

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Robert Kirby

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

Interview # VRK-A-L-2010-046

Robert (Bob) Kirby, Military Policeman during the Korean War guarding a North Korean POW compound, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Oct 8, 2010      Location: Kirby residence in Mason City, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

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

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Patty Maynor and Rozanne Flatt, ALPL Volunteers

Total Pages: 40      Total Time: 2:23 / 2.38 hrs

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on Feb 16, 2011.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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# Abstract

## Robert Kirby, *Veterans Remember*, VRK-A-L-2010-046

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Robert (Bob) Kirby was born on August 15th, 1931, and grew up on his family's small farm near New Holland, Illinois. Kirby discusses growing up during World War II, attending a one room school, and the arrival of electricity on the farm. Following graduation from high school in 1949, he worked on the farm for several years as well as other jobs. Kirby was drafted into the Army in July of 1952, and attended Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training at Ft. Gordon, Georgia, where he was trained as a Military Policeman.

Kirby arrived in South Korea in late 1952, and was assigned to the 8137th Military Police Group, then stationed on Koje-do Island off the southern coast of Korea. He served as a guard at a POW compound for hardened North Korean Communists, a very dangerous place both for the prison guards, and for any prisoner who did not want to return to North Korea after the war. Kirby has written about his experiences as a guard at the compound, and discussed one incident where a POW hurled himself at Kirby's feet trying to escape the wrath of his fellow prisoners, and another incident where the daily headcount turned up one short. They eventually discovered that a prisoner had been brutally murdered and then dismembered. He recalled the occasion in June 18th when Syngman Rhee suddenly released tens of thousands of North Korean prisoners who had indicated their desire to stay in South Korea, as well as the eventual armistice and the transfer of control of prisoners for shipment to the POW exchange point. Kirby returned to the states and the family farm in late 1953.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Military Police during Korea War; North Korean POW compound during Korean War; Koje-do Island; 8137th Military Police Group; Syngman Rhee; Kim Il Sung; USS Walton Walker; release of North Korean POWs on June 18th, 1953; Armistice talks at Panmunjom, Korea; prisoner exchange at conclusion of Korean War

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