

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Gene K. Bleuer

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

Interview # VRK-A-L-2007-037

Gene Bleuer, a army NCO during the Korean War and a POW survivor, 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: December 18, 2007      Location: Bleuer residence in Rock Island, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

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

Transcription by: Audio Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Ann Countryman & Rozanne Flatt, ALPL Volunteers

Total Pages: 46      Total Time: 2 hr 7 min / 2.12 hrs

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on 1/23/2008.

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

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# Abstract

Gene K. Bleuer, *Veterans Remember*, VRK-A-L-2007-037

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** Gene K. Bleuer was born in Rock Island, Illinois on July 2, 1929, and grew up in the Rock Island area. Following graduation from high school Gene found work with John Deere and in 1947 joined the Illinois Army National Guard, being assigned to Battery B, of the 223rd Field Artillery Regiment in Rock Island. Over the next few years he made rank quickly, and was married and a Sergeant First Class (E-7) at the time he was called to active duty in October of 1951 with the rest of the 44th Infantry Division, an Illinois National Guard division. His wife was pregnant at the time. He was soon sent to infantry leadership school at Fort Riley, Kansas. He arrived in Korea in late 1952, and was assigned to Company B, 5th Regimental Combat Team, which was in the line at the time.

SFC Bleuer served over the next couple of months as a platoon sergeant in B Company, leading patrols and performing defensive operations. A few days before Christmas Bleuer was leading a platoon-sized patrol conducted a probing mission toward the Chinese lines. Immediately after the patrol reached its position, his patrol was attacked by Chinese troops and eventually overrun. Only Bleuer and three others survived the attack, but all were captured. He spent three days and nights walking north toward the prison camp, where he was interrogated. Bleuer spent roughly 90 days in the camp before deciding to make an escape attempt. He and two others dug a tunnel underneath the wire, but the tunnel ceiling collapsed on Bleuer. The next thing he remembers was awakening in an American hospital. From what his buddy told him, he had apparently gone out of his mind. He and his buddy, who had suffered wounds during the escape attempt, were traded for Chinese and North Korean injured and hospitalized as part of the “Little Switch” prisoner exchange between the UN and Chinese and North Koreans. Bleuer was soon interrogated by an American officer, then shipped home on an aircraft carrier, suffering from a serious case of claustrophobia. Bleuer spent many years dealing with the aftermath of his POW experience, with his second wife helping him in his recovery. Gene passed away on June 15, 2011.

**Topics Covered:** Infantry Sergeant (NCO) during the Korean War; Prisoner of War during the Korean War; Illinois Army National Guard; 223rd Field Artillery Regiment; John Deere manufacturing; Company B, 5th Regimental Combat Team; Little Switch prisoner exchange during Korean War; Lane Evans, U.S.S. Palau; Pyongyang; Henry J. Keiser and Liberty Ships; U.S. Congressman.

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