

# Interview with Eldon “Curly” Yetter

# VRK-A-L-2009-010

Interview # 1: February 7, 2009

Interviewer: Rozanne Flatt

## **COPYRIGHT**

**The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. “Fair use” criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955**

**Note to the Reader:** Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

Flatt: Hello, my name is Rozanne Flatt. I’m a volunteer in the oral history department at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, working on the *Veterans Remember* project. I’m in the home of Eldon and Rosalyn Yetter. Eldon, I have to stipulate, is a longtime friend, in fact, a lifetime friend of my husband’s and a friend of mine for many years. I want you to know about that, if I get a little familiar with him. I kid him a lot. We’re in their lovely home in Havana, Illinois. He’s going to tell us a little about his life, but mostly about his life in the Marine Corps, during the Korean conflict, which we now acknowledge to be a war. So, good afternoon, Curly, how are you?

Yetter: Good afternoon.

Flatt: I’d like to start by asking you to tell us where you were born, when, and a little bit about your early life, growing up in Havana, Illinois.

Yetter: Okay. I was born on a farm, about three miles southeast of Havana, Illinois. I was born on August 21, 1929. My mother was Mabel Hurlburt-Yetter, and my father was Leo Yetter. My father died when I was just an eleven year-old kid. He died of a heart attack one night.

Then, as we grew up, I wasn’t old enough to manage the farm, so my uncle took care of the farming, and I helped him as a young boy. My mother was a rural school teacher. She taught a little country school, there, close to us.

Flatt: A little one-room school?

Yetter: One room, yeah. I never had anybody in my class until I was in the eighth grade, and I had one other fellow that had moved in, in the eighth grade. I went to Havana High School, played football and ran in track. I always had a ride home if I wanted it, but if I played in sports, then I had to walk home, which wasn't anything to me. Once in a while, some of the fellows would be sorry for me, and they'd take me home in their cars. So, I graduated in 1947.

Flatt: Can I stop you just a second?

Yetter: Sure.

Flatt: How long a walk was that?

Yetter: Three miles.

Flatt: Didn't mean a thing to you then, did it?

Yetter: Not then, no. (both laugh)

Flatt: Now?

Yetter: It would now.

Flatt: Three miles! (both laugh)

Yetter: Let's see...So, I graduated in 1947, and I started farming in late 1948, and—

Flatt: What did you do in-between graduation and late '48, then?

Yetter: Well, I worked at...We were building a power plant here in Havana. I worked there as a laborer. I also worked at the Van Etten's Garage during that time. After I was doing that a while, I just, I wanted to be outdoors on the farm, and so I decided I'd start farming.

Flatt: Backing up just a little, when you were a kid growing up, and your uncle was there, did you have farm chores that you did?

Yetter: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we had to milk the cows and had to feed the pigs, feed the chickens, gather the eggs, and all that good stuff. Clean the chicken house, clean the barn out. (both laugh)

Flatt: We all know what that is.

Yetter: Yeah. (both laugh)

Flatt: How many cows did you have to milk?

- Yetter: I had to milk...I think there were seven cows, and we had to milk them morning and night. Of course, my mom and my sister helped some of the milking.
- Flatt: I know that your mother remarried—
- Yetter: Yeah.
- Flatt: ...how much later after—
- Yetter: Well, when my sister and I graduated from high school, why, my mother married an old country doctor here in Havana, named Doctor Corey. So then I was kind of glad to see them getting married, because I knew probably that someday I'd have to leave for the service. So mom wouldn't have to be there by herself. Then, when I left for the service, we went to St. Louis—
- Flatt: I need to back you up again, though.
- Yetter: Okay.
- Flatt: I'm sorry, I got you off-track a minute there.
- Yetter: That's okay!
- Flatt: You say you decided to do some farm work when you got tired of working in the garage and the power plant?
- Yetter: Correct, yeah. I wanted to be outside.
- Flatt: Tell me a little bit about that farm work.
- Yetter: Well, it was just...In 1949, I put in my first wheat crop, and I also put in a crop of alfalfa hay. Then I was called...I got my orders to go to the service in 1951.
- Flatt: So, you were farming for a couple of years?
- Yetter: Yeah.
- Flatt: And was this on your original father and mother's farm?
- Yetter: Yeah, uh-huh. So, then, I was going to say, we left for St. Louis.
- Flatt: Now, wait a minute. I happen to know (laughs), because you're such a good friend of my husband's, that you and another guy had some other work that you did when you were young.
- Yetter: Oh, we worked in the funeral home?

Flatt: Yeah!

Yetter: Yeah, I did work in the funeral home.

Flatt: Right. Tell us just a little bit about that.

Yetter: Well, actually, we'd just be with the family. I usually would stand up by the casket. In those years, the family would pass by the casket, you know, at the end of the funeral service. My job usually was to stand there at the end of the casket, in case anybody needed help. Then, my friend, Niederer, he ran the funeral home, and I'd help him close the casket, like when the service's over.

Flatt: In those days, in a small town, the funeral home also often had ambulance service. Was that true here?

Yetter: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Flatt: So, were you an ambulance driver?

Yetter: Yeah. I'd always drive the hearse to the cemetery. He would be ahead, in the lead car, with the family. I'd be behind him with the hearse, and drove to the cemetery. That was about all my experience with it.

Flatt: For a young guy—and this bears on your later experiences in the service—it kind of takes away the mystery of death, doesn't it?

Yetter: Oh, yeah, it does.

Flatt: When you experience it as a young person. Many young people don't experience it very often.

Yetter: No...I was used to being around dead people; that's for sure. (both laugh)

Flatt: Some of them were still walking around though, huh? (both laugh)

Yetter: Yeah.

Flatt: We have a few of those. Well then, let's get on to...Before you left, it seems to me that you met a young lady.

Yetter: Oh, yeah. I started going out with Rosalyn Kleier, who later I married. I had my first date with her on, I think it was the first of June, and we dated—

Flatt: What year was that?

Yetter: That was 1951.

Flatt: You have a good memory.

Yetter: ...and we dated until I had to go to the service. That was August 16, 1951.

Flatt: So you barely...For those days, that was a short acquaintance, wasn't it?

Yetter: Yeah, yeah. But we—

Flatt: Tell me about what you were hearing at home about what was going on in Korea, because the Korean situation started in 1950, so you'd probably been hearing about this on the radio?

Yetter: Oh, yeah. We'd hear about how it was over there and how the North Koreans would take civilians and put them out ahead, when they were marching, before the...Again, the North Korean soldiers would take civilians and put them out there. I had one fellow who told me he had to call the artillery in on the civilians. He didn't want to do it, but that was his orders. So he actually called artillery in on the civilians that was out in front of the North Korean troops.

Flatt: That's interesting. You learned that after you got over there, or had you heard it here, from somebody who came back?

Yetter: Well, a fellow told me about it in later years.

Flatt: I see. That's interesting in light of the kinds of things that we, the United States, get yelled at about, civilian deaths. So, then, were you drafted?

Yetter: I was drafted. Well, a friend of mine went... We went to St. Louis; we were taken to St. Louis, and the next morning they put us in an old hotel up there. We had to sleep three in a bed.

Flatt: (laughs) Sounds like Abe Lincoln.

Yetter: We didn't sleep. But anyway, I know the lights went out. It wasn't too long, somebody yelled, "Bed bugs!" Everybody jumped up and turned the lights on, and here was bed bugs all over the place.

Flatt: Oh, my. I'm laughing, but it isn't funny, is it?

Yetter: (laughs) And so—

(pause in recording)

Flatt: I'm speaking again with Eldon Yetter. We had a problem with the equipment on our first session. So curly, I appreciate very much that you are willing to spend time with me to pick up and fill in this part that we missed. Where we lost you before was just when the fellow said, "Bed bugs!" So, why don't you pick the story up there?

Yetter: Okay. The guy said, "Bed bugs!" and everybody jumped up and turned the lights on. I'd never seen bed bugs before. But anyway, there's bed bugs scurrying all around. (Flatt laughs) That night, we slept three in a bed, and we just left the lights on all night, so the bed bugs wouldn't bother us. The next morning—

Flatt: Did the guy in the middle have the preferred position? (both laugh)

Yetter: I don't know; I was on the outside, I think. I don't think anybody slept very good. But anyway, the next morning they took us down and put us on this...it was a train, a troop train. It stopped every little town on the way to California, picking up guys that had been drafted.

Anyway, we got to Los Angeles, and we got off this troop train. I had never seen a palm tree and the green grass and flowers in bloom. It just looked so pretty, I thought, "Boy, this is really, really nice."

Flatt: Not quite like central Illinois in the winter.

Yetter: Yeah, (laughs) right. Then we had to wait a couple of hours, and they put us on this train out. It was called the *El Capitan*. It was a fast train that went to San Diego. So, we got to San Diego and got off the train, and the Marine Corps bus was there to pick us up. They started yelling, "Get on that bus you sons of bitches!" They just crammed us in there, just like cattle. You couldn't hardly have room to breathe.

Then, from the bus, they took us to the receiving barracks, and that was worse yet. The receiving barracks, they just was drilling everybody. If a guy got a little bit out of line, they was cuffing him around. Luckily, I didn't get out of line, I guess, because I didn't get touched. Then, we got to bed. It was like, 3:00 in the morning, maybe later than that. We got...[They] put us in this barracks and there were no sheets on the bunks or anything like that. It was just mattresses.

Six o'clock the next morning, why, the whistle blew and the DIs [drill instructors] come running in there, and "Get up you knuckleheads!" and yelling. I jumped up; I got out of my bed real fast. Some of the guys woke up real slow, and they didn't get up very quick. So the DIs just shoved the mattress and them guys right out on the concrete floor.

From then on, it was just pretty much...It was just kind of like being under your mother's table, but you've done something wrong, and you got punished, only it was a lot worse than your mom would punish you.

My girlfriend, Rosalyn, sent me some fudge shortly after we got there. Of course, you weren't supposed to have any kind of candy or anything like that. So, these guys just took that candy and smeared it on my head and made a big commotion about it.

Flatt: Was it at mail call that it happened?

Yetter: Well, yeah, it was at mail call. Then another time, at mail call... You had to leave your place in the platoon, had to run around the platoon, and they'd hold your letter out, and you'd grab it as you went by. You weren't allowed to look at it until they told you [that] you could. Well, I was running in the back of the platoon, getting in my spot, and I just happened to glance down to see who it was from.

They saw me. So they said, "Private Yetter, come out in front." Stood me up again, in front of the platoon and gave me a good scolding and took his back hand of his hand and hit me right across the mouth. It didn't knock me out; it just kind of stung me. I went down to my knees. [I] finally got up, and I went back to my spot in the platoon.

There was another guy. He had to run around the platoon to get his mail, but they said he wasn't running fast enough. So they ran him around and around and around. Finally, the guy was just about to drop, and he just said, "Well, you can just have the damn thing!" Boy, they pulled him out there in front, and they grabbed a-hold of him, and they choked him until he turned blue and his eyeballs were about to pop out. They said, "Damn you, boy, we'll stomp your brains out and send them home to mamma." (laughs) That was the kind of treatment we got.

Flatt: Well, they were trying to enforce discipline, but I don't think they do it quite that same way these days.

Yetter: I don't think maybe anymore they're allowed to do that. And I think it was our Dis that was maybe a little worse than some of the others. But we always... They'd march us around. I was always impressed with the San Diego recruit depot, because they had their streets; they were like... All the streets would be named Iwo Avenue and Guadalcanal Street and all the famous battles in World War II.

Flatt: Those were famous Marine battles, weren't they?

Yetter: And so, we went through that training. Well, they had to give you a haircut. I know a fellow asked me, when I got in the barber chair, "How do I want it cut?" And I said, "Oh, you can just take a little bit off." He just took the clippers and went right down the center of my head, and then just shaved you bald. Everybody was just bald. (both laugh)



*Eldon Yetter's official Marine Corps photo, taken while he was in training, circa 1952.*

Flatt: Just like you wanted it, huh? (laughs)

Yetter: And then we had to go through gas mask training. They had us put on gas masks, took us in this room—it was tear gas. You stood in there a little bit, and then everybody had to take their gas masks off. I thought they never were going to let us out of there, because every guy's coughing and tears was running down their cheeks. Finally, they let us out of that. That was just kind of the way it was.

From about the last part of our boot camp, we went up to Camp Matthews, which was north of San Diego, must have been about twenty miles. That's where you had to snap in, act like you're firing a rifle or whatever you had. I had a BAR, Browning automatic rifle, that I carried.

We finally got to shoot at the target, and one time... It was one Sunday evening, why, our DIs came in. They had been out on liberty, and I think they'd probably had quite a little bit to drink. They took us way out in the boondocks; we couldn't hardly even see the camp. They ran us up and down the hills, up and down, full pack, our weapons on our shoulders, full pack, and just ran us up and down, until you just about wore out. You couldn't hardly go any more. Finally [they] stood us up in a platoon formation out there. There was a little Negro kid that had been—you didn't smoke unless the smoking lamp was lit—anyway, this kid, he had been smoking when the smoking lamp was not lit, so they called him out in front of the platoon, and they said, "We're going to kill this little..." I forget what they called him.

Anyway, they stood him up at attention, and they started beating him on the head with a two-by-four. Finally the kid just went down in a pile, you know?

Flatt: Oh, my.

Yetter: Everybody was just, you know... We was just standing there at attention. They said, "Well, we've killed him." They said, "We're not going to bury him, because he's not worth burying." They marched us back to our quarters. The next morning, we got up; we had all new DIs. What had happened, that this kid had finally came to and made it back to sickbay. Then I guess our DIs were reported, and we had all new Dis. They were a lot better men than our first DIs.

Flatt: Well, you know, Korea is known as the first war where there were orders to have integrated troops. It sounds like these particular DIs weren't as good at following orders as they expected you to be.

Yetter: That's probably true. (laughs) Anyway, it was quite an experience. Then, from Camp Matthews, just before we went overseas, they sent us up to Lake Tahoe. There's a place called Big Bear Mountain. We had to march through the snow. We were only supposed to be up there five days, and there's a blizzard



came along. So we were up there for two weeks. They couldn't get in to us, and we couldn't get out.

You just had to buddy up with another Marine, and each had a shelter half, what were called shelter halves. We made kind of a little, make-believe tent and used our rifles as a tent pole. Along about 3:00 in the morning, the snow would drift up over your little tent, and you'd have to get out of your tent and walk in a circle the rest of the night. You weren't the only one; that was happening to everybody.

Flatt: Was the snow making the tent collapse?

Yetter: Yeah, it was drifting over the tent. We had one kid that, he tried to run away. I don't know where he thought he was going. Anyway, they caught him and brought him back. He was in for a lot of trouble, I'm sure, when he got back to San Diego.

Flatt: Well, did they have any kind of subsistence rations for you or anything?

Yetter: We had C-rations<sup>1</sup>; that's all we had.

Flatt: But at least they had enough of that for you.

Yetter: Well, they give you so many in your pack. They're just little, oh, I'm going to say about that big around and that high, little cans.

Flatt: So, about the size of a regular vegetable can or a soup can, something like that.

Yetter: Yeah, right. Then you had little... They called them Sternos. This little thing would burn a little flame, like a candle. You set that little can of food on top of that candle, (laughs) or that Sterno, and that's the way you kind of half-heated your food.

Flatt: But when you went up there, you only expected to be there five days, you said, and you were there two weeks. So, you had enough C-rations?

Yetter: Yeah. Finally, after so long, after the blizzard kind of let up, they did get into us with, they called them Weasels. They're kind of like a tank that rolled over the snow. They did get in to us. A couple of days before we left, we had hot food.

Flatt: That must have been a relief. Oh, boy!

---

<sup>1</sup>Individually canned, pre-cooked, and prepared wet rations, issued to U.S. military land forces when fresh food (A-rations) or packaged unprepared food (B-rations) prepared in mess halls or field kitchens, were not possible or available and when a survival ration (K-rations or D-rations) was insufficient. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C-ration>)

Yetter: It was. (laughs, sneezes) On the way, nobody got sick up there, when we were in the cold. But as soon as we got back to the bus, where it was warm, and we got back to San Diego, why, everybody got colds. I had a real bad throat on the way to Korea [for which] they gave me some penicillin shots. I was pretty well back to normal when I got to Korea.

Flatt: Well, Curly, I think that's about where we picked up the last time, because we had you coming down from Big Bear Mountain. I really appreciate the fact that you've been willing to put up with our machine problems here, because it's interesting to fill in that whole story. Those are important things that we need to learn. I'm just going to comment that I know, from speaking with other service people, that the whole training is much more geared toward teamwork, working with your buddy, being part of an important team and observing discipline. They're just as tough on discipline as they ever were, but there's no more of the business of physical discipline.

Yetter: One thing they taught you to do—and this is in training—if a grenade was thrown at you, and it landed with a group of men, the closest man to it was supposed to take his helmet, put it over it, and then lay down on the helmet. That would muffle the... It would kill him, but it'd save the others.

Flatt: And that happened, over and over again; didn't it?

Yetter: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Flatt: Brave men. Well, thanks again, Curly. I appreciate your time, and again, thank you for your service to America.

Yetter: Okay, well, you're quite welcome.

Flatt: Very good! Fifteen minutes.

Yetter: Have we got it? (laughs)

(pause in audio)

Flatt: Okay, we're back on wire here. You're coming down from Big Bear Mountain. Why don't we pick it up there, Curly?

Yetter: Okay. Like I said, nobody got sick when we was up there, but when they got on the warm bus, most guys had colds and bad throats and that sort of thing. So, anyway, we spent a couple of days down in San Diego. Then we got boarded ship. Five thousand men got on board. The ship was called the *General Walker*, I think it was the *William Walker*.

Flatt: Now, that's the general who was killed, early in the Korean War, in an accident, isn't it?

Yetter: It could be; I don't know.

Flatt: I think so.

Yetter: They called it the *General Walker*.<sup>2</sup>

Flatt: They probably named that in his honor. Was this a strictly navy ship from the beginning, or is this one of these...?

Yetter: It was just an old troop ship. It was just old, rusty showers, and it was just 5,000 men, all packed on a little bitty boat. Well, before we get into that, we got on board, and then we left. As we were pulling out, there were people on the dock waving, and everybody was waving back. Everything was kind of funny, until you got out about a couple of miles. Guys finally started realizing it wasn't too damn funny, you know, where they were going. So everything got real quiet. (laughs) I believe you could almost [have] heard a pin drop.

Flatt: Well, I'm not surprised. The realization hit, yeah.

Yetter: So, anyway, we were on board ship. On the way over—it took us twenty-two days to get over there—we had stainless steel tables. You didn't sit at them; you just would stand and eat your food. [We] had them old powdered eggs that were green, and this old... we called it horse cock; it was (both laugh) kind of like salami, you know. We did get one orange on the way over.

Flatt: An orange. That was the only decent food you had all the way over? (both laugh)

Yetter: On the way over, we lost a guy. Nobody ever knew what happened to him. They kept calling; they called for him over the intercom, all the way to Korea. Never heard of him, and nobody ever knew what happened or anything, whether he fell overboard or maybe had an enemy that threw him overboard, or... I don't know. I didn't know the guy, but I know that they kept calling for him.

We landed at Kobe, Japan, and we were there for two days. We left our sea bags in a warehouse, with our clothes. Then we went on over to Korea. The big ship couldn't get in close to the shore at Pusan, so there was LSTs; they'd come out.

Flatt: Landing ship tank, wasn't that what that stood for? LST was landing ship tank?

---

<sup>2</sup> The *Walker* was renamed in 1950 after World War II U.S. Army General Nelson M. Walker, killed in France shortly after the D-Day invasion. It saw active service during the Korean War by regularly transporting American soldiers and Marines from West Coast ports to Inchon. (<http://www.vietnamgraffiti.com/the-ship-history>)

Yetter: I think so, something like that. Anyway, as we were going in, well, they told us... They stood us up on deck, and they said, "Now, some of you guys, I want you to listen up. Look to the guy next to you, and one of you won't be coming back this way." So, they were telling you it was going to be pretty tough. So, when we were going in on the LST, the fellows that we were replacing, they were coming out to get on a ship. (laughs) They were yelling, "You mf-ers will be sorry!" They were yelling at us.

Flatt: Were they Marines?

Yetter: Yeah, they were Marines that were coming out. Then, when we got in, off the LST at Pusan, why, as we went off the ship, it was just box after box of candy bars. You just take all the candy bars you wanted. So, I didn't know what was going on, where I was going to go, so I just filled my pockets with candy bars. Then, they put us on trucks, and then they trucked us up to the front.

Flatt: Did you have an assignment at that point, or...?

Yetter: No. They took us to service battalion. My group went to service battalion.

Flatt: Now, what does a service battalion mean?

Yetter: Well, they service, I don't know, trucks and take care of... Oh, where we took the bodies, back to service battalion.

Flatt: So, it was kind of everything that wasn't the fighting, the guys up on the front, throwing them...

Yetter: Yeah. So, the officer asked me. He said he wanted to know what I'd done in civilian life. I said, "Well, I was a farmer, and I did help at a funeral home." And he said, "Oh, you helped at a funeral home?" He said, "Well, we'll just put you in grave registration, then. So, then they put me in grave registration. I was there at service battalion for probably... I'm going to say a week, something like that.

Then they said, "Well, we'll send you up to the front." You know, the front actually was a battalion. We stayed at the battalion, and then, when they... like if they got in a big battle or got somebody killed, they would call down and have us come get the body.

Flatt: All right, now, the front was where, at that point?

Yetter: It would be at the thirty-eighth parallel.

Flatt: On the east coast, north of Pusan?

Yetter: Let's see... Yeah, it would be on the east coast.

- Flatt: You were there...I know later, you were farther west.
- Yetter: Yeah. We were up there, and then we were only up on the east coast for about, I think, six weeks. They got orders to move the whole First Marine Division over to Panmunjom. We had lunch, and then we were going to leave right at 1:00, had to head for Panmunjom.
- The first time I ever heard incoming...We called it incoming mail; that's a shell coming in. What had happened, we'd had our dinner. [I was] walking beside this major, had a big cigar in his mouth. We were walking along, and he heard that, and boy, he flopped down. I went down, too. That shell hit our mess hall and just blew the shit out of it. (laughs) We called it the mess hall. It was a—
- Flatt: It was a mess. (laughs)
- Yetter: It was kind of a big tent, you know, had board tables and stuff in there, where you ate. Then we left at 1:00 that afternoon—
- Flatt: Can I ask you another question, Curly? I know you've been a hunter since you came home, because you and my husband hunt together. Were you a hunter before you went into the service?
- Yetter: A little bit, yeah.
- Flatt: So, you knew what gunfire sounded like?
- Yetter: Oh, yeah.
- Flatt: Of course, artillery fire's a little different than a shotgun or a rifle.
- Yetter: Yeah, right.
- Flatt: So, you knew what that sound was; didn't you?
- Yetter: Well, really, it was kind of a flutter. Just kind of a flutter when it came down.
- Flatt: What kind of ammunition makes that kind of flutter?
- Yetter: Well, is was...I don't know is you'd call it mortar; it'd be artillery, enemy artillery is what it was.
- Flatt: Because you didn't hear or report back at the muzzle of whatever it was?
- Yetter: No, unh-uh. So, then we left at 1:00 in the afternoon. We drove all that afternoon, all night that night, and the next afternoon...It must have been about 4:00, we got over to Panmunjom. Then we were scattered out wherever they wanted us. I spent the rest of my time over there.

Flatt: Did you pass Bunker Hill on the way to Panmunjon?

Yetter: Yeah, we were pretty close to Bunker Hill. We had a BAR in every foxhole at one time. It was a hotspot. Then, one time—I don't know whether it was on Bunker Hill or not—I was up on outpost. It was Easter Sunday morning, and the planes were strafing an enemy hill, not too far away from us, maybe, I'm going to say less than a half a mile away from us.



*Easter Sunday. Returning to their tent (arrow) from watching an air strike. Sergeant Yetter in front, then Sergeant Crandall and Cpl. McNeil.*

Flatt: Were you worried about friendly fire?

Yetter: No, not at that time, we weren't. What they were doing, they were dropping napalm on this enemy hill, and it just... Those poor guys. I bet it just burnt the hell out of a bunch of them. We could hear the burp guns shooting at the planes when they went over, but then the burp gun didn't really hurt that much on an airplane.

Flatt: For our listeners, a burp gun is what? A mortar?

Yetter: A burp gun was an enemy machine gun, actually, kind of a little gun like a submachine gun. They had all different... They had some they called grease guns and burp guns, and I don't know what all.

Flatt: Sounds like each one has its own sound.

Yetter: Yeah, uh-huh.

Flatt: You get to know what's coming at you. (laughs)

Yetter: Yeah, you finally get to know that. Well, then we were there until I left to come back home; we were at Panmunjon.

Flatt: So, which Marine group were you in?



*Sergeant Yetter proudly stands in front of a sign for the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment (Marines) near his unit's Command Post.*

Yetter: Fifth Marines.

Flatt: And the graves registration?

Yetter: I was with the Fifth Marines.

Flatt: Did you have to do this alone?

Yetter: No. No, there was a five-man team. We'd just take this old truck and go up, and we'd... [It] depends on how many guys got killed.

Flatt: So, your job was to retrieve the dead?

Yetter: Yeah.

Flatt: You didn't do anything with wounded; you took strictly those that were known to be dead?



*Graves Reg'n teammates: Cpl. Linwood McNeil "Mac", Sergeant Kenneth DeWhitte, Sergeant Claude Crandall.*

Yetter: Strictly dead, yeah.

Flatt: So, you had to go to collect them. What did you have, body bags or...?

Yetter: Yeah, we had—

Flatt: Tell us a little bit about what you did on that job.

Yetter: Well, you just have to go up and get them, put them in... I don't think... We didn't put them in body bags, until we got them down to service battalion, and then they put them in body bags. But they were just usually on stretchers or some of them, just laying there. We'd just pick them up and put them in our



*Randall, Mac, Van, Coutts and DeWhitte in the body retrieval truck.*

truck and take them back to service battalion.

Flatt: Once you got them there, then what did you do?

Yetter: At service battalion? Well, we put them in body bags, and then we left. And whoever was down there took them down to Seoul.

Flatt: Well, now, the term was graves registration. Did you have to identify them at that point?

Yetter: No, what we had to do, we had to go through their personal effects to see that there wasn't something in the personal effects that the family wouldn't want to see. I mean, they'd been on—

Flatt: They'd been on leave in Japan? (laughs)

Yetter: Yeah, you know, and they'd have pictures of them and prostitutes and all that, so you wouldn't want that to go back to the family. That's what we done. We had to go through their pockets.

Flatt: So, you really didn't do identification, *per se*, then?

Yetter: No. Well, the identification, of course, we'd get their dog-tags, and we had to put them... Oh, I've got one of them little... It's a little sack, about that big around, cloth. We'd have to write their name on that and their rank and all that, and then we'd put everything in there and tie it shut. Then we'd tie it to their big toe, and then that would go with them.

Flatt: And their personal effects were in there, their dog-tag?

Yetter: Yeah, their dog-tags, like, letters from home, and—

Flatt: Personal effects. I'm sure you saw some things that were pretty hard to look at.

Yetter: Yeah, I think I told you about the fellow that got hit directly with a mortar, and there was only two legs and a pair of ribs left. The head was gone. We had to go out and look for his head; we couldn't find it. The only thing we could do for identification was get a statement from one of the other fellows. He said he didn't know who it was, but somebody's guts hit his bayonet, and he just assumed that was this fellow.

Flatt: But he didn't know who he was?

Yetter: I don't know. I suppose maybe the commanding officer, the lieutenant. After everybody was back, if this guy wasn't there, well, they know that's probably him. Oh, then you'd see... Sometimes they'd get in our lines—the gooks



would get in our lines—and we had to take care of enemy dead, as well as our own dead.

Flatt: What did you do with them?

Yetter: Well, we had Korean service workers. They were like laborers. They would dig the graves, and then we would put the dead bodies in the grave. We had a whole... I don't know how many. When we left there, I bet we had maybe fifty enemy dead, buried in this one space. It was right with the Imjin River. I've always thought I'd like to—

Flatt: Was this a common grave they were buried in, or were there individual graves?

Yetter: No, it was individual graves.

Flatt: So even the enemy were treated with respect, then?

Yetter: I would say so, yeah.



Flatt: They weren't just burned or something like that?

*Plot A was used for enemy dead. Note that the Americans treated the enemy dead with respect. The Main Service Road to the front is in the background. Just beyond is the Imjin River.*

Yetter: Yeah, I would say so. So, that was just kind of what I did. I don't know what else to tell you. Well, we'd have our personal weapon. I don't think I told you about this. When I got over there, I had a .45 automatic I carried over there, because they said you could have your own weapons. Of course, you had to use the military weapon, too. But anyway, guys had... When I first got over there, they'd have pearl-handled revolvers, just kind of like the Old West, you know? Then, they got to where everybody tried to outdraw the other guy, and some kid got shot in the leg. So the colonel said, "No more personal weapons." They took our personal weapons away from us. Then we got them back when we was just outside of San Francisco. Why, they had a whole room full of personal weapons, and you could go in there and get your weapon.

Flatt: Did you get your sea bag back, too, when you came home?

Yetter: Oh, yeah. I've got my sea bag today, right back there in the closet.

Flatt: Sometimes there'd be bodies out there, and I'd think you would be uncertain whether they were living or dead. Did you have any coordination with MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital/Military Advance Surgical Hospital] units?

Yetter: No. Of course, the guys knew where just go out and get them.

Flatt: The MASH units probably identified them as dead people, when they went out to pick up wounded; didn't they?

Yetter: I really don't know. I always had a respect for a Catholic priest. We had one young Catholic priest with us, and he would be... when we went up to get the bodies, a lot of times he'd be giving them last rites. Of course, we'd wait until he got done. I always thought a lot of him. Actually, this guy would go out on patrols at night, with the fellows, if they were going to have a patrol. I know I said to him one time—I forget his name now—I said, "Father, you don't have a weapon." He held up his Bible and said, "This is my weapon." I always really respected the guy. He was a guy that you could party with. Like back in reserve, if you wanted a bunch of guys to get together and have some drinks, why, he'd be right there one of them, you know?

Flatt: That's not the first story I've heard like that, about a chaplain.

Yetter: Is that right? I never did see another, anybody up there, any other denomination. But this Catholic priest, he was right up there with the guys.



*"An ambulance helicopter that brought in the only KIA since we have been in reserve," wrote Yetter for this photo he sent home.*

Flatt: I think you said something about an artillery duel.

Yetter: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Flatt: What was that about?

Yetter: Well, one evening, it was just about sundown. We had a whole new replacement draft come in. And we were... Like, here was a hill that we were getting; (motorcycle revs in background) our camp was right down here.

- Flatt: Go on. We had a motorcycle go by, a motor scooter, sorry.
- Yetter: Okay. Our camp was right here, and this whole replacement draft was out in this field, kind of an open area. They're waiting for the next morning, to be assigned to their different platoons. Well, it must have been about sundown that evening, we were all kind of standing around in our camp, nothing much was going on. Before I get into that, we had a little Korean barber named Figaro. Figaro was everybody's buddy, you know. You knew Figaro; he cut your hair—
- Flatt: Figaro, the Korean barber? (both laugh)
- Yetter: Yeah! Anyway, by golly, the enemy started artillery hitting. They weren't hitting us, because they had to shoot over this mountain, so to speak. They were really aiming at these new guys out here, just blowing the hell out of some of them guys. But we were right down there, where they couldn't... Well, we were getting the shrapnel from it, but—
- Flatt: The trajectory took it past you. Curly's showing me on his hand that it was a steep hill. They were at the bottom of the hill, just before it leveled out. So coming over the hill, that trajectory would go past the people that were not yet where it leveled out.
- Yetter: Right. So anyway, our artillery started firing back at their artillery. This went on... We were in our bunker; we were pretty safe in there. The shrapnel, you could hear it hit our sandbags, you know? Hell, probably shrapnel as big as plowshares, some of it, flying around. This went on all night. They'd fire at us; we'd fire at them. This kept up until about 3:30 the next morning, and then it kind of leveled off. Then our artillery called, said they had some dead over there. We went over there, and we picked up seventeen dead bodies. I don't know how many they had that were—
- Flatt: Were they North Koreans or were they Chinese or both?
- Yetter: No, they were our troops.
- Flatt: Oh! Our troops, you were picking up at that time. That's tough.
- Yetter: I don't know how many was wounded. So, we picked them up. But, you know, during this battle, this artillery duel, nobody... The intelligence, we had a South Korean intelligence [officer] with us, and they couldn't find Figaro; Figaro was gone. They finally got to looking around, they found Figaro, up on top of the hill, and he was calling artillery in on our guys.
- Flatt: He was their observation post.

- Yetter: Yeah, he was a spy, a North Korean spy. So, I don't know what happened to Figaro. The story was that they cut his throat, but you know, we never saw Figaro anymore. (laughs)
- Flatt: Well, that's something you face in war, isn't it? Did you have any other contact with enemy people?
- Yetter: You mean, with enemy dead?
- Flatt: Well, with the dead. Of course, you were not on the line, so—
- Yetter: We were on the line sometimes.
- Flatt: But you were going up when things probably were quieter, weren't you?
- Yetter: Well, sometimes. Sometimes it was still going on. Whenever they called us, we'd go up. We had artificial moonlight. Our old truck, when you went up at night, [you] just had little peepholes in the—
- Flatt: Cats' eyes?
- Yetter: ...headlights. They were about like that, just little slits. So, you could just kind of halfway see where you were driving.
- Flatt: I heard another army man—or soldier, Marine or somebody—describe those as cats' eyes. He said you could barely see.
- Yetter: Yeah, right. Yeah, they were cats' eyes. And then we had the artificial moonlight. They're great big searchlights in back of us. They would shine up and light that whole front up, so you could see, you know, not too well, but you could see movement if somebody was coming at you.
- Flatt: Sure. And the purpose there was to be able to direct your fire?
- Yetter: Yeah, uh-huh. I don't know how big those searchlights were, but I would say they were at least eight or ten feet in diameter, because they were huge things, to light that whole front up.
- Flatt: Did you have any particular contact with the Koreans, aside from the service workers who dug the graves? How about any of the Korean soldiers? Did you have any contact with them?
- Yetter: Not really. I knew there were some that were soldiers, but we were with... The Scots were on our left flank, and the Limeys were on our right flank. The Limeys, that's English.
- Flatt: These were U.N. troops, because this was a U.N. action, United Nations action.

Yetter: And we also had the... What do you call them? They cut themselves just to draw blood on their—

Flatt: The Turks?

Yetter: The Turks. And nobody ever fooled with them. You didn't associate at all with the Turks. [We were] told not to, because they were just bloody bastards. If they drew that knife, why, if they didn't stick somebody with it, they'd cut their own self and get blood on it, get their own blood on it. That was the story, anyway. They were pretty tough, but nobody associated with the Turks.

Flatt: I've heard this story before.

Yetter: But the Limeys, they were okay, and the Scots, they were really... They liked to party, you know? (Flatt laughs) Not much going on, why... We went up there one late afternoon, and everything was quiet, and, of course, we were back in the reserve, and I guess they were too. (laughs) Anyway, they called out, got out the bagpipes and they had a parade.

Flatt: Oh! Did they wear their kilts?

Yetter: No, they didn't have their kilts. They did have the bagpipes, a few of them.

Flatt: I can't imagine a Scot playing the bagpipe without a kilt!

Yetter: Anyway, we had a fellow that was a big Scotsman, only he was one of our fellows. He had his bagpipe over there. Anyway, this one Scottish major, he had something to drink. I don't know what the name of it was, but it tastes real good. It had an orange flavor, you know, just have all of it you want. Well, what it was, I don't [know], but I remember going



*Sergeant Yetter strikes a pose while also illustrating the rugged terrain in Korea.*

back to our tent that night. I was laying on the... They had real wash[board] roads. I wasn't the only one laying on the floor of the truck, my head was just going like that (slapping sound). (both laugh) But I didn't really feel that bad, because I had too much to drink.

- Flatt: You couldn't feel a thing! Beware of orange-flavored liquor. Were there any other...Did you have any Australians or Czechs or Poles or anybody like that?
- Yetter: There were Australians there. Oh, of course, we never got around that much, but there were other nationalities there, with the U.N. troops.
- Flatt: But the two that flanked you were the—
- Yetter: The Limeys and the Scottish troops.
- Flatt: Well, that's interesting. I think we tend to forget that that was a United Nations action, that we, in fact, had very coordinated efforts. Let me take you back again to something we talked about, way back at boot camp. That is, did you have many black soldiers? Any colored soldiers?
- Yetter: A few.
- Flatt: A few? Did it seem to work well? Were they integrated well?
- Yetter: Yeah, we got along with them. Of course, I was short. They had, in the platoon, they had, the taller fellows up in front, and as the shorter ones...Of course, I was short, you know, so I had one little fellow ahead of me. His name was Stuart. He was a little colored fellow, and he'd been in prison. He had scars on his leg. He said, well, he'd got shot. He'd robbed a filling station, and he got shot in the leg. So, then he went to prison. But he said, "I'll tell you," he said, "prison wasn't anything like this." (laughs) [He] was in boot camp.
- Flatt: I imagine. Continuing with this, tell me a little bit about your observation of how well integrated the black troops and white guys were.
- Yetter: Yeah, I really couldn't...We didn't have any problems with them.
- Flatt: No problems? Good. Now, we think nothing about it. I think it's very healthy that we have such a well-integrated force. Let me ask you a few questions about the things like...We've already talked about, the mail. Did you get any more fudge?
- Yetter: No, never got any more fudge. And if I would have got fudge in training, other than boot camp, it'd have been fine.
- Flatt: Yeah, or over there at the front.
- Yetter: We could get what we called 190-proof alcohol. We'd get it from the medics. But you couldn't drink it; it was so strong. So, I wrote my mom and told her, "We'd sure like to have some orange juice and grapefruit juice (laughs) and that sort of thing." And so—

Flatt: Maybe that's what that Scottish major had. (laughs)

Yetter: Anyway, Mom would send me this all kind of orange juice and grapefruit juice. What we were doing, we were cutting it, and half of it would be juice, and the other half would be 190-proof alcohol. So, that's what we done to get...

I had a bet one time that I could swallow 190-proof alcohol. I bet a [medical] corpsman I could. So we tried it, but I couldn't get it down. (Flatt laughs) Just could not get it down.

Flatt: How about your chow? Did you have good chow or was it all...?

Yetter: Oh, over there, when we were at a battalion, we had good... Somewhere there was a bakery around there, and they had eggs and bacon, you know? You ate outside, but—

Flatt: But you got a hot meal.

Yetter: ...but it was good. And the guys online, you know, they'd have maybe two platoons up and one back, and then they'd rotate. So, either one [that was] back, they would have good meals. I say they were good, but they weren't—

Flatt: Well, they were hot meals and not like eating C-rations out of a can. (laughs)

Yetter: Yeah. We could take the boots off of the guys that were dead, and this... I think the mess sergeant probably was doing something with them. Anyway, we'd trade him boots for fresh bread, fresh loaves of bread, and we could have our own bread up there. (laughs) I think he must have been maybe having a black market or something far as boots, I don't know.



*Sergeant Yetter (right) and Sergeant Kenneth DeWhitte cooking pheasant in a field-rigged fryer.*

Flatt: Oh, really. (both laugh)

Yetter: Anyway, we could trade. You know, we had pheasants over there. You could take the brush guns out—they're just like sawed-off shotguns—and kill pheasants. I was the only guy that knew how to dress a pheasant, and so I'd take—

Flatt: Well, you were a farm boy!

Yetter: Yeah. (laughs) I'd take my helmet liner out of my helmet, then put water in there and get that helmet over the fire and get it real hot, then I'd scald the pheasant and take the feathers off of it. That's another thing we'd done. We'd trade the mess sergeant boots for his little cans of oleo [margarine]. They're about that big around, I think like a gallon. We'd drop the parts of pheasants in that boiling oleo, and it was pretty good.

Flatt: (laughs) Just like everybody's deep-frying turkeys now. You were deep-frying pheasants.

Yetter: So, finally the pheasants got smart. They got to hiding in the minefields. Some kid stepped on a mine, hunting pheasants, so then the colonel said, "No more pheasant hunting."

Flatt: Did it kill him?

Yetter: I think it did.

Flatt: Oh, boy. That's sad, isn't it? How about accommodations? Were you living in tents or what?

Yetter: We were in kind of a five-man tent. It was, oh, I'd say maybe a tent like...I don't think, maybe from this wall to that wall, maybe not quite that big.



*The team's tent. Home Sweet Home for a year. The large cans hold their water supply which was hauled from a central tank and made potable with halogen tablets.*

Flatt: Maybe ten by twenty feet, something like that?



- Yetter: Yeah, something like that. It was just so you could have your cots; we had cots, and five men could get in one. We did have oil stoves. We had big pots of...a stove that was just a round pot. Then you had your oil barrel out here and then the line coming in. So, really, we had it pretty good, as far as being warm.
- Flatt: Yeah, because you were there in winter.
- Yetter: Oh, yeah. Yeah, the climate in Korea is the same as it is here. The only thing is that in August they have the monsoon season, and it just rains all the time. They couldn't fight in the monsoon season, because you just couldn't maneuver. And, of course, we weren't trying to take ground, either. We were just stalled there at the parallel.
- Flatt: That was one of the things that was a bone of contention a lot during the war, was that we really weren't...We were just doing a holding action. And MacArthur had wanted to...He wanted to go right up into China and go after everybody. That's when he got kicked out.
- Yetter: Some of the fellows I was with had been up at the Chosin Reservoir. This one buddy of mine, he said, "When the gooks started to see, there was like, I think, 120 divisions of Chinese that were back in the hills [that] they didn't know about. When they [the gooks] started across the ice," he said, "I was on the machine gun." He said, "You just couldn't kill them fast enough." [He] said, "They was going right by us. Some of them were just young kids with sticks and blowing horns." All they knew was to go south. "Finally," he said, "they set up machine guns behind us, and said, 'Now you can retreat back as far as your foxhole, and you don't go any farther back.'" He said, "So we held." He said, "They were just going by us. Finally we got surrounded up there." And then they had to fight their way back to Pusan.
- Flatt: That was before you were there that that happened.
- Yetter: Yeah, that was before I was there.
- Flatt: So this fellow was telling you about it, your buddy.
- Yetter: Yeah. We had one general. His name was Chesty Puller; he was a famous Marine general. And Puller said, when they got surrounded, somebody said, "Well, sir, we're surrounded." And Puller said, "Those poor bastards, they'll never get away from us now." (both laugh)
- Flatt: I think he also said something to the effect, "We can shoot them in any direction."
- Yetter: (laughs) That could be!
- Flatt: I heard that story from another veteran.

- Yetter: He's famous.
- Flatt: Yeah, Chesty Puller. So, you weren't really uncomfortable. The guys on the line, they had to sleep in foxholes and wherever they could, right?
- Yetter: Well, usually we had our own tent with, you know...and it was warm in there.
- Flatt: You had your little stoves, yeah. So that wasn't too bad. How about your clothing? You said you (laughs) had two pairs of socks when you had your cold weather training. Did you have adequate clothing by that time?
- Yetter: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we had, like, if your dungarees got bloody or dirty or whatever, why you could go...They had places where you could go turn those in and get clean clothes.
- Flatt: During the winter, did you have plenty of adequate clothing?
- Yetter: Yeah, we did.
- Flatt: What kind of boots?
- Yetter: They were called Mickey Mouse boots. They were really warm boots. The only bad thing about Mickey Mouse boots is, if you wore them all day, your feet would sweat, and then your feet would get cold. I know we used to take boots off some of the bodies, and when we'd pull their boots off, there'd be ice on their socks. Really, we had pretty good, cold weather gear. I didn't at first. Like up at the Reservoir, I don't think they did.
- Flatt: Well, that's what I had heard. It was earlier, and they just weren't as well equipped for clothing.
- Yetter: Actually, they were moving too fast, that they couldn't keep up with the cold weather gear.
- Flatt: Well, I know your mom sent you mail and sent you stuff that would help you get down that 190-proof business. (both laugh) Did Rosalyn write to you?
- Yetter: Oh, yeah, Rosalyn would write me every day, and I would write her. Only on weekends she didn't. I'd always get a letter from Rosalyn; I'd write her.
- Flatt: Did mail come through pretty regularly?
- Yetter: Yeah. When we would write a letter home, it didn't charge us anything for stamps, it's just free, it's like free up there. No, it was pretty regular. Well, of course—
- Flatt: She was not going to let you off the hook; I can tell. (both laugh)

Yetter: I guess not; I don't know. Anyway, what was I going to say? Oh, we couldn't write when we were moving. I mean, like, when we left the east coast and went to the west coast, then we couldn't. I know one time, we just got swamped. They just got in a big battle, and we were up for, I think, about three days and nights without sleep, hauling bodies. It was just real bad, you know? I said that was the longest I ever went without sleep.

In fact, the medics were close to us, and they would give us something. If I remember right, it was 190-proof alcohol, and it had some codeine in it. We'd take that and mix with our juices, and we just would... You weren't really drunk; you're just kind of out of it, yet you still do your job. If I remember right, that's what they said it was. So, I guess maybe you might say we were kind of dopes, dope fiends over there. Of course, that didn't happen very often. That just happened just that once, you know.

Flatt: You were on active duty in Korea about how long? Was it was a year or so?

Yetter: About fourteen months, thirteen months.

Flatt: Tell me about when your time came to come home. Did you have a point thing, or did you just come home on time?

Yetter: See, some of the fellows that we were with, they hadn't been over there as long as we had. There were, I think, two of us that were what I'm going to call seniors. You know, if a guy's time was up, if his year was up, then he'd rotate back to the back, and they'd send a guy up there to take his place.

So, this fellow and I, when our time came, why, we just... Somebody came to replace us, and we got on this little train, with a bunch of other fellows, and they took us back to Ascom City, where we turned in our cold weather clothes. We was only supposed to be there about twelve hours, and the LST broke a rudder on the way in, and we were, I think, there for two days, without heat and no cold weather stuff.

Flatt: You had turned in your stuff?

Yetter: Yeah.

Flatt: Oh, boy!

Yetter: So, these guys, they had in tents, but the flaps weren't even... There's no heat in them; no flaps were buttoned down; the wind is about ten above zero, and you just have to huddle together to—

Flatt: It's like being back at Lake Tahoe, except the chow probably wasn't as good.

Yetter: (laughs) Yeah.

Flatt: So, when did you leave Korea, finally, and from where?

Yetter: We left Korea...I think it was February 22, 1953. We went to Kobe, Japan, picked up our sea bags, and then we got on board the ship. This was a real nice ship that we got on. They had tables we could sit at, and we had ice cream, and we had butter for our bread, and it was just a real nice... warm, fresh water showers. See, on that one we went over on, it just had old rusty showers. You didn't have any soap or anything. You just stood in there and let the salt water run all over. (laughs)

Flatt: Salt water, to boot. Didn't you get a fresh water rinse or anything?

Yetter: No, just—

Flatt: Oh, salt water's terrible! (laughs)

Yetter: A lot of the guys wouldn't even take showers. Some guys would throw a line and throw their clothes over the side of the boat, and let the sea water wash them. I know when I got to Korea—because I took salt water showers quite often—my towel that I dried with, I believe you just stood it up.

Flatt: Stood it right on end, huh? (both laugh) It's a tall towel! So, you got ice cream and butter. Those must have been real treats, after you'd been—

Yetter: Oh, yeah, [you] got a table to sit by, even had tablecloths on our table, so we were really living it up then.

Flatt: Living high on the hog, as we farmers say. (both laugh) So, where did you dock when you came back in?

Yetter: We docked at San Francisco. I remember the first...I hadn't seen a neon sign for a year, and right out of San Francisco—it was night when we pulled in there—I saw a sign that said, "Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer." It's a neon sign. Boy, that looked good to me.

Flatt: Did you start salivating? (both laugh) You came back in March of '53, I think.

Yetter: That's correct, yeah.

Flatt: And what happened then, from San Francisco?

Yetter: Well, then I got a thirty-day leave and came home to see my folks. And I think I saw Rosalyn every night, almost.

Flatt: (laughs) Imagine that. (both laugh) For our listeners, Rosalyn is a very beautiful woman.

Yetter: So, then I went back to (sneezes) Camp Pendleton and finished my time at Camp Pendleton, then came home. [I] got released from San Diego and came on back home.

Flatt: So, you were in just two years exactly, weren't you?

Yetter: Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah, I got released on the sixteenth of August, the sixteenth or seventeenth of August of 1953.

Flatt: How did it feel to come home?

Yetter: Ah, it feels great! You know, I will always remember that, when I went first was in California, remember how pretty those palm trees were. And when I left there, I never wanted to see another palm tree. (Flatt laughs) And I remember coming back, I'd see the timbers, how beautiful they were. It was just such a thrill to see a timber, if you hadn't seen a timber for a year. I'll always remember that.

So, we got back home, and then I started farming again. Rosalyn and I got married on July 31, 1955, and then the kids came along. Had three sons, we did. So here we are today, an old man of eighty years old. (both laugh)

Flatt: They have three sons, all professionals, who chose to remain and live in Havana. They're a very close family.

Yetter: We feel really fortunate about that.

Flatt: Let me just ask you to reflect a little, before we talk a little bit. I want to ask you a couple of things about your farming. What was your opinion of your fellow soldiers, in general, not individuals, but did you feel that the Marines were—

Yetter: I felt that, if I had to be in there, that I was glad I was with Marines. Like, when I go to bed at night, when I'd go to my bunk, I'd always think, I'm glad that we've got marines up ahead of us. (background voice interrupts)

Flatt: There's a saying I've heard many times, "Once a Marine, always a Marine," and you still feel the same way, I know.

Yetter: Yeah, that's right, once a Marine, always a Marine.

Flatt: I know that you fly that Marine flag right under the American flag—



*Eldon and Roslyn Yetter, taken in their home in Havana, Illinois in 2009.*

- Yetter: Oh, yeah!
- Flatt: ...out on your flagpole, in your corner yard. What about the officers? How did you feel about your officers?
- Yetter: Oh, they were okay. The commanding officers...In fact, when I was just about ready to come home, why, [I] had this one staff sergeant—No, he wasn't; he was a first lieutenant—and he said, if I'd ship over, they'd make me a staff sergeant. I was a sergeant, then. I said, "No," I told him what I had back home, and I said, "I'm not interested." But, you know, the officers were okay. [I] don't have any complaints about them.
- Flatt: Once you got rid of those DIs back at—
- Yetter: Yeah. Oh, they were tough; I'll tell you.
- Flatt: Well, that was too much.
- Yetter: I seen them, you know, even take guys by the...have their head here and just run them across the room and bang their head into wall lockers and all that kind of stuff.
- Flatt: Not necessary. Were a lot of the officers ones that had been in for a while? Were any of them World War II people?
- Yetter: I'm sure they were, but I—
- Flatt: Didn't differentiate; they were just Marines, right?
- Yetter: Yeah. In other words, actually, the officers had...They weren't right with you all the time. I mean, they lived a little bit separate. You didn't get to be buddy-buddy with the officers. They were nice guys.
- Flatt: Well, you know, I think it's important to respect your officers, if they deserve respect. Did you feel that your officers deserved respect?
- Yetter: Oh, yeah, yeah. I had no bad feeling about the officers.
- Flatt: That's good, all right. Well, we have you back at home in Havana and farming. What kind of farming did you do, just briefly?
- Yetter: Raised corn, wheat and soy beans, and that sort of thing. Had pigs...No, I didn't have any livestock when I got back. I just did green farming, so to speak.
- Flatt: Did you do any specialty green farming?
- Yetter: No, I didn't, but in later years, after I quit farming, why, then our farm tenant raised green beans and cucumbers and popcorn, that sort of thing.

Flatt: Well, you have one very nice, special advantage here. You're on an aquifer, I understand, and what does that help do for farming?

Yetter: Well, we had irrigation, yeah, a lot of irrigation. I had irrigation systems. You could water your crops in dry weather. That's one great advantage, because it's so sandy soil around here. So, I did watch my crops burn up several times, before we had irrigation.

Flatt: Well, you also conducted a business related to farming. Why don't you tell us briefly about that?

Yetter: Oh, my insurance business? Well, (coughs) they wanted me to sell crop insurance. I don't know how the guy got next to me, but anyway, he got me interested in selling hail insurance for Farmers' Mutual Hail Insurance Company. So, I started selling that. Then, my friend, Ed Niederer, said, "Well, if you're going to sell that, why don't you just get a broker's license and sell all kinds of insurance?"

So, I studied, and Rosalyn helped me study my book about getting my broker's license. I passed the test, and then I started selling other kinds of insurance. We finally ended up... We had the company office here; it was a small, county mutual insurance company. We had the office here in our home, until we retired. Then I still kept my crop insurance. I still sell hail insurance, to this day. It's not a big thing, but it gives me something to do, and I make a little money out of it.

Flatt: Gives you an excuse to go down and have coffee with the boys.

Yetter: Well, yeah, right. (laughs)

Flatt: Well, you're good about keeping in touch with your clients, I know. You also are active in veterans' groups here, I believe.

Yetter: Yeah. I belong to the American Legion and the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars. I help with parades and funerals and that sort of thing. I'm sergeant-at-arms in the local [American] Legion, here in Havana.

Flatt: Now, you say you help with funerals; tell us what that entails.

Yetter: Well, it's called the military rites, where you take the flag and the Legion flag... The VFW and the



*Eldon proudly stands next to the U.S. and Marine Corps flag in displayed in front of his Havana, Illinois home in 2009.*

American Legion work together. If there's a veteran that's going to be buried, if the family wants military rites, [we] take the flags out to the cemetery and, when we see the procession coming, we get lined up, and then we have a firing squad, and then they play their "Taps," at the end of the funeral. They shoot a volley of shots three times. So that's what we do.

Flatt: And then does the flag get given to the widow or the mother or some family person?

Yetter: Sometimes we fold the flag and sometimes not. Sometimes the flag's already folded. If it's just on the casket, then we take the flag and fold it, two of us, and when we get it folded, we present it to whoever [is] the nearest relative, the wife or mother, whoever it would be.

Flatt: Did you Marine experience overseas have any effect on your life?

Yetter: Oh, (coughs) I can't say that it had a lot of effect. One time—I do have depression sometimes—and at one time, I thought I was in depression. I was reliving Korea all the time, in my mind. I thought, at that time, that maybe it did. But then the psychiatrist I went to then, he said he didn't think it was...that it wasn't service-related.

Flatt: Even though you were dreaming about it all the time?

Yetter: Yeah. But in later years, I was told that they now think maybe it does have an effect on you. I don't know.

Flatt: So, have you used the veterans' services available, the medical services?

Yetter: Oh, yeah. Yeah, all my medicine comes from the VA [Veterans Administration].

Flatt: Do you feel you've had good treatment there?

Yetter: Oh, yes, very good treatment.

Flatt: Good, I'm glad to hear that. Do you have any advice for young people or future generations about—?

Yetter: Not really. Just try to stay out of trouble. (both laugh)

Flatt: Do what the drill instructor says.

Yetter: Yeah, right.

Flatt: Well, Curly, I want to thank you for two things. The most important is thank you for your service to our country.

Yetter: You're welcome.



Flatt: And...(voice breaking) thanks for time for this interview.

Yetter: Oh, well, that's perfectly okay. I really kind of enjoyed it.

Flatt: Well, I hope it doesn't make you relive things that you'd like not to relive anymore.

Yetter: No, I don't... This wouldn't make any difference. I mean, this is stuff that... I don't always talk about it, like I talked to you, but anyway, this is as I remember my experience in the Marine Corps; that's all. That's about all I have to say.

Flatt: Well, thanks again!

Yetter: You're welcome.

Flatt: I appreciate your time.

(end of interview)