

**VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**  
**Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations**

**Interview with**

**Frank Kalisik**

**Conducted by Deb Barrett**

**June 7, 2017**

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in partnership with the Library of Congress**

**This interview is being conducted on Wednesday, June 7, 2017, with Mr. Frank Kalisik at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Mr. Kalisik was born on February 17, 1930, in Rossford, Ohio, a suburb of Toledo. He is a retired Executive Vice President of Development and Engineering from Continental Plastic Containers, and learned of the Veterans History Project from John Costello, a fellow member of the Darien Veterans of Foreign Wars. Also with us today is Frank's daughter, Sue Kalisik. Mr. Kalisik has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.**

### **Life Before Entering Military Service**

**So, Frank, where were you living before you entered the service? What was your life like at that time?**

I was living in Rossford, Ohio, with Mom and Dad, and 3 brothers and 3 sisters. I was going to a high school – a vocational school instead of a college prep school because my Dad wanted me to have a skill. So he actually sent me to Toledo, Ohio, to the Macomber Vocational School, so that I could pick up a skill. The skill I was being taught at the school was auto mechanics. So my tenth and eleventh grades in high school were two weeks in classrooms for a regular education – English, math and so forth – and two weeks in a shop or working for somebody as an apprentice in auto mechanics.

**So you just flip-flopped back and forth – two weeks of one then two weeks of the other?**

That is correct. And there was also another group that took my job when I was in school, and I took the job when he was in school – another guy and I had the same job: two weeks on and two weeks off.

**So you shared the job.**

Yes, we did. And we also shared the shop at the school. The school also had a shop that if you didn't have a job you could still stay in the shop and still be trained in the career you were looking for.

**You said you went into the Army.**

Yes, I did. Instead of going into my senior year, in August of 1946 my friend and I decided we wanted to join the Army because the GI Bill was going to expire at the end of the year. We decided we should have the GI Bill. We said, "Oh, boy. That's going to be great and we could go to college." So we joined the Army.

**So you were 16 at the time.**

I was 16 at the time. That is correct.

**How did your parents react when you told them you wanted to go into the Army?**

My two brothers were already in and out. There was a big family at home – there were seven kids. So they said, “Fine! Where do I sign?”

**So, even though you were under age, they were okay with it.**

Yes. They were.

**Did they have to give their permission?**

They had to sign the papers, yes. So they signed the papers. Then I needed the papers to be verified by some legal person that they signed it, which I had done. So all we had to do was turn the papers in to the Army.

**So you had three years of high school and were just waiting for your senior year, and that’s when you went in.**

That is correct. I had 9, 10, and 11. I was supposed to graduate in June of 1947, and all those guys I met in Japan later on did graduate from the Rossford High School in June of 1947, and most of them were draftees, or about to be drafted and joined up also. So, from my little town there were eight of us in the Yokohama area who would meet on the weekends and drink a little beer and stuff like that.

**Why did you choose the Army?**

Well, to join the Navy was a two-year enlistment, but you had to bring your parents to the recruiting station. I didn’t think that would work too well, so we didn’t do the two-year program with the Navy. After we first tried we figured out it probably wasn’t going to work for me, so we then switched over to the Army, which had 18 month enlistments.

We filled out the papers, got them notarized and brought them in. That was it.

**Induction and Basic Training**

**When did you go into the service?**

August of 1946.

**Where were you inducted?**

Camp Atterbury in Indianapolis, Indiana.

**What do you remember of those first days? What was your induction like?**

Induction was very simple. You get shots and this and that. But that was not a problem for the first day.

**Were there a lot of guys getting inducted at the same time as you?**

Yes, sure. But my buddy and I were being inducted together.

**How did you get from Ohio to Indianapolis?**

I really don't remember how I got there. I did a lot of trips, though, from Indianapolis to Rossford by hitch-hiking, because I was retained at Camp Atterbury for about six weeks. During that six weeks I had weekends off. So I would go home, and I would hitch-hike to Rossford, and on Monday morning I'd hitch-hike back.

**In your uniform?**

In uniform, and absolutely no problem. I could get almost to my doorstep.

**So when you were inducted, you got to Camp Atterbury. Were you inducted individually? Was it a group? Did they process you in long lines getting shots?**

Yes, we did all of that. Also, when we had spare time – Camp Atterbury was phasing down, so we were used to do little details. One of the details we were doing was the closing of the PX, which is a military store. In the PX was a stand-up piano. They wanted the stand-up piano taken to the dump. So we loaded the stand-up piano into a two-and-a-half ton truck, which had a cover over the top. We got it loaded up. The truck backed up to a little fire in the dumper where we were going to dump it, and we were going to push it over.

But somebody said, "You can't do that. Because if you dump it over it will hit the top of the truck and take the top off." It was a canvas top. "You have to lay it down first." So we said fine, we would lay it down. Then we were laying it down, asking if everybody's feet were out of the way. And we dropped it. Somebody didn't have their foot out of the way. That's why I was there six weeks. I spent six weeks at Wakeman General Hospital, which was a general hospital at Camp Atterbury, and all the guys who were still recovering for a year after the war were in there. So I was in there in a ward right there with all those guys.

**From having a piano on your foot.**

On my right big toe.

**Did it break it?**

It crushed it. I lost the nail, but it grew back.

**So when they ask how you were wounded?**

They didn't. But various wards would have the local ladies put on Sunday dinners for the wards. Well, they finally got to our ward and I went out to dinner. And I'm sitting there and the lady comes over. She asked, "Aren't you a little young to be in the war?" I said, "Yes, I am. I've only been in the Army two weeks!" So I spent my first six weeks in the hospital.

It was a great hospital. What you saw there was pretty grim. Guys were shot up pretty bad. Mostly it was probably arms and legs – shoulders and arms and legs – in the ward I was in.

At that time I also spent most of my spare time by going to the dentist. I came from a family who didn't have that much money, so we never did dentists. So I had all my teeth filled during the six weeks while I was recovering.

**So you spent six weeks getting your body together!**

I was able to go home, though. I cut a hole in my shoe and I could walk without a shoe on the front toe. And I ended up coming home to a football game. My little town high school was playing the next town, and I went to a football game on Friday night.

**So you hitch-hiked with your bad toe.**

Yes, I sure did. And it worked out fine.

**When your toe was healed and your teeth were fixed, you were living in the camp. What were your living conditions like at Camp Atterbury?**

Camp Atterbury conditions were very good. There were barracks.

**Tell us about the barracks. What were they like? Were they Quonset huts?**

No. They were regular built barracks. It was a regular, first-class military base.

**How many guys were on your floor?**

In the barracks itself, maybe 24 – 12 and 12 on each side.

**Were they bunk beds?**

They were always bunk beds.

**Were you on the top or the bottom?**

They weren't doubles; they were single bunk beds.

**They were twin singles, not the stacked beds.**

No, they weren't stacked beds.

**What time did you get up?**

Actually, we used to have bugle call at 6:00 in the morning. Then we'd have reveille at night – 10:00 at night or something like that. But I didn't spend much time at Camp Atterbury, other than in the hospital. When I was pretty well cured of the injury, I was then shipped out to a basic training camp.

**So you went from Camp Atterbury to where?**

Fort Eustis, Virginia, for the Transportation Corps Basic Training. I was transferred into the transportation corps basic training. That was, in essence, I was there until late December of 1946.

**So you were only there for a few months.**

I would say approaching three – two-and-a-half to three months – for basic training.

**What did basic training include?**

You name it – everything! A lot of marching, a lot of exercise, a lot of special things that you're supposed to do; how to dig holes and how to remove a truck out of a trench or out of mud; rifle training and sub-machine gun training; obstacle courses – everything to keep you healthy and moving along, and learning things about the military.

**Had you fired a gun before?**

A shotgun at home.

**So using arms was not new to you.**

No. Using a rifle was, and using a sub-machine gun was. I never had a sub-machine gun.

**But you had fired some sort of gun before.**

Yes – the shotgun.

**Were you a hunter?**

Yes – pheasant and rabbit. I didn't hunt deer, just pheasants and rabbits.

**You were at Fort Eustis for a couple of months. Tell me what a typical day was like for you there? What time did you get up and how were you awakened?**

Well, we'd be getting up at 6:00 in the morning. If you didn't get up the first sergeant would come walking through and he made enough noise that you better get your butt out of bed.

**He didn't gently waken you.**

No. And the next thing you knew, you lined up at 7:00 and they marched you off to breakfast. You had your breakfast and you came back and started doing your daily duties.

**What kind of food did you have for breakfast?**

It was just like home – not much different from what you'd have at home.

**Eggs, bacon?**

Eggs, bacon; even cereal if you wanted.

**Did you have a timeframe in which you had to eat?**

Yes. You had a regular metal plate that was your eating tray with little sections. You had to go through a line, and it was buffet style – served to you buffet style. You'd go back to your table and eat with your buddies. Then you went back, rinsed your tray off and turned it in to them for a final washing.

**Could you go back for more? Did you have time for more?**

No. Once you were served, you'd been fed. It was the same type of tray you used for all three meals.

**Was the food good?**

Oh, yeah. The food in the military for me was good all the time.

**What were your living quarters like there?**

We were in a barracks, with 24 guys on the first floor. That was about it. We had our own latrine where you'd shower, which was at one end of the barracks. Everything was, if you will, kind of like living in a motel.

**You had gone there from Camp Atterbury. How did you get there?**

On a train.

**Was it a troop train or a regular train?**

I hate to tell you this story, but I will.

It was a regular train, and it was an overnigher. We were traveling and had sleeping accommodations on the train. On the train, the sleeping accommodation was an upper bunk – two persons to a bunk. Two persons to a bunk! Head to toe, though. I couldn't believe the

military was putting two persons on a bunk overnight to go to Fort Eustis, Virginia. But that's what it was.

**Did you know the person you bunked with?**

Oh, yeah. He was one of my buddies. He was from the south – kind of a hillbilly buddy. Yeah, I knew him.

**Did you know him before the train ride?**

Yes, I did.

**Well, that would make it a little easier, I would think.**

Yes, a little bit.

**On that train ride down there, how did you pass the time?**

Just like a regular person. You were traveling just like a civilian. We had the car – the car was the military car.

**All military.**

Yes, that was our car that was going to Fort Eustis.

**Did they feed you on the train?**

Yes. We ate on the train just like we were regular passengers. They didn't treat us any differently.

**How did the other passengers on the train react to you?**

They never interfered. We never saw them.

**You were just really separated from them.**

Yes. We never saw them. That's how we got there. I remember that train ride!

**So you were at Fort Eustis, and you're getting your basic training – calisthenics. Had you ever been away from home like that before?**

Not like that, no. I may have been away from home for a week before, but nothing more than a week. I'd never been away to speak of.

I remember taking a motorcycle ride with my cousin up to Pike's Peak. But it was like a five-day ride in Colorado – it may have been four or five days. We even had a tent and slept in the tent. We never went to a hotel or motel or anything. But other than that, no.

**But you had been away from home for a little bit.**

For four or five days, yes.

**Were any of your buddies from home in the group you were with?**

No.

**So you didn't know anybody when you got there.**

Right, except for the guys I moved with from Atterbury. They were all strangers.

**So you'd get up. You had calisthenics. You ate.**

Yes. And marched around.

**You did a lot of marching!**

Right. Every ten minutes, though, we'd have a break. You could break and it was always, "Smoke if you've got 'em." I didn't smoke, so every ten minutes I'd get a five minute nap. I just laid down on the ground somewhere and took a five minute nap. That was pretty good!

**Did anybody ever get in any trouble for doing stuff?**

Not in basic training, no. But in Japan, yes.

**So you did your three months?**

Two-and-a-half months.

**Did you have any classroom work, or was it all just exercise and in the field?**

No classroom work.

**Just physical stuff.**

Right.

**While you were there, were you able to communicate with your family?**

Letter writing.

**No phone?**

We didn't have a phone, I don't think. Just letter writing.

**Were you able to get packages from home?**

Yes. Sure. We always got mail.

**Did you ever get any packages besides letters – food or anything else?**

Probably not from home, but at that time I had left a girlfriend behind. And she sent me some stuff every now and then.

**Did you share it with the guys, or was that your stash?**

You better! Yes, I shared it with the guys.

**At the end of your basic training did you have a ceremony of any type?**

Oh, sure. Graduation! Flags and parades – all of that stuff. Yes, very much so.

**Were any of your family able to come to graduation?**

No. They wouldn't have come anyway. Our family was a big family and my Dad was a factory worker. He struggled to keep us going. We didn't have a car. That's okay. That's the way it went. But no family or anyone came to see me graduate. I had a picture, but I couldn't find it – a group picture. It's around home somewhere.

### **Duty Assignment and Deployment**

**So you graduated. Did you get any time off before your next assignment?**

Well, the answer to that is I was scheduled to go to Camp Stoneman in California, which is part of embarkation. But I had a delay in route. My delay in route took me to Rossford, Ohio. So I was home for Christmas, and I was home for New Years.

**For that first year.**

For that first year. I didn't miss Christmas and I didn't miss New Years. I think on January 3, then I boarded a train again to go to Camp Stoneman, California.

**So you were still 16. And you were going to California. What was the name of the camp?**

Camp Stoneman. It was in the San Francisco area.

**Were you a private first class?**

I was a nothing! Just a guy with a uniform. I had little gold things, but no patches or anything. I was a buck private.

**So you got on a train and headed to California, toward the San Francisco Bay area. How long did that train trip take?**

I would say maybe two days.

**And it was a train similar to what you had taken down to Fort Eustis?**

I was traveling like a civilian.

**In uniform?**

Yes. I didn't have any other clothes.

**So there were other people in your car, but not only military.**

Yes. Basically, it was a regular ticket. I had my duffle bag with all of my clothes. So I carried my duffle bag and checked in and all that kind of stuff.

**What kind of stuff was in your duffle bag?**

Changes of uniform, underwear, shoes – everything that you owned.

**Was in your bag.**

Every military issue that they gave you was in the bag.

**So you got to California. Did you take a bus from the train station, or did the train pull into the camp?**

I think they had a stop where the government would come and pick you up in a truck and take you to the camp. The train did not go through the camp. They picked us up and brought us in as a routine thing that they had there.

**And you said this was a point of embarkation?**

Yes.

**So you knew you were going overseas.**

Yes, but I didn't know where, and I didn't know when.

**Did your family know you were to be going overseas?**

Yes, sure. Mom and Dad weren't worried. My two brothers came back home unscratched already.

**So they were feeling pretty confident.**

Yes. George and Steve. George was in the Air Force. Steve was in the Navy. And they came home. And my cousin, Steve, was in the Army and he came home. We had, military-wise, no family problems, fortunately.

**How long were you in California?**

About six weeks.

**What did you do in that six weeks?**

Hide! Eat and hide.

**Hide from what?**

Don't let anybody see you standing around! Our only duty was to pick up cigarette butts every morning. As soon as we had breakfast we'd fall out and they'd say, "Okay, let's clean up the area." And you had to go pick up cigarette butts.

After we got them all picked up they'd say, "Hide! Don't let anybody see you." So we hid – anywhere and everywhere. But not in a big group – a couple of guys this way and a couple of guys that way.

**How many guys total?**

Lots! There were 30 or 40.

**Where did you hide? How did you hide?**

You'd go to the PX, or you could find a place under a building somewhere.

**Really physically hide.**

Yes. They didn't have anything for us to do. They didn't have a cadre there or anything to do military exercise or anything. Their job was to process you out.

**So you'd get up in the morning, revlie, you'd have breakfast, you'd pick up cigarette butts, and then scatter. And then come back for lunch?**

Yes.

**And then scatter.**

Yes.

**And come back for dinner?**

Yes, you'd come back for dinner. But then you also could go to the PX and stuff like that.

**That was considered after working hours.**

Yes, after dinner – or a movie or something.

**So you only had to hide during the day.**

Yes. We only had to hide during the day.

**Did you find some good places to hide?**

Yes. It wasn't difficult. I'm sure I wasn't the only one. I'm sure everybody was going through Stoneman at that time. You have to remember, the Army was phasing down significantly. All we were coming in was to replace the guys where you needed to have people. So the Army was significantly phasing down, and things were kind of easy at the time. This is now a year after the war was over. The war was over in 1945.

**So this is like the clean-up after the war.**

That's exactly right.

**So you were there for six weeks playing hide and seek. When those six weeks were over, how did they notify you that you were going overseas?**

They always had a bulletin board. And the bulletin board would say, "The ship is leaving. The ship is going here, and here are the people who are on the ship." So you start to prepare to make yourself available with your duffle bag to be on that ship.

So eventually the first thing came up, and we were going to be on a ship. We were going to go through the Panama Canal, and we were going to go to Germany. And we were the happiest guys in the world! Oh my gosh – German girls; white women! We really enjoyed that.

The next day they changed their mind. We got pulled off the boat that was going to go to Bergenhausen, Germany. I still remember that was where we were going to go.

A couple of days later – Yokohama, Japan. Oh. Japanese girls? No, we didn't want to go to Japan. But that was it. The Admiral Hughes was going to go to Yokohama and a bunch of other places. So we then went to Japan. Yokohama was the first stop.

**And the name of the ship you were on?**

The Admiral Hughes; maybe it was General Hughes. I got that from a newspaper article.

**How long was the trip?**

It was about ten days.

**What did you do on the ship for ten days?**

You won't be happy with me, but I'll be very truthful. I didn't think I was going to make Japan. I was seasick maybe for seven days on that ship over. If there was anything I didn't like in the military, that was the first thing I didn't like.

**Had you been seasick before? Had you ever been on a ship before?**

Not like that, no. I'd never been on a ship before. Also, it was a troop ship. A troop ship is, instead of having cargo in the hold, they have a pipe rack with a piece of canvas, six high. We were all down in the hold of the ship, and that's where we slept. Again, onboard ship there were no military exercises or anything like that. But, boy, I was really, really sick.

**Were you stuck in the middle of one of these stacks?**

I got the bottom one.

**Right off the floor.**

Six inches off the floor.

**Looking at the cot right above you.**

Five more! I saw a lot of toes. That was very uncomfortable.

**Did a lot of guys get sick?**

Not as many as I'd thought. I was apparently more sensitive to motion like that. In fact, I wouldn't ride at the circus on equipment that went around and around.

**Because that would make you sick, too?**

That would make me sick, too. I was pretty sensitive to the ocean. And I was not in the middle of the ship, I was in the rear of the ship.

**Where's a lot of motion.**

Up and down, and up and down. And we had some pretty bad weather and all that stuff.

**That must have been, besides feeling sick, just seeing yourself with all that water around must have been an interesting experience.**

That was it. It was not a very good trip.

**Did you stop anywhere along the way, like Hawaii, or did you go straight to Yokohama?**

We went straight to Yokohama. We went out of San Francisco, went underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, and away we went. Camp Stoneman is in San Francisco Bay, so you go under the Golden Gate Bridge and say, "Good bye, USA."

**Ten days is a lot of time, even if you're sick a good part of it. What did you do to pass the time? Did you have any military exercises or duties at all?**

None. No military exercises or military duty. I went up to sick bay to try to get in. They gave me pills and told me to go back to bed. They wouldn't put you in sick bay, they just gave you seasick pills, which didn't do a thing for me.

**What about the food? Were you able to eat the regular food there, even though you were seasick?**

I wasn't going to eat. When I was sick, I wasn't going to eat, so I didn't eat very much. I must have lost weight going over. I hardly went to eat. Also, on a troop ship they only feed you two meals a day. You can't go back for seconds because they gave you a card, and they punch your card.

**That you had your portion.**

That you had your portion. When you were going into the mess hall. But that's the way that went.

**So you landed in Yokohama. What was the purpose of being there?**

We got off the boat and onto a train to Zama, which is what we called a repo-depot. That was the incoming. If you went into Japan you came through Zama; when you leave Japan you came out of Zama. It was like the Camp Stoneman equivalent.

**What was your responsibility while you were there?**

I was only there less than a day. I was just moved out to my next station.

**You were just processing through.**

Yes. I was there, and then they trucked us over to Sagamihara where the school was; where I was stationed, which is not too far from Zama.

**About how far? Do you know?**

About an hour truck ride.

**When you got there, what was your responsibility?**

My responsibility was to get checked in and get my assignment to my bed. Then tell me what I was going to be doing while I was there. And I was there to go to school for the first six weeks.

**And the school was about what?**

Automotive maintenance – how to repair military vehicles.

**So they sent you to Japan to learn how to repair vehicles.**

Yes. Well, to repair the vehicles in Japan.

**Was it a regular Army base there?**

It was a Japanese tank school; a Japanese base.

**What were living conditions like there?**

Quonset huts. The Japanese quarters were all gone, except for one building, and that building represented a barracks. But that's where the permanent people that are there all the time – the staff and so forth – stayed, in that barracks-type building.

**So everybody else who was coming and going were in the Quonset huts.**

That is correct. And even though the instructors were not considered officers, they were in that building. My entire twelve months there was in the Quonset hut.

**What was your first impression when you got to Japan? What did you think?**

Nothing exciting. It was just another place to go. But it was entirely different, because the Japanese people were in pretty bad shape themselves. They had food problems, gasoline problems – they had all kinds of problems.

**A lot of shortages.**

A lot of shortages. What used to be Japanese factories, all we saw were concrete pads and a big smoke stack. There was a lot of fire-bombing, and everything was burned down. Everything was cleaned up, but you could tell this was a factory and that was a factory. The Japanese had a tough living.

**How did they respond to you?**

They were absolutely very courteous and very generous, but they kind of avoided you as much as they could. We used them to work in our kitchens, and gave them employment. We used them to clean our Quonset huts. The Quonset huts didn't have a toilet facility, but you had three Quonsets and another three Quonsets, and at the corner would be the place where you'd shower and go to the bathroom. And they would have Japanese people cleaning all that up.

And with the Japanese you didn't have to worry about anything being stolen. You didn't have to worry about going anywhere at any time and having an incident. If there were incidents, they were American generated, not Japanese.

**Were the Japanese afraid of you, or just kind of kept to themselves?**

They kept to themselves. We were not allowed to eat their food, so we were not allowed to go in and drink their beer. We couldn't go into their facilities. And when we left camp, we always had PX's located around. You could do anything you wanted to do in the military PX.

**Did you have any opportunities to meet any of the Japanese people yourself? Did you get to know any of them?**

Well, there always were girls hanging around. If you wanted to meet girls, you could meet girls. But that wasn't among my interests at the time.

**You still had your girlfriend at home.**

Yes. That's right. And I was still a young man. Venereal disease was a concern. And that was the first thing the military told you: If you came in with venereal disease, they were going to tell your mother and your wife.

**That was enough to scare you!**

There was a lot of that, yes.

And, like I say, a little boy Tatso, whose picture I showed you. He came in and did a lot of odds and ends around the camp. I don't think he slept at the camp. I'm sure he left everyday and came back the next day. But he was around the barracks area.

**Did any of the other guys have any problems in Japan? Did any of them get into trouble?**

Yes. A couple of my friends got into trouble. It was a sexual misbehavior. They were put in the guardhouse, and I think they got some military time in Japan at a military court. But I remember, when they were in our guard house their daily duty was to walk around and pick up cigarette butts under guard – armed guards.

Yes, I had a couple of friends. In fact, after service I even came back to see one of them who lived in Chicago. He was not living too well. I'm sure he probably got a dishonorable discharge.

**So you were in class five or six days a week?**

Five days a week, eight hours a day, with a ten-minute break every hour. And outside of the classrooms we had volleyball nets. So, for that ten minutes if you wanted to play volleyball with your classmates, you'd go out there and play volleyball. If you wanted to go sit and smoke you could go out and sit and smoke. And an hour break for lunch.

From the living quarters we marched to school to music – they played band music over the PA system to the entire camp.

**John Philips Sousa type music?**

You got it! Colonel Bogey march. So we marched to school and back from school. And every time we marched they played John Philips Sousa's band music.

The PA system was a means of communication.

**What were your classes like?**

Basically, some were classroom classes. And some were in a big shop with a bunch of motors around it. The motors would run. They were all mixed up. They'd do something wrong and they'd say find out what's wrong and fix it. It was just a regular classroom and you were going to school.

**How did you do in your classes?**

They made me an instructor!

**That stuff at the technical high school had helped you.**

Yes. I guarantee that made a big difference in my assignment in the Army. And I thank my Dad for that. He didn't want me to work in a factory. That's why he sent me to get a skill. The only reason I ended up in the transportation corps, where my buddy who didn't have that training went into the infantry. He ended up in Korea on the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel for his entire career, doing guard duty. When he came to visit me when he had a week off – what you call R&R – he said, "Frank, you guys eat and live like kings!" Most of his food was always C-rations and stuff like that.

**And you ate regular meals.**

Yes.

**Did you have American food or Japanese food, or some combination?**

American food.

**All American.**

Yes, we had powdered milk, powdered eggs, dehydrated potatoes.

**A lot of things to just add water.**

Yes. That came over by ship. And the only time we had trouble with food was when they had a shipping strike. That's when things were a little scarce. But it was pretty good food, but not as good as when the ships were regularly going back and forth.

**What was the shipping strike all about?**

I have no idea why the shipping strike happened. But I guess the unions were striking about something.

**Do you know how long it lasted?**

Two weeks. That two-week period was a shipping strike. And that would have been in 1947 – about mid-1947.

**So you were 17 at that point.**

Yes. I'd made 17 in February, so I sure was.

**You celebrated your birthday in Japan.**

Kind of. There was not much celebration.

**Were you able to communicate with your family?**

Letters.

**Just letters or packages?**

Yes, letters and packages.

**Could you tell them where you were?**

Sure. There was nothing secret. There were no problems at all. You could send all the pictures you wanted and ask for whatever you like. "I'd like to have a chocolate candy bar," and stuff like that. Fortunately I didn't smoke. But a lot of guys were asking for cigarettes to be sent to them.

We were given a carton a month of cigarettes – you could buy a carton a month. Cigarettes, some silk stockings, chewing gum all went well on the black market. And there was a black market going on. And there was a lot of participation – very low scale. If you had a pair of silk stockings you could sell them for a pretty good piece of money – of Japanese money, because we didn't get paid in Japanese; we got paid in military script. So if you wanted something to use to get your pictures developed by the Japanese, you had to pay in Japanese money. You always had to have a little Japanese money because they couldn't handle military script.

**How was military script handled as far as spending money? That's what you were given.**

I'd get paid. I'd get paid in military script.

**Is that what you used in the PX?**

Yes, I'd use some in the PX, and I'd also send some home. We never used up all of our military pay, even though it was low.

**What did your family do with the military script?**

They put it in my savings account.

**So it was treated as cash back at home.**

Yes. But you'd get a money order to send it back to the States; you couldn't send the script back to the States. You had it converted to a money order.

**So you got the script converted to a money order where you were, and then your family got it and put it in the bank.**

Yes. And they watched that very carefully – how much you were sending home. So if you were getting an awful lot of money from somewhere, you never knew if somebody was watching you.

**They would know something was going on.**

Yes. There was a limit of what you could do monthly. It was based on looking for what might be going bad – such as if you were a big dealer in the black market or something like that.

**So your family must have been very happy to get that money.**

Sure. They were happy to get the letters with a money order.

**So you were there for six weeks in class. After class ended, did you have any down time? Any furlough?**

No. By the next week I was teaching.

**And you were teaching the same things you had been learning.**

Right.

**Was there any specialty you had when you were teaching?**

Well, mine was in the first two week period. And lubrication was kind of an important part: what kind of greases there are, where you use them and what they're all about; how to pack a bearing; how to troubleshoot an engine that won't start. Those were basically where I was. I didn't get any farther than that.

**So you were there for the first six weeks as a student, and how long were you there as an instructor after that?**

Oh, I spent about eight months there in Japan as an instructor.

**So you were seventeen years old and you were teaching guys who were older than you.**

Yes.

**How did they react to you?**

They didn't know the difference. They didn't notice any difference – I was just a regular GI. Nobody cared about me being a younger one. Once you got through basic training they said, "We don't care. Just shut up and do your duty!"

**You told us something before we were recording, when you were in basic training and you were so young, that one of the sergeants told you something. What did he tell you?**

First thing in the morning, the first morning we lined up, our staff sergeant said, "Look. I notice some of you guys are underage. If you want to go home, speak up and go – no problems at all. But, if you don't go home, don't come telling me about it because I won't hear you after today. Today is your day to make up your mind whether you're staying or leaving."

**So once you got past that the age didn't matter.**

That's correct. It didn't matter one darn bit, because you had to register for the draft board then so it didn't make any difference.

**You had some downtime when you were in Japan. Did you go to do any sightseeing?**

Oh, sure. I went to Tokyo a lot of times. I even used to go see General MacArthur. General MacArthur had a parade every Saturday in Tokyo.

**Every Saturday?**

Every Saturday. Well, he was stationed in Tokyo. And it wasn't a big parade, but where General MacArthur went, he was in his limousine with the flags and motorcycles. That was a parade in itself! You could see little kids on the corners waving American flags and stuff like that.

So I went to Tokyo quite often. And Yokohama was good. Mt. Fuji and Lake Hakone was kind of nice. Going to the beach was kind of nice, where you could see American military

women, nurses. And believe me, not seeing American women after six, seven or eight months kind of gets to you! It wasn't good.

**So when you got to see them it was kind of a little peek of home.**

Right. That's for sure.

**Anything memorable happen while you were there as an instructor or student? Any experiences? Anything you saw or heard?**

No. Other than my buddies getting into trouble.

Oh, I had one. I was doing guard duty. When we go on guard duty they give you a carbine rifle. It's during the night, and you walk around the perimeter of the camp. The camp had a hillside, and on top of the hillside were bushes. The hillside was about a four foot high mound with bushes on top of that. They gave you a rifle and five bullets, and, of course, if you have any problems you immediately call for the officer of the day.

So I'm doing this guard duty, and it was about 9:00 at night. I'm in the Quonset area at this time, and I heard rustling in the bushes. So I wondered, what is going on. So I immediately stopped, put a bullet in the chamber, kneeled down and I see some movement. I said, "Halt! Who goes there?" And obviously it was a girl. She could speak English and understand English. And I said, "What are you doing here?" She then mentioned the name of a guy who lived in my Quonset hut. And she wanted to see him. Fortunately I was pretty close to the Quonset hut, and I stuck my head into the Quonset hut – like a nut; I didn't realize I was taking a risk. I called him and said, "Somebody is here looking for you. I'm going to make my rounds and when I get back you better be back in the Quonset hut and she better be gone!" And it all worked. It could have backfired, but it didn't. It could have backfired for me doing something like that.

**You could have gotten into big trouble.**

I could have gotten into a lot of trouble. Right. But it worked out fine. When I came back he was back in the hut and she was gone. I believe!

**You didn't see her.**

I did not see her and I didn't hear a rustle in the bushes.

So that's one of the things I remember pretty well. I think back on it and I think, "Frank, why did you do that! You could have gotten yourself into deep trouble. You could have been in the guard house." So that worked out fine.

**Did you ever have any trouble with things being stolen or going missing?**

Not me. The kitchen did. The kitchen was losing our egg mixture and our butter. They couldn't figure out where it was going. What it was, we used the Japanese people in the kitchen. And when we had breakfast they made pancake batter. And if they had too much pancake batter we gave it to them, and they could take it with them when they went home. And the way they would take it home, we had 5-gallon square cans. They'd put a hole on this side and this side,

and put a wire through the can. Then when they went home with something in it, they had a pole for one guy and a pole for another guy, and the can would hang on the pole. They would go to the guard gate – they always went to the guard gate – and off they'd go.

Finally, somebody asked, "You know, what's in that can besides pancake batter?" That's where the butter and the egg mixture was! Needless to say, we stopped doing that. I had nothing to do with it, but it was quite a thing in the camp. They didn't get to take anything home anymore. But it was something to see.

But other than that, no. In our Quonset hut we locked nothing. They doors weren't locked or nothing; not even your own little box where you kept your clothes.

### **So the food was what they really needed.**

That's what they were after. Right. And they found a way to get it past the guards at the gate. Other than that, no.

### **So this was basically your life, all through your time there.**

Sure.

## **Redeployment to the States and Discharge**

### **A student and an instructor. And you said you were there for about eight months as an instructor. How were you notified your time was up and you were going home?**

Oh. Well, they said that we were cutting back and letting some people go home early, and they called it 'for the convenience of the government.' I wasn't supposed to go home until February, 1948. I went home in December, 1947. I got to the States on December 23<sup>rd</sup>.

### **Just before Christmas.**

To Camp Stoneman. And there was an airplane that used to fly people – private people had some airplanes – and they would fly servicemen home for a fee. So I got \$139 of travel pay to go home. I found out about this airplane flying to Toledo, Ohio. So I came home on Christmas Eve!

And on the plane I met one of my Rossford high school buddies who was in Japan, and I didn't know he was there! In fact, later on I was best man at his wedding – Albert Kovick. He and I would be in the same schools in Rossford. He was in my class in Rossford. And he was being discharged at the same time I was. I don't know how he got to Camp Stoneman – whether he was on the same ship as I was or not.

### **What ship were you on coming back?**

It was the Funston.

### **Was it any better than your trip over there?**

It was worse!

**Oh, no!**

I was in Yokohama harbor, and I was hanging over the side.

**In the harbor. Was the ship bigger or smaller than the first one, or about the same?**

It was about the same. Everything was about the same.

**About how many men were on the ship?**

I'd say a couple of hundred.

**The same racks?**

It was all the same.

**Were you on the bottom rack again?**

I don't remember.

**You were just glad to go home.**

Yes, but I didn't want to go on a ship! I was sick before we even left the harbor. They say seasickness has a got a lot to do with mental feeling – you could make yourself sick. And I probably did.

**You were expecting it.**

Yes. So that was the second thing I didn't like about the military!

**And the first one was?**

Going over!

**Each trip was what you didn't like.**

Right.

**How long did it take you to get home – it took you ten days to get there?**

It was about ten days again.

**Did your family know you were coming home?**

Sure. I wrote them a letter that I was going home. They knew.

I was also going to tell you, while we were in Japan on weekends we could rent a Jeep or a little pickup truck, pack sandwiches or lunches, and we could use the military vehicles for travel around Japan, have our food and come back. We had a motor pool. But you had to sign up for it and had to be qualified to use it. We were able to use the military equipment for our weekend time off.

**What were the qualifications to do that?**

You had to have a Class A pass to get out, that you were a qualified driver and in good standing. It wasn't anything more than that. So we were able to use the military small vehicles. We never got a big truck or anything like that. That helped a lot, too. But we never drove to Tokyo. If we went to Tokyo we always took the electric trains.

**The Japanese trains.**

Yes. We'd always go to the Japanese trains.

**When you were on those Japanese trains there were civilians on there.**

Oh, yes. You'd sit right there with them.

**How did they react to you?**

Like as if you weren't even there. There was no interaction.

**No communication of any sort.**

Most of them didn't understand English.

**Did they nod to you or anything?**

Nothing.

One of the things we used to like to do, we used to like to drive the trains. We'd go up and try to get into the motor cab. You'd give the guy a pack of cigarettes and he'd let you drive it! That went on for about four months. Then an accident occurred with a military guy driving it, somewhere in Japan.

**And that was the end of that.**

“Thou shalt not!”

**Did you ever drive a train?**

No, I never did. I was up there, but I never drove it, but my buddies did. They'd just give the guy a pack of cigarettes; they'd do anything for that.

**For a pack of cigarettes.**

But you had to be very careful – know how to start and stop. It was like our elevated. There wasn't much difference, except it was on ground level.

**Were they a higher speed?**

They could go pretty fast, yes. But not 60mph. No. They wouldn't go that fast. I'd say if they got to 30mph they were going fast.

**Did you get anywhere near any of the sites that had been bombed – Nagasaki or Hiroshima?**

The answer is, not while I was there.

The company I worked for – Continental Can Company – had a licensee, which was Toyo Seikan in Japan. I made numerous trips back to Japan for company business. In fact, one of the trips I went back with, our company said, "You know, the Japanese people do better things than we do." So they selected about 50 executives and sent us over there. We got an interpreter from California, hired. And took us over there for two weeks to visit various manufacturing facilities. During that period I got to spend a day in Hiroshima, to where the bomb came down and all that kind of stuff. There was a silhouette of a body laying on the concrete driveway, like a shadow. They have a block of untouched as a memorial.

**They left it as it was.**

They left it as it was, and it's still as it was. So, about 1975 I did that. But not while I was in the Army. Hiroshima was pretty far away from Yokohama.

**From where you were. So you got home. You came into California and were glad to get off that ship.**

I'll tell you one thing about that ship. I probably hadn't eaten for about four days, and I finally decided I better go get something to eat. And, of course, my card had not been punched yet. As I finally got to the guy who punches the cards, he looked at me and said, "Soldier, don't you ever wash? You ain't getting in here to eat. You get your butt back there and wash!" So I got my butt back there in the back of the boat. Water was in the urinal trays, and as the boat went up the water went slosh, slosh. I didn't wash. I went back to my bunk for two more days. Then finally I did wash and made my way up. But I got sent away. He wouldn't feed me! How do you like that? Just because of a little wash.

So I finally did get something to eat, but it was quite a while.

**So you got back to California. Were you processed out there?**

Yes, very quickly.

**Where?**

At Camp Stoneman. Yes. I was processed right out of there.

**What was your rank when you were discharged, by the way?**

T5 – Technician, fifth grade.

**That’s the highest level technician?**

Yes, I think so. Maybe not.

**Returning to Civilian Life**

**What was the first thing you did after you were discharged? Was there some food you had?**

I wanted to finish high school.

**So you left Camp Stoneman. You took that plane back to Toledo. Did your family come to get you, or did you hitchhike back home? How did you get back to the family home?**

I can’t answer that question. I don’t remember how I got from the airport to home. Too much excitement.

**So you got home. Your family knew you were coming. Was there any kind of get together with family and friends?**

It was Christmas Eve when I got home. I never missed a Christmas! We went to midnight mass and lots of good food after that.

**That’s right! Every Christmas you got home, one way or another. So it was nice to be home for Christmas.**

Right. But I wanted to finish high school. It was in January, when I went to Macomber, where I was supposed to graduate in 1947. I said I wanted to finish high school. I told them what I did in the military, gave them my papers, and they said, “Oh. We’ll give you credit for the first semester. You come to the second semester and you can graduate in 1948. So I graduated one year later than when I was supposed to from Macomber, because the high school vocational school gave me semester credit.

**For what you had done in the Army.**

Yes. For the school I was at and for what I was doing in auto mechanics in the military.

**What was it like going back to high school after having been in the Army?**

Well, the vocational school was a boys' school. Across the street was a vocational school that was a girls' school. So I would stand at the window, watching girls!

**Did you have any different perspective than the students who had not done military service?**

No. You wouldn't have known the difference. But it was a whole new group of guys, because my group had graduated in 1947.

**So you graduated when you were 19?**

No. I was 18. In February of 1948 I would have been 18 years old. And that was after I had registered for the draft. I graduated in June, 1948.

**So even though you had served, you had to go register.**

Yes. Very much so. And the guy said, when I told him I'd already been in the service, he says "What are you, a smartass?" I showed him my discharge papers and he changed his mind.

**But you still had to be registered.**

By all means. As a matter of fact, during the Korean War, I got a notice from the draft board. I'd already had a baby and was working in a big government project and couldn't leave town for more than 24 hours without telling them where I was going. I was on temporary notice that they were going to pull me back in, into the Korean War. But they didn't call me – that was the only notice I got.

**What year was that?**

1953. That's when I got married, in 1953.

**Now you said you wanted to finish high school, but you said originally the reason you went into the Army was because the GI Bill was going to expire and you wanted to take advantage of it. So after you finished high school, did you take advantage of it?**

Not right away.

**What did you do?**

I went to work in the construction business. There was lots of work in construction and lots of good pay. So, when I graduated in June of 1948, I joined the Hod Carriers Union, which

is the laborers, and I went to work for construction companies. And I worked through 1948, and I worked into January of 1949. My job usually was a carpenter helper or bricklayer helper, or a surveyor helper – somebody’s helper.

In February it is cold as hell in Toledo. I was a carpenter’s helper. They said, “Frank, you’re a veteran, aren’t you?” I said yes. They said, “You’ve got the GI Bill. What the hell are you doing out here in this cold weather? Don’t you know you can go to college? There’s pretty girls there, they pay for your college, they even give you \$100 a month to live on!” I thought about it and thought, hey, that doesn’t sound too bad. So I said I thought I would go to college.

I went to the University of Toledo. They said, yes, I could go to school there but I couldn’t join the college. I didn’t have enough credit hours in the right courses. I could go to junior college if I wanted. Then I could go to college once I got enough of those courses. So I said fine, I didn’t care. The government was paying for it, so I’d go to junior college – which was in the same building as the college – to different classes. So my first semester I got 0 hours credit. I then started off college in summer school – night summer school – while I continued to work in construction.

Then in the fall I went full-time[to school] and did night jobs in construction. Then I graduated from the University of Toledo on January 30, 1953, which was a Friday.

Saturday morning I got married! January 31.

### **Was this the girlfriend you had all along?**

Off and on.

### **The one who was your girlfriend when you first left.**

That’s the one. But it had been off and on – we’d been through bumps in the road. She survived! And I survived. And we got married. And I got a degree in electrical engineering.

### **And you went on after that to something.**

Well, I went to work. I went to work for Goodyear Atomic Corporation. Goodyear Atomic Corporation was building a big plant in Portsmouth, Ohio, that enriched uranium for the atom bomb, and for reactors. I got a job with them. So my first job out of college – I had to get a “q” clearance and all that kind of stuff. It was a “start-up” training engineer at the atomic plant in Portsmouth, Ohio.

We moved, Milly and I moved down to Waverly, Ohio – a little community by the plant.

### **How long a move was it for you?**

About a four-hour drive from Toledo – south of Columbus, Ohio. I worked there from 1953 to 1959. I worked there for six years in operations in a lower management position at that point. The job got a lot easier as we got everything organized and local people trained. The local people we were training could do the things I was doing while they were being trained. It was a very, very good six years I had with Goodyear Atomic Corporation.

### **Did you do anymore schooling while you were there?**

Yes. While I was there I was going to Ohio State and getting ready to become a registered professional engineer in the State of Ohio. I got my registration as a professional engineer before we left.

### **In electrical engineering.**

In electrical engineering. You're absolutely right.

Then I changed jobs because the raises were getting smaller and farther apart. So I joined a company called Hercules Cement as a production engineer in a cement plant in Easton, Pennsylvania. Then, in Easton, Pennsylvania I became a professional electrical engineer in Pennsylvania. We lived close to Lafayette College. I went to Lafayette College for some night school to learn things I was a little short in. I wasn't reading, and I went to remedial reading class and a few other things at Lafayette.

### **Was this still on the GI Bill?**

No.

### **This was on your own now.**

Yes. Since I had used my GI Bill for my last high school semester, my last college semester I had to pay for. I had used up my four years – I had one half year at the vocational school and three and a half years at the University of Toledo.

Then I went to the company and said Lehigh University had an evening school program. Would you support and pay for my master's degree? They said yes, they would pay for my master's degree. So in 1963, ten years later, I got my master's degree from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in industrial management.

Then a job opened up and they passed me over. So I decided to find another job.

I went shopping for a better job. And I found one in Chicago with Continental Can Company in 1965. I spent 30 years with them – from 1965 to 1995.

### **And that's where you retired from.**

That's where I retired from.

While I was with Continental, I went to executive management training at Northwestern. I went to another training program at Michigan State. While I had been in Easton I'd taken a Dale Carnegie course. I never stopped going to school to try to better myself. Whether it was college or a program. And all of them were pretty much paid for by the companies. So I lost the GI Bill, but I found a lot of companies which were willing to do that.

[Frank takes out his diplomas.]

This is my bachelor's from Toledo. Here is my master's in industrial management from Lehigh in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, June 1963. Sue went to my graduation.

### **How old were you when your Dad graduated?**

Sue: He graduated and the next day I made my first holy communion. I was ten years old.

Frank: By that time I had five kids!

**So you found something to do besides going to school!**

I had four girls and a boy.

So we then came to Continental on 1/1/1965. And that was a very, very good career. I had a lot of good mentors who gave me advice and things like that. I worked my way up from a project engineer to an executive. Retired as Senior Vice President, Technology of Continental Plastic Container division.

**Over all these years, do you have any friends from your time in the Army? Have you kept in touch with some of them?**

Yes, I do. Larry Lennon. He lives in Lansing, Michigan. When I was doing fire guard in Japan I looked and saw a Toledo Blade newspaper in the garbage can. It was outside a Quonset hut, so I opened the door and asked if anybody in there was from Toledo, Ohio. And he responded. So he and I got to be real good buddies in Japan. And when we came to Toledo we went to the University of Toledo at the same time. But he branched off and went to Purdue in Indiana. He graduated from Purdue. But I stayed at Toledo.

**Do you still keep in touch with him?**

I do, absolutely. I do keep in touch with him. Unfortunately, he lost his wife two years ago and he's kind of lonely. I haven't seen him for maybe about a year.

And I lost my wife eight years ago, going on nine. And Sue lives with me. She just retired from work, also. She needed something to do, so she takes care of me.

Sue: He's just recently reconnected with the VFW. And that has become like a whole career for him now.

**So you are part of the VFW here in Darien, now. Have you joined any other veterans' organizations or attended any military reunions or anything like that?**

Not military, but with the VFW they made me the charter organization representative to the Scout troop 97. So I have a Scout troop number now! I had to go through a training program to become a Boy Scout.

**Are you a Scoutmaster?**

No. I'm a charter organization representative. There are three people who are key in the local council – me, the Scoutmaster and the committee chairman. So I'm with Troop 97 as the representative for the VFW. It's the charter organization for the troop. So I'm doing that.

I joined them two years ago, so both of those are kind of new for us.

I get some of my medical needs from the VA. I get all my pills from the VA. In addition to that I got my hearing aids from the VA. I have a Bluetooth system with my hearing aids for my cell phone, and I have a system for my speaker for the TV set that goes directly into my hearing aids. And I got all of that from the VA a year ago. And I get an annual physical at the VA.

Sue: They're very supportive – the VA.

**So you're a big supporter of them because they're a big supporter of you.**

That's for sure.

### **Lasting Impressions**

**When you look back at your time in the military, how did it affect your life? Was it a good decision to go in? Are there things that you learned in the military that you use in your life now?**

The answer to that is I know it was an outstanding decision I made when I was 16 years old. Everything fell in place. Like I said, I can't believe, if I plotted what I wanted to happen has happened. And I haven't plotted it. It just keeps falling into place. Like getting my master's degree with a company-sponsored program.

And I did my high school diploma and a BS degree in Electrical Engineering on the GI Bill while it was cold outside.

It's been unbelievably good.

**How did your time in the military affect the way you look at what's happening in the world today?**

Oh, boy. I'm very unhappy about what's happening in the world today. I'm very unhappy about what's happening in the State of Illinois. I'm very unhappy with politics. It's unbelievable what's going on in Washington – what we're doing to the country: borrowing money, spending more money. It's unbelievable.

I'd be willing to pay more taxes if they'd say, "Yes, we're going to cut spending and balance the budget – federal, state and local." I would pay high taxes if, in fact, they would do something like that. Because I just don't believe in going into debt the way we're going into debt. We're going to take our monetary system and bankrupt ourselves if we keep going like this.

So I'm very unhappy with what's happening in the federal government and the state government.

My time in the military didn't have anything to do with that – it's just my American way of life.

By the way, I'm first generation American. Mom and Dad came from Slovakia. Dad came before World War I. Mom came after. They met and married here. My wife's family was

exactly the same way. She was also Slovak, from our little town in Rossford. Her Mom and Dad came from Slovakia, also. She was first generation.

So my kids are second generation Slovak American.

**I can understand that.**

So the military was unbelievably good. I'd do it all over again. If I could start again I wouldn't change anything. I'd go to vocational school like my Dad told me because he didn't want me to work in a factory. The military was a no-brainer. It was unbelievable.

**Is there anything else we haven't covered that you'd like to add?**

I was registered in the State of Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania as a professional engineer. So wherever I worked I qualified to be registered as a professional engineer.

Sue: Well, your son was in the Army and your three grandsons are Marines.

Frank: One Marine grandson who came back from Okinawa last week.

Sue: He's at Fort Leonard-Wood.

Frank: Another grandson who was also in the Marines is working for American Airlines because his job in the Marines was taking care of big airplanes. For him things are falling into place like they did for me. He's very happy with his job at American Airlines.

**So the military tradition has continued for two more generations.**

I would say I'm very happy with the USA. I just don't like what we're doing now.

**Well, if you have nothing else to add, we're going to close. Thank you very much for sharing your story.**