think, is the numbers of those that refused to go back.
- Smith: Twenty-one.
- DePue: Let's start with the Chinese. Fourteen thousand seven hundred Chinese refused to go back. And this book I'm reading from: *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* by Walter Hermes. I believe it's the official U.S. military history of the war. And I think the book you cited might have slightly different numbers, but that's not surprising. The number of North Koreans who refused to be repatriated was seven thousand nine hundred. Now, remember that was after the twenty-five thousand—some got released by Syngman Rhee, so—
- Smith: About thirty-two thousand.
- DePue: —these are significant numbers. Very significant numbers. Now, on the flip side—and here's the ones you had just referred to—there were twenty-one U.S. and one Brit who refused to be repatriated. So we've got a comparison of

basically twenty-two versus about twenty-three thousand. But what did you think when you heard that some of those guys elected to stay in the north?

Smith: I couldn't believe it. They were sold a bill of goods. I couldn't understand why anybody would want to stay there, no matter how the treatment was. I couldn't imagine, particularly Americans—and, you know, two guys that planned to go and backed out was Dickerson and Batchelor. They planned to stay there but got cold feet at the end of the line.

DePue: So initially twenty-three people said, we want to stay in the north, and the U.N, in the process of being repatriated, talked them out of it?

Smith: Somewhere along the line they changed their mind for some reason or other.

DePue: I know those guys when they came back were court-martialed, and I know that you were being asked about that. We will pick up that part of the story the next time we meet, if you don't mind.

Smith: Fine.

DePue: But still, couldn't begin to comprehend what was going on in their mind?

Smith: It's always flabbergasted me why they would want to stay. It was hard for me to comprehend that. Give me a reason, you know. Ain't no reason.

DePue: Were they afraid to be repatriated because they'd collaborated?

Smith: (laughs) Some of them might have been, yeah, because they were threatened. (laughs)

DePue: You said yourself you had threatened them.

Smith: Yeah, I did. I told him, "Once we get you back to the States, we'll kick your ass." I said, "I ought to do it now, but there's too many guards guarding you."

DePue: Do you know of any murders that happened in those camps?

Smith: I know a couple that might as well have been murders. One of the guys wouldn't let—it was zero weather out there, and they wouldn't let the kid back in the hut, and he died, froze to death. I guess that was murder.

DePue: How about some of the other prisoners lashing out at the progressives?

Smith: I don't think anybody was ever killed; however, I don't know. One of them drowned one time, and I don't know whether it (laughs) was just a mistake or he just drowned. I don't know what happened to him down there at Pyoktong. But the thing of it was, I was never afraid of anybody or anything in prison. I had no reason to be afraid of them, you know what I mean? Or do you?

- DePue: And here's the part that strikes me: you get back to Japan, and they ask you to sign the piece of paper.
- Smith: Oh, man.
- DePue: And you've expressed your concern about that, afraid of what repercussions might come if you violate that. Can you understand that?
- Smith: I understand now partly because we still had men there. I can understand that. But what was I going to say that would harm them? You tell me. What would I have said that would harm them? Nothing. I had nothing. I had no qualms about the guys. I didn't like a lot of them, particularly Batchelor and Dickerson, and a lot of them I didn't like for the things that they had done, but I wouldn't stop them from coming home.
- DePue: So much of the popular perception of what was going on with prisoners in the Korean War dealt with the issue of these day after day lectures and interrogation, the brainwashing. Do you think some of that was a response to the FBI, the CIA, the American public or the Army's suspicion that you guys had been turned and were yourselves plants in America?
- Smith: They could have thought that real easy, because the Chinese made it real easy for them to think that.
- DePue: That's exactly what they intended, isn't it?
- Smith: That's exactly what they intended. The only thing about it: we didn't come back and start demonstrating against everything that came along. I would have never demonstrated against anything or anybody. Our government—we got the best country in the world, the crookedest government in the world. (laughs) That's just in my opinion.
- DePue: And you have every right to say that, Bill.
- Smith: A lot of things, I didn't understand.
- DePue: Did you ever see the movie *The Manchurian Candidate*?
- Smith: I don't believe so. I have heard of it, but I don't think I've ever seen it.
- DePue: So you've deliberately gone out of your way not to watch it or...?
- Smith: No, I just—
- DePue: Never had the opportunity?
- Smith: —never had the opportunity. But I heard it was something. Did Gregory Peck play that?

DePue: No, he was in *Porkchop Hill*, a different kind of Korean War movie. This one was Laurence Harvey and Frank Sinatra. And I think Laurence Harvey was the guy who was the plant, who was the Manchurian candidate, the person who had been brainwashed in North Korea and had come back to carry out this assassination of a presidential candidate.

Smith: A lot of the guys were told to come back and start riots and start protests against Washington and the Wall Street warmongers about certain things, this, that, and the other, but I didn't pay any attention to it.

DePue: But that was a subject of the lectures.

Smith: It was one of the subjects of the lectures, yes. You should go back and tell your people you were cannon fodder for the Wall Street warmongers. You must go back and rise up against them! (laughs) And get rid of Truman. (laughs)

DePue: I'm going to inject an opinion here at the end of today's session. It's because of that that I think you guys in the prison camps were as much or more a part of the front lines of that war as anybody who was in the trenches in the front line. (pause)

Smith: Well, I just don't know. I know one thing: I never did anything when I was in prison to be ashamed about. I could walk down the street anywhere in the United States and look anybody straight in the eye: I never let you down.

DePue: Bill, I think that's a great place to stop today. Thanks very much, and I appreciate you suffering through the questions.

(end of interview #4)