

Randy Smith Transcription

[00:00:00] **Dean Wetzel:** Alright, Randy, let me just start off with saying thank you for your time today and your oral history. Um, we'll start with where were you born? Um, and what about your basic family? Did your dad, mom, dad, brother, sisters, any of them, and did any of them serve?

Randy Smith: Um, I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And I'm the first child of six. And my father was a, was a Marine, um, at the tail end of World War II. And served on the USS Missouri, amongst other ships. My uncle was in World War II Battle of the Bulge. So that's about the only military history I have. It was... I was one of the last ones drafted in 1972. Then I ended up enlisting, so I guess I was enlisted instead of drafted.

Dean Wetzel: Well, okay, so with that, uh, with that type of entry into the military, what was your family's reaction to your service?

Randy Smith: Um, they were, they were concerned, but they were for it, because, you know, I come from a very patriotic family, you know. Yeah, they were, they were, they backed me out all the way.

Dean Wetzel: Now, when we were talking, you had a little bit of an interesting story there. You were telling me you were on Isle Royal.

Randy Smith: Yeah, I was up on Isle Royal, which is way out in Lake Superior, closer to Canada. And, um, my draft, the draft numbers came out. So, I had to walk seven miles into town to get a newspaper. And then I didn't look it up right away, I walked seven miles all the way back, and went up on the ridge and stared at Canada while I tried to find my number, and it took me three or four times to find it, going through that paper, but my number was fourteen, so I kind of knew where I was going, no matter which way you look at it, but I was looking at Canada and I thought, you know, my dad being a Marine and stuff, I thought, I can't, I can't do this, this, this, this. This is uh, not right. So, I'm gonna just let the cards play out the way they play out.

Dean Wetzel: Very tempting though, huh?

Randy Smith: Yeah, well, it was and wasn't, you know.

Dean Wetzel: Um, so obviously you say you, you enlisted into the service after you, your number was selected in that. Did you, in your dad being a Marine and stuff, did you ever look at other branches or did you know right away you wanted the Army?

Randy Smith: Well, I had a couple of buddies that wanted to go into the Air Force. And so, we kind of all three went down and we're going to join the Air Force. And, uh, but then I just kept, kept thinking about, you know, maybe the

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Army is the way to go. And, uh, so yeah, I just, I backed out of the Air Force and, uh, went and talked to the Army recruiter and that's when I enlisted. That's all. They ended up going in, and we all actually ended up going to Detroit for our physicals. They ended up going to Texas, and I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Dean Wetzel: Now, did you have a particular MOS that you were seeking out, or did you just feel like the Army was....

Randy Smith: No, I just, I, wherever they put me, you know. Vietnam was going on, and I, that was where I was going to be, that's where I was going to be. So, I didn't want to go, but I just, like I said, I just let, let fate take, take me where I was supposed to be so, I ended up, uh, going to Korea instead of Vietnam, so I was right at the tail end there.

Dean Wetzel: Now, what, what was the MOS that you ended up getting? Um,

Randy Smith: 95 Bravo, that's, uh, military police.

Dean Wetzel: Uh, were you, were you happy with that particular job?

Randy Smith: Yeah, it was a, I thought it was a better job than being an infantry, but you're still kind of infantry, I mean, you're still pulling kind of the same duty except you might have a jeep instead of a walk-in miles.

Dean Wetzel: Still got to shrug it off, right?

Randy Smith: Yeah.

Dean Wetzel: Um, what was basic training like? in, in the late, early seventies towards the tail end of Vietnam.

Randy Smith : That was tough. That was tough, but I, uh, I approached it to do the best that I could in, in basic. And, uh, a lot of guys with shirt doing pushups and stuff, you know, but I, uh, I tried to do every single pushup that was possible. Thrown at me. And, um, we had a good, we had a good drill sergeant. He was a Vietnam veteran, um, in Recon. And, um, he was tough. He was no nonsense tough. And while the other platoons in my company would march to the rifle range or up and down the hills. We had heartbreak and all those hills in Kentucky there were killers. Um, he would make us march or run with our rifles above our heads and do it the whole way. And, uh, he just put these extra things on us that were, um, that were tough. And I think, I think we became the best platoon in that company because, because of that toughness. We, uh, never, I think we only failed a barracks inspection once. We came in first, first place every single time. And the other drill sergeants were kind of jealous of that, so. They were trying to figure out what's making us the best.

Dean Wetzel: As you look back at, uh, boot camp, what's one funny moment that sticks out to you? We weren't allowed to laugh. I know at the time, but when you look back, you just go, gosh, the stuff they made us do.

Randy Smith: Yeah. I guess, I guess I didn't have to do it, but I guess a guy had to do pushups with the, uh, bolt cutter because he lost a key to his locker. So, you had to get a bolt cutter to cut the lock off. And then he threw the bolt cutter on the bed while the drill sergeant came in and saw the unsecured bolt cutter. So, he had to put it across his hands and do push-ups. And every time he went down, he had to kiss that bolt cutter and tell it, it was, tell it, say, I'm sorry, bolt cutter.

Dean Wetzel: Oh yeah.

Randy Smith: Funny stuff like that.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah, I have stories like that all the time. Going through it was not funny at all, but now looking back on it, you're like, wow, the stuff they had us do. Um, alright, so you get done with basic training. Um, what's the next? Are you immediately put out in the general army, or do you go on to more schooling?

Randy Smith: We got on a bus, buses, and went to uh, Excuse me. All the guys, they were going with me to Fort Gordon, Georgia for MP training. So, we left

Fort Knox, traveled all night, got to uh, Fort Gordon. This was close to Christmas, it was like the first of December or November sometime. And we thought it was going to be warmer, but we got there and it was freezing cold. So, to Augusta, Georgia, early morning, something wasn't even just barely coming up and we got to get off the buses. Um, for some reason they had so many, um, guys going into military police at that time that they didn't have enough barracks for us. So, I was put in a holding pattern for two weeks where a lot of the guys did fixing up of the barracks and stuff. Um, I chose to, um, there was a, there was a sergeant, a black sergeant who was special forces, and he said he would train us in special forces stuff for two weeks. So, I elected to do that instead of working on the barracks to fixing the barracks. So, I did that for two weeks and that was, that was pretty tough. We ran and ran and ran and ran wherever he was going and he was just, he'd just teach us stuff, you know, basic military stuff, you know, but a lot more, um, in depth, you know, how to spot somebody in the jungle and, you know, stuff like that. Eat grubs and worms and

Dean Wetzel: The things you're looking at going do I really need to know?

Randy Smith: Yes, I really need this but You know, it was better than painting I just I wanted I guess I wanted to be the best of the best if I was in World War two. I've probably been an airborne or ranger training or something, but

Dean Wetzel: Um, so you said your deployment was to Korea. Did that surprise you? Were you prepared for Korea?

Randy Smith: no. When, well, originally it was supposed to be Vietnam and then several of us got new orders to go to Korea because they were, they were winding down and they were changing everything. So, um, I hadn't gone, I was on my way to go call him. My mom and dad told me I was going to Vietnam, and they said go to the, go to the, um, office there. They had new orders to go to Korea, and I'm like, well, Korea, where's Korea? So, um, I wasn't surprised, but I thought, well, I knew it was by Japan somewhere, but I waited until after AIT, we got a 30 day leave to go home, so then I looked it up and I found out where I was going.

Dean Wetzel: Do you feel like you were prepared for Korea? Because I, because I mean, climate wise, terrain wise, I would feel like it's so different than what Vietnam was. And obviously basically trading your AIT would've all been like, you're going to Vietnam, right? So now you get this like little wrench and you're off to Korea where you're cold weather training. You didn't have that in.

Randy Smith: Yeah, we didn't have that. But uh. I found out it was cold there, but it was also hot in the summertime. So, it was a little like Michigan. Um, it can be, you know, 90, almost 100 in Michigan. Colder than cold in the wintertime. So, I thought, well, whatever, it's kind of the same climate.

I didn't know what I was going to do there. Um, we went to San Francisco. I flew into San Francisco for Ord. Ended up getting on a plane to fly, fly to Fairbanks, Alaska, and then down to Osaka, Japan. And then from Osaka, we went to Osan Air Base in Korea. So, we got off the plane and there's an archway there by the terminal. So, um, land of the morning, land of the morning sun, I guess. So, and it stunk.

Dean Wetzel: Well, so now, yeah, being in Korea, uh, is a little new for me, but I knew that there's guys there, but knowing what they did, I don't. So, could you explain to me what the daily workload for a military police officer was like in Korea at this time?

Randy Smith: Well, I ended up going to Seoul and staying there for a couple days where they were getting to our duty stations or whatever. And I ended up getting, going to Waegwon, which was down by Daegu in Korea. But, uh, had no idea, still, they said you were going to be working on trains, train, being train guard. And I, my dad was, worked on the railroad for a while, so it was kind of neat, but I still had no idea what we were going to do, so. When I got down there, um, I was in the 260th M. P. Company, um, at the camp there, and Camp Carroll, and I was assigned to the train guard platoon. Well, this was, this was something new. I was in on the ground floor. We hadn't even really started yet, but all this, all the equipment coming out of Vietnam was new. It was being shipped to Okinawa, Philippines, Korea, so a ship would come in and, or, they'd

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take so many guys for how big the train was or how big the, uh, how many cars had military equipment on it, and then so many guys would go down to, uh, Chin Hei, which was down by Pusan. by train and then we'd uh, they were loading a cargo train or uh, yeah, just a regular freight train and then we'd ride that train to wherever it had to go and so it was kind of a nice job because you got to see, I got to see every part of Korea. It didn't stay in one spot, so.

Dean Wetzel: Would you say Korea is beautiful?

Randy Smith: I'd say it's beautiful. Mountainous, um. Yeah, very beautiful.

Um, it didn't smell very good, because of the, uh, fertilizers on the rice paddies and stuff, but after a while you don't even smell it, you know.

Dean Wetzel: Did you enjoy the culture of Korea?

Randy Smith: Yeah, yeah, I did enjoy the culture. People were friendly, and Yeah, very It had a few incidences, but, uh, it was beautiful. I really liked, uh, the duty there.

Dean Wetzel: Um, so as you're riding around on these trains, doing your daily job with the military asked you to do, did you have a good feeling about what you're doing? And I guess, I don't know if that's the best way to say that, but like, uh, were you proud with your job or did you feel like somehow you were like, almost escaping. Um, like you had friends that obviously went to Vietnam,

and you probably heard about what was going on down there and stuff. And then you were over here in Korea. I mean, yes, you're still doing your job and you're doing it to your best of ability, but did any of you, like, regret not being in Vietnam?

Randy Smith: I don't think so. I think we were blessed to have what we had.

Not be there. We, we did see some guys that we knew and That later on came to Korea that went to Vietnam for a while and it was, they were, they were not the same guys. And um, and though it was winding down and they were only there for four or five months, it was, it had an impact on them. They were so glad to be out of there, so, yeah, we uh, we liked our job. I wouldn't mind staying there for another six months or so.

Dean Wetzel: Uh, did you ever work with the South Koreans or any other UN members for that, member nations for that matter? And then, what was your role when you were working with them, if you did?

Randy Smith: Yeah, we had what they called katusas that worked with us.

They were Koreans that were in the South Korean army. And they were doing the same job we did. It was nice working with them because most of them knew English. So, we could the translating would be easier when you're going to a town or, you know, going to a little shop to buy something or something, you know. Take a katusa with you and he could translate for you. And you'd learn a

lot about the country too. One guy that I, uh, was paired up with for about the first three trips was a Korean who was Um, adopted by a United States Colonel. And he was taken to the United States and educated in our school systems. And then joined the Army when he got old enough and went back there. Knew perfect English and still knew, even from being a little boy, um, the Korean culture and stuff like that. That's it. I learned a lot from Juan. He was, he was a good guy, very dedicated. Yeah, we had, we had a good time together.

[00:20:00] **Dean Wetzel:** Were you able to stay in touch with him after your time in Korea ended?

Randy Smith: No, he, uh, he was in the train guards for a certain while and then he went on to something else. I don't know where he went or.

Dean Wetzel: The one curse, I guess, of the military, right? Like, overnight, somebody could just disappear.

Randy Smith: Disappear, and they're gone, and you don't know where they went.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah. If you stay around long enough, they say you'll eventually see each other again, but that's if you stay around long enough. Well, well, this'll be an interesting one. Leave. Obviously, you know, Vietnam, that would have probably been a little bit harder to get, but I'm thinking in Korea, you probably

had reddle, but I'm thinking in Korea, you probably had reddle. readily leave.

So, what was that like and what did you guys kind of do on leave? Um. You by leave I guess like your rest.

Randy Smith: Just rest?

Dean Wetzel: Yeah, like your time off.

Randy Smith: Yeah, we weren't on duty all the time. We, we were in the barracks or in town and we'd have to check the roster every day to see if we were gonna be on another train. But it wasn't like you were working every day. Now, when you were on a train, it could be anywhere from two days to ten days, depending on where it was going, and, uh, but then you'd come back, and usually our, our sergeant would, if you were on a ten day trip, he'd give you, you know, several days off, you know. Yeah, it was, me was just, we went, we went to Tegu, we traveled around the immediate area there, and, uh, you know, just hung out, you know. Yeah

Dean Wetzel: Little, was there like nightclubs and like bars and stuff like that?

Randy Smith: Bars and nightclubs.

Dean Wetzel: So it was a well-developed military kind of city. It wasn't just some little village out in the middle of some jungle.

Randy Smith: It was a little village, but it was, yeah, it was a military village.

Dean Wetzel: Yes, it had at least some of the refreshments that you could, you could give for leave purpose. Um, do you think your time in Korea changed you as a person? And I guess we can even open that up to even be enlarged and say, do you think your time in the military changed you as a person? And was that a good change for you?

Randy Smith: Oh, definitely. Um, made me mature, made me more respectful. Um, before I went in the army, I was kind of like a hippie. I was, you know, I did, went to the protests and, Rock and roll and whatever, you know, it was a lot of partying. And, uh, you know, when I went into the military, it just straightened me up and, uh, just made me more respectful and more, yeah, I mean, it made me a better person.

Dean Wetzel: Well, how old were you?

Randy Smith: I had more of a, more of a trying to plan my life where before that time I had no plan for my life. And then after I got out, it seemed like, you know, what am I going to do now? And I tried to, uh, first thing, get a job and that stuff. And I think it helped me. When I did get jobs, I was rarely called in sick. And I was there every day, so. Stuff like that just makes you more aware of your, what you're supposed to be doing.

Dean Wetzel: They don't give you sick days in the Army, do they?

Randy Smith: No, you got to be really sick.

Dean Wetzel: Um, during your time in Korea, uh, did you ever make friends? I know we talked about this a little bit with the one gentleman. And then what did you guys' kind of like do as friends while you guys were in Korea, both on duty and then off duty?

Randy Smith: Yeah. We traveled around, um, Hmm. We all had. You know, it was a big thing back then. Everybody bought stereos from the PX. So, yeah, the barracks were full of stereos, making, playing all kinds of different music. And, um, Excuse me. Um, yeah, I had a couple of really close friends. And, um, one, one died from cancer. And the other one lives down in Ohio. And, uh, yeah, we stay in touch. Gary and I stay in touch. Um, I haven't seen too many of the other ones. It was, we were tight as a unit. That's, that's kind of one thing I regret is that we were tight as a unit, but we didn't stay tight when we got out. It was like never seeing each other again, you know. And I always think I'm going to run into some, one of the guys sometime, you know, because I travel around a little bit here. So, I've seen, I've seen Gary. I've been down, I've been down and seen him. We're both into motorcycles and stuff like that, so. What we did on our off time, just, you know, bars, hanging out. We do things like build models and stuff, just little activities like that.

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Dean Wetzel: You guys get good at cards?

Randy Smith: Yeah, we were, we were cards, playing pool, you know, we had pool tables and stuff. Yeah.

Dean Wetzel: Kind of, it's kind of hard to play pool by yourself, so. Yeah. Makes it, makes it a little bit easier there.

Randy Smith: We had a little ice cream shop across the, our barracks was right on the edge of a, an athletic field. Okay. Ice cream shop was on the other side of the athletic field. We hung out there quite a bit, playing pool. We had a jukebox and, you know. Just a hangout place.

Dean Wetzel: It's like the enlistment club. It sounds like.

Randy Smith: Small. All it serve is ice cream.

Dean Wetzel: Don't eat too much of that.

Randy Smith: No.

Dean Wetzel: Uh, so I got to ask kind of a little bit of a personal question here. Do you believe in, in luck?

Randy Smith: Um, no,

Dean Wetzel: no. Uh, what then do you think kept you safe while in Korea?

And I know we were talking right before we started actually recording. Korea was still a war zone. It was forgotten about during the Vietnam era, but this was still an active war zone. At any moment, you could have been the new front lines. So what do you think kept you safe then?

Randy Smith: Well, as uh, as I got older, I, um, started getting more and more into my faith. And I think I think God is real and I think he kept me safe because there's so many incidences where things could have gone bad and, uh, didn't, even in civilian life and, uh, he had a plan for me and, yeah, I think he kept me safe.

Dean Wetzel: You think you could give us an example of one of those instances when you were in the service? Again, it doesn't have to be necessarily in Korea, just during your time.

Randy Smith: In the service, uh, well I got thrown off a train more than once just from the bouncing.

Dean Wetzel: Okay.

Randy Smith: And, uh, we were, we, you know, we were all over the trains, we were walking, you know, you see on TV these guys walking on boxcars and stuff, you know, that, that was, that was all the time with us, you know. But

once in a while these cars would start bouncing. It was me and Gary. Uh, going around a curve, and all of a sudden that thing started bouncing, and it threw both of us off, and we rolled down this hill, and then quickly got up and ran back, and it was just, and the, the train went around the curve and then into a tunnel which was probably ten miles long, because you couldn't see the other end of it, and we just barely caught the caboose, and. Had to jump on the caboose to get on that train again. Just before it went into the dark tunnel. Ha ha. So, there was things like that, I can't, I can't really, driving, Riding around in a Korean taxi cab was putting your life in danger. Ha ha ha. Those, those guys, when you meet on a mountain pass, somebody's going to go over that cliff. It was so scary. But, uh, yeah, it was somebody who was keeping his hand on us.

Dean Wetzel: Well, it sounds like your job was a little hazardous. At times.

Randy Smith: hazardous at times. Yeah.

[00:30:00] **Dean Wetzel:** Um, maybe walk us through some of the, some of that little bit of hazard. I know another thing you had talked about was, uh. Sleeping on the trains, and you had an interesting story of some of the stuff that you've slept on at times.

Randy Smith: Yeah, we slept on bombs and, um, artillery shells, ammunition, mortar shells, all kinds of stuff, and crates. Um, even Agent Orange, the barrels

of that, which I think was part of my physical problems. But we had, what we liked was the trucks and the tanks and stuff. We could get inside and ride those. Um, that was kind of fun. Um, did, did sleep on some missiles. Had, had a trainload of missiles that we, um, traveled at night. Slept, uh, was a train that stopped inside caves to hide from the satellites. And, uh, it was interesting, the stuff that we guarded. And then there was also the Korean Slick, Slick Boys, would get on there and try to throw stuff off, you know. So, you'd have to always chase them down. There was some incidences where they got thrown off the train and some of them didn't make it.

Dean Wetzel: Wow Yeah., I was just about to ask, I was like, was this like the Wild West? Was this like train robbers going on, but in Korea?

Randy Smith: Well, you didn't know if they were Slick Boys or they were North Koreans, you didn't know. Yeah, we just had to keep the stuff we had safe. Some of it was junk, I mean some of it, we had gondolas full of just parts. It was like a junkyard, parts. But they'd get on there and they'd throw that stuff off and use it. But we kept them from doing it, so.

Dean Wetzel: Did you ever go toe in toe with one of those Slick Boys?

Randy Smith: I was with two guys I did, and that's, uh, one of the times where they held him down and waited for, uh, us to go across a train, uh, a bridge

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across the river. And then they threw him off the train. And he hit the girders and ended up in the sandbar down below. And didn't make it, because when we came back days later he was still laying down there and kids were poking him with sticks and stuff.

Dean Wetzel: Price of the job, right?

Randy Smith: Yep.

Dean Wetzel: So, uh, looking back at your time in Korea, what do you think was your funniest memory of Korea?

Randy Smith: Funniest?

Dean Wetzel: Funniest. What are your top five? We can do the top five too if that's easier. And again, going through it, I'm sure it wasn't funny at the time, but looking back at it, you're probably like, God, you're stupid.

Randy Smith: Yeah, it was a lot of that. Um, it was, it wasn't really funny, but it was a terrifying time. A town attacked us one time.

Dean Wetzel: Okay.

Randy Smith: Apparently, they had an army base there, they got shut down, and the people there were kind of ticked off. And we stopped there. And there

was 10 of us on this train. Well, me and one of the guys went down into town, which sloped, sloped down from the train station, and got down to the intersection and, uh, a taxicab flew around the corner, stopped, guy got out, kicked the back window out, or the side window, one of the door windows, grabbed the glass, and came at us with the glass. And, uh, so we, I had my nightstick out, and the other guy had a straight razor out. And he backed us all the way up to the train station, screaming and yelling. And then behind him, the whole town came after him, with him. And, uh, when we got to the train station, those guys were in the middle of the train station. In a circle, you know, with our backs to each other. And, um, this whole town just came through the train station trying to get us. One guy got hit with a shovel. There were pitchforks and rakes and all kinds of stuff coming at us. And even the, uh, the train conductors and people were fighting them off. And, uh, finally we went out and got on our train. I don't know. And the train went down a ways and stopped, and me and Juan, the guy I was telling you about that was from Korea, we went down to the police station and they had captured that guy and started it. And he was getting Korean justice down there, which isn't very, very good for a Korean. And they just wanted to know our side of the story. And so we told it, and then we got back on the train. Well, what happened was they put that town off limits. We could stop, we could go into the train station, but no further. And so that town was completely off limits. And, um, several weeks later, I saw that

guy that started it. He was outside the fence. And they had cut his hand off for coming at us and starting the whole thing. He was crying and blaming us. .

Dean Wetzel: Uh, was that alarming? I know. Listening to that story, for me, the first thing that goes through is, I mean, we didn't necessarily win the Korean conflict, the Korean War, but I mean, South Korea exists because of Americans. Mm-Hmm. , you know, in our resolve and whatnot. So, for there to be such opt, you know, pushback against the Americans, that, that's alarming to me. Was that a common theme throughout?

Randy Smith: I think they were; they were mad that they lost their jobs at the, at the base, at the army base that was there. And so, they were losing their

Dean Wetzel: Income.

Randy Smith: Income. And so, they saw us and took it out on us, and we were just at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Dean Wetzel: So, more of an instance of happens just, just wrong place, wrong time. Oh, yeah. That's, that's interesting. Um, yeah. Well, I'm glad you made it through that, alright.

Randy Smith: Yep. A few little injuries, but we made it.

Dean Wetzel: Um, so, I've got to ask, do you attend any veteran organizations today?

Randy Smith: not really. I've participated in the wall, um, being set up here and there. Um, because several years ago it was a motorcycle deal too, so we, we escorted the wall. From the casino into Grand Rapids, South Grand Rapids area, to a park and, and then help set it up and just was there for his little three-day event. Um, no, I haven't joined the American Legion or the VFW. If I, if I would join anything, it would be the VFW....

[37:57]- [40:45] [Section omitted on behalf of the Veteran]

Dean Wetzel: Well, let's move on to a little bit of a lighter topic here. Um, what do you think was the best part of your service?

Randy Smith: Just the whole, the whole experience. I think I had really good jobs. Um, even when I got to Yuma, Arizona, I got out of the MPs because I had a disagreement with one of the sergeants, MP sergeants. And, um, Um, because I had driven a truck before I went in, they put me in the motor pool, which I ended up driving the pass bus 30 miles into town and hauling these guys back and forth from town. And the one good thing about that job was I didn't have to wear a uniform. So, I wore cut offs and, you know, hot desert. And they were,

mostly, I'd take them in there sober and bring them back inebriated. So, that was a fun job.

Dean Wetzel: I've never personally been to Yuma, but every one of my guys that I know that have been there said they hated that place.

Randy Smith: Yeah, it's, it's kind of a spot in the desert out there. They

Dean Wetzel: said it was the middle of nowhere.

Randy Smith: Yeah, it truly is. They have a Marine base there too.

Dean Wetzel: Oh yeah, of course, of course they do. Um, was that all that you did when you were in Yuma then? Was just bus driving?

Randy Smith: Um, yeah, I worked in the motor pool for a couple weeks and then I drove a big bus around the base, which was as boring as I could get. And then this job opened up to run the pass bus into town. So that was good because I had parked the bus at the regular Greyhound bus station. And me and another Army buddy of mine down there ended up getting an apartment three blocks away from the bus station. So, I'd have to drive the bus in, park it there, and wait three hours before I drove it back. So, I'd go down to my apartment and hang out for a while. But it was a pretty crazy job.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah, you get, some, some jobs can be lucky like that, huh. Did you ever experience anything unusual during your service? Like, I don't, um, I'm trying to think. I had a rogue wave once when I was deployed. That hit the ship that was just out of nowhere. Uh, did you ever experience like something unique, random, unplanned in your event? And then how did you deal with that?

Randy Smith: I can't really say anything happened like that.

Dean Wetzel: Or even it could be someone just runs in there, just does something humorous in your bunk as you're laying there one night.

Randy Smith: Well, we had, some of the brothers got upset one night and one of them came up, this was early on, and came through and flipped all our bunks upside down with us in them. He was talking about something, I don't even know what it was now, but uh, everybody got all upset and it was kind of a barracks brawl. It wasn't really a brawl, but a lot of hollering and screaming. Um, there's a lot of weird incidences, uh, we were always fearful of a train being derailed, when one had been derailed. Which they had pictures in the Stars and Stripes, uh, magazine, well, newspaper. And luckily none of our guys were on it. That was always a fear that, you know.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah, hauling around missiles and tanks and

Randy Smith: Yeah, tanks and all kinds of equipment.

Dean Wetzel: Agent Orange and if it derailed.

Randy Smith: Bombs. Went to a lot of air bases with bombs.

Dean Wetzel: I could, yeah, I could see why derailment might be a little bit of a fear.

Randy Smith: Bombs even though they didn't have fuses on them, they just had eye hooks. It was hard to sleep on.

Dean Wetzel: Well, and they're still heavy as all get out. So even if it doesn't detonate, just rolling on you, it could be a bad day.

Randy Smith: We, uh, there was a humorous, I got a humorous story. Um, in the wintertime, we, we kind of sleep in the, uh, our congregate in the caboose because it's too cold. And, uh, there are a lot of tunnels in Korea. Well, when this train would go into a tunnel, it was pitch black. I mean, you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. And, uh, there was always an engineer in there in the caboose. So, we'd play mind games with him, uh, like, uh, we'd all sneak out the door. And then when the king came out of the tunnel, he's the only one in there. And he's looking around. We're looking in the windows. And then he'd go into another tunnel and then all of a sudden, we'd be back in there. He just didn't know how we were coming and going, coming, and going without him hearing it. It was kind of funny.

Dean Wetzel: Well, I'm sure if you, especially like a 10-day trip, I mean you'd probably get pretty monotonous so you'd have to deal with whatever you could.

You'd get tired of playing cards and everything else that you could do to entertain.

Randy Smith: Hard to play cards on top of a train. It's moving.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah. We'd

Randy Smith: horse around. Luckily, more of us didn't fall off.

Dean Wetzel: Oh yeah. No. Well, it's round. They

Dean Wetzel: You were explaining to earlier that movement from car to car because they would pack them so full, you guys had to go on top. Was there a walkway up there for you guys?

Randy Smith: No.

Dean Wetzel: It was just smooth metal?

Randy Smith: Well, its round and did have a flat spot right in the center. That you could walk on. But, uh, On the passenger trains, yeah, we, We got good at riding passenger trains for free. Because we could go between the cars, climb up on top, and the conductor would come through a bunch of tickets, and once he

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got through, then we'd come back down again. But, uh, Yeah, we, we, uh, we would do things like that. Right for free. Got caught once, got thrown off the train out in the middle of nowhere. But when a freight train came by, we'd hop on that and take it, you know.

Dean Wetzel: Became essentially a hobo then.

Randy Smith: that's kind of what we were. We were, we were called train rats. Train rats. So, uh, Yeah, that's kind of what we were, hobos. Armed hobos. Yeah, we grew our hair a little longer. You know, when you're on a train for ten days, a lot of beards got grown out. A little bit.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah, you have no way to shave.

Randy Smith: Ya

Dean Wetzel: Well, how was it like staying in touch with your family and your friends?

Because obviously, you being in Korea, you having a set base even once you were Done with your train rides or whatnot. You still had a certain place. So, I imagine you could get mail I imagine you could send mail. I imagine you you could communicate fairly easy. Is that correct?

Randy Smith: Yeah, that's correct. We Got cookies and care packages and stuff Home shared it with all the guys. They did the same.

Dean Wetzel: Is that a big morale boost for you guys over there to kind of be able to stay connected like that even though you're thousands of miles away.

Randy Smith: Yeah, we always look forward to mail I have a girlfriend at home. She wrote me quite a bit. Sent pictures and sent the pictures back.

Dean Wetzel: Was it pretty regular? Could you like set your clock to like when mail was?

Randy Smith: Yeah, it was every day. Um, whether you got some or not. Um, obviously if we were out for a few days to come back and you'd have some mail. Stacked up. I was always looking forward to that.

Dean Wetzel: That little touch of home.

[00:50:00] **Randy Smith:** lot of guys did take 30 days leave while they went over there and went home, but I didn't. I stayed there for the whole 13 months and uh, actually kind of would have wanted to stay longer, but I had just as much good time in Arizona as I did over there too, so.

Dean Wetzel: Now was it just one deployment is what you did in Korea, correct?

Randy Smith: Yeah, one deployment. I did end up at the tail end. The last three months or so I ended up going down to the, there's a, there was a base right on, uh, in Pusan on the bay. And that's at the docks and stuff. It's, uh, was the food, it was the food depot of all the military in Korea. They had refrigerators after refrigerated units. Stacked up there, um, they had a full lumber yard. They had, you know, just basically everything that the army would use came out of that depot. And so I ended up spending the last three months there, riding around in a jeep, guarding it, which wasn't much because it was walled in, barbed wire, and then they had towers, which had Korean security guards in all the towers and stuff. So it was, it was not really a bad thing.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah. Crazy to hear that they had guard towers around the food supply.

Randy Smith: Yeah. Well, from what we hear, there was a lot of uh, pillage going on I guess you might say. Some of the security guards were in on that. Yeah.

Dean Wetzel: Well, sure, I mean, I can imagine the Korean people looking at that massive storage, as you were explaining, refrigerator after refrigerator after refrigerator unit, and going, well, I could probably use a little bit of that.

Randy Smith: Well, one of the bad things was, we were part of it, kind of doing it too, because our mess hall there served nothing but hot dogs and, hot dogs, hamburgers, and sauerkraut. Day after day after day. And here we are sitting on the whole food depot of Korea. We had refrigerated units full of steaks, which obviously went to Seoul for the, you know, higher ups. So a few of them steaks got, we bought our own little hot plates and ovens and stuff like that. I don't know. We'd have steak cookouts once in a while.

Dean Wetzel: Oh man. Um, do you recall the day your service ended and where were you when your service ended?

Randy Smith: Yuma, Arizona. I hadn't worn a uniform in months, and I had to put on a uniform that day. And, uh, yeah, went in and signed out. And the thing of it was, I was kind of in a predicament, because I had a, I had bought a 51 Chevy car that had transmission problems, so I had the transmission being fixed in Yuma. The car was at the base in our auto repair thing, up on the hoist, and I could not get this guy in town to finish that transmission. So, I had to kind of stay on the base for a while after I got out. So, I had guys make me a meal, meal card, and I lived in one of the barracks rooms for about a month after I got out and I'd eaten a mess hall and nobody really knew I was, I was out, you know, in or out. So, I stayed there until I got that transmission and put it in that Chevy. Then I was out of there. Gave another guy a ride home. He lived up in Wisconsin.

Dean Wetzel: Can't go very far without a transmission.

Randy Smith: No, no. And that was a nice car. I wish I would have never sold it.

Dean Wetzel: And that's what you did was drive all the way back to Michigan?

Randy Smith: Yep, drove all the way back to Michigan in that car. That was one of my toys that I came back with.

Dean Wetzel: Well, because you were serving during the Vietnam era, I know this was towards the end, and correct me if it wasn't quite this way, but did you have a bad reception returning home? You hear the horror stories of guys getting spit on, people calling them baby killers. What was it like to finally come back, I mean, to your home?

Randy Smith: It was different. It was, uh I didn't have the, the, the spitting and the protesting going on, but the fact was, nobody would talk to me, and nobody would sit near me, and I flew into San Francisco airport and had a, quite a layover there, and I sat in that sat in the terminal, and nobody would sit on that bench next to me. It was like they avoided me because I was in uniform. And the one guy that did sit down and talk to me was going to, what do you call it, Al-Anon or something. It was a drug rehabilitation thing. So, he was basically a prisoner. And um, that guy there. And, so he, he sat down and he's the only guy

that talked to me. And we talked for quite a while. But I got on a plane, everybody I sat next to wouldn't talk to me. So, I kind of got this feeling that nobody wants to talk to the military, somebody in the military. So, I ended up coming all the way home that way.

Dean Wetzel: Did that hurt?

Randy Smith: It was different, but I did feel like, yeah, I felt like, uh, nobody wants, nobody wants to talk to a military guy, you know. It kind of hurt.

Dean Wetzel: Um, so when you got out, were you aware of any of the VA benefits, any of the VA help? Was the VA helpful for you at all?

Randy Smith: Yeah. Not, not what they are now. I did get a VA loan for my first house I bought, but basically it was, you know, it was not, I just didn't try to pursue it a little bit, but I can't even tell you where the VA office was, so.

Dean Wetzel: Were you aware of the GI bill?

Randy Smith: Yup. And I was, um, I was going to enlist in school, that's after I got married. Get some, but um, life got in the way of kids. I just never ended up going to school. I did a, uh, correspondence course through Chicago Institute for drafting for about a year. And, um, did well in that, but it was just, it was work on my own, send it in, grade it, send it back. I passed the first year, but

after that I didn't pursue it anymore, so. Yeah, I just, that's one of my regrets, is not using the GI ability to get schooling.

Dean Wetzel: How would you classify or say your adjustment to civilian life was?

Randy Smith: It took a while. I didn't know it then, but I had PTSD. I think everybody does. Um, just the feeling that you just don't fit in. You know, all my friends and everything were two years ahead of me with things. Yeah, I just, I kind of stayed a couple friends of mine. If I'd go anywhere to a party or something, I'd just remain quiet. But there was a lot of, a lot of guys that did congratulate me for being home and stuff like that, so. Eventually it passed. But I can remember the first, probably the first two weeks I just, I didn't leave my parents' house. I just was, didn't want to go anywhere or do anything.

Dean Wetzel: But it wasn't, wasn't because you didn't feel safe?

[01:00:00] **Randy Smith:** No, I just didn't feel like I fit in.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah, you felt like that, that black sheep, so to speak. I, I even had that when I came back a little bit. I think, I think that war changes you in a way that you, you do stand out.

Randy Smith: You know, and you don't even You're doing something different that all, everybody that you know doesn't relate to. You know, and so, yeah, there's nothing you can talk about, so.

Dean Wetzel: Um. So, looking back some 50 years later, that's unfortunate how long it's been, Uh, do you think your service, your time in the service changed how you interacted with people and the overall relationship you have with them?

Randy Smith: I think so. I think it made me more, um, more outgoing, more confident. I guess before I went in the service I felt like a, kind of like a failure. Back then it was hard to get a job. I did finally get a job and worked there three months and then got drafted and stuff. But, yeah I was more of a, more introverted I think back then than I ever did when I got out. Even though, for a while there. I was kind of introverted because of probably PTSD. But after a while, after everybody, you know, you start mingling in with everybody again and yeah, then you feel more confident. I know I was in a lot better shape than a lot of my friends.

Dean Wetzel: Um, after, you know, going to Korea, um, training to be in Vietnam, training for war, has it changed your opinion and feelings about warfare today? And if it hasn't, has it reinforced your feelings and your opinions of warfare?

Randy Smith: Um, yes and no. I've got two sons. Yes, I would like to see them go into the military. No, I would not like them to be in a war situation. Um, because I've done a lot of military, like my bookshelves are full of military books, and war is not something that anybody should hope for. It's the worst. But yeah, as far as military service, I think it would help them to be a little more respectful and grow up, you might say, because it did, it did do that with me.

Dean Wetzel: It helps you.

Randy Smith: And everybody I know that went in, except that one buddy of mine.

Dean Wetzel: It's very quick to let you know you were a cog in a much larger machine. But without you that machine doesn't work. Right. And that's what it teaches you, at least from my perspective. You know.

Randy Smith: Right. And it teaches you teamwork. And, uh, you can't, no man is an island. You do things all by yourself. Sometimes you have to help. And then

Dean Wetzel: like, it's also got incredible memories, right? Yeah. The once in a lifetime type of stories and experiences, obviously. Yeah, the

Randy Smith: travel, the lifetime experiences. Stories I can tell the people. One funny story I told you last time you were here was throwing a can of broken beans or whatever and hitting a farmer. Yep. Korean farmer in the head. I wasn't aiming for his head. It laid him out instantly flat in that rice paddy and I thought, oh, I killed him. He jumped up and he was dancing and holding that can up high. Even though it had blood coming out of his forehead, he loved that can.

Dean Wetzel: well, as this interview winds down, Randy, Is there anything else you would like to include in your oral history?

Randy Smith: Um, I wish, uh, The VA would be a little more responsive. Like Agent Orange and stuff. Cause, uh, medical problems. And every time I try to get some, uh, You know. I guess you wouldn't say, uh, help with it because I am getting help, but, uh,

Dean Wetzel: Investigation?

Randy Smith: Investigation or, uh, you know, retirement, uh, disability or something. For my wife, even, to hold on to. Um, it just goes nowhere. And they throw it out. Because the date, the dates were wrong. I know for a long time Korea wasn't on the list. But they put it on the list now, and uh, but it only goes up to 71. Well, they were still getting barrels of that stuff after 71. I, I

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know that to a, for a fact. Every camp was using it, around the perimeters and stuff, especially up at the DMZ. No man's land there, it was all defoliated, so. And that's where we took most of it.

Dean Wetzel: So we're going to fast forward and say it's like 200 years from now and, uh, only your oral history, for whatever reason, lasts. What would you want that historian or researcher to know about your service in the U.S. military and about you being in Korea in particular? What is one thing that would stand out?

Randy Smith: Um, that, uh, well, we were there to defend the Korean peninsula. Um, you know, that was made back in 1950 when the North Koreans attacked. It didn't stop with the signing of the armistice. Um, because I was up at the DMZ and it's still like a war zone up there. There's still incidents of shooting back and forth. Um, I know the South Koreans love their freedom, and we made it happen. Vietnam, I think we had to quit in Vietnam because of political pressure, and, and just the, we got tired of that war. Just like Afghanistan. You know, we got tired of that and pulled out. Well, where's it gonna go? Right back to where it was in the beginning. Well, I don't think that that's the answer every country, but it is working in South Korea. I guess I was just happy to be part of that. Two short years I was there.

Dean Wetzel: It's always interesting to think about that question, isn't it? We could be fighting on our own

Randy Smith: soil by that time.

Dean Wetzel: You know, I wish I could have been around with like the revolutionary soldiers and asked that question, where they thought in 200 years, you know, 1976 would end. What do you think we would need to know?

Who knows what they would have said. It's an interesting thing the oral history project gives us a chance to do. Uh, last question and I'll let you go for the day. Uh, often history is written by the victor. In the case in Vietnam in particular, uh, the American government would say that this was a failed conflict. Would you agree with this statement or disagree with it? Why or why not?

[01:10:00] **Randy Smith:** I agree with, to the fact that we failed in doing what we should have been doing. Um, I mean we tried, but the politics of it just wouldn't let the military win. And so why was that? Was that just to make millions of dollars off of the whole thing? You know, it was just the way that thing was fought. To take ground and then give it back. And take ground the next day and give it back. Take ground It's what is that? That's just a waste of lives. To me. Yeah, I think we should have maybe pulled out a long time before that. Or not even gone in there. I mean it was a noble cause. It just didn't work

out. It just didn't work out because of, well, we're sick of war, I think, from World War II and Korea. They didn't want another one, but we're still having them.

Dean Wetzel: Would you say, um, Vietnam, Korea were both part of that domino theory? That, that, that's what they played? The, the bigger reason for America's involvement was that fear of communism and taking over, maybe, the South Pacific.

Randy Smith: Yeah, I think that was big. That was the big, I don't know if that was a lie, but it was a big selling point for that war. I don't see it happening now, after Vietnam was taken over. You don't see the other countries falling, but socialism is getting more prevalent nowadays.

Dean Wetzel: know I said that was the last question, but I promise this will be the last one. How did you feel then when the wall fell? You know, that, that, because I mean, again, that was the whole Cold War, that coming down, Vietnam, your time in Korea, that, that was kind of an ending to that. Did you, did that make it feel successful then?

Randy Smith: Yeah, that was a success, I think, with Reagan and, uh, Goyertchok. Goyertchok. Yeah, I think that was successful, um, because it did,

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it did free that whole area up for being oppressed. Now they can travel back and forth and get jobs wherever. You know, I think that worked, but, uh

Dean Wetzel: Did it kind of, like, re-recharge you, though, for, like, Okay, the wall fell, my time in Korea, us going to Vietnam, us fighting in Korea was worth something. We did actually get to the end. Even though the wall wasn't in Korea, per se, but that at least showed, like, we did beat Communism, what we set out, one of the bigger umbrellas that we set out to fight. Was that, was that there at all?

Randy Smith: Yeah.

Dean Wetzel: Yeah.

Randy Smith: Yeah. Um, yeah, we did hold them in check there. It was too bad we couldn't have done that in Vietnam. But, uh, yeah, you know, what went wrong there? Politics or just, uh, people got sick of the war.

Dean Wetzel: Well, Randy, I want to thank you for your time today with this oral history. It was a pleasure recording this, um, so thank you. Oh, you're welcome.