

Edgar St. John, Part I

[Interviewer: It's July 19, 2006. We're at the home of Edgar St. John in Las Vegas, Nevada. My name is Shannon Berndt and our cameraperson is Ed Feldman. Thank you so much for helping to put the Veteran's Oral History on the map. We're very excited about this project. Before we start in talking about your service, tell me a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up.]

Ed St. John: Well a little background on me I guess...I was born in Oklahoma City back prior to the Great Depression years. Oklahoma was probably the worst devastated state in the Great Depression because we had the dust bowl, it was known as then and the sand storms and so during that period of time I can recall where we had dust storms that would totally black out the sun during the noontime during the day. We had the soup bowls on the street. People of all levels of employment were lined up to get their piece of bread and their soup. That was a period of time when I went to a two-room school. We had Mrs. Norton there. She was part Indian, and Oklahoma was the last vestige for the Indians before it became a state. We had all the five civilized tribes, they called them: the Cherokee and the Cheyenne and the Checotahs and the Choctaws and so on. The different tribes were there and I went to school with some of the Indian children.

Interviewer: What did your father do for a living?

Ed St. John: Excuse me?

Interviewer: What did your father do for a living?

Ed St. John: My father was with the, first he was working with what was then a new company called Western Electric and later on, the Bell Telephone Company formed and he ended up working for the Southwestern, or he was with the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company for over 40 years and retired. He retired as the general plant superintendent of the telephone companies there in Oklahoma City. So I had a comfortable home and my father had a comfortable job during the Depression and we didn't suffer but we saw many people who did and we were around them at that time.

Interviewer: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Ed St. John: Excuse me?

Interviewer: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Ed St. John: I had a sister after I was twelve years old. My sister and I are barely, she was a latecomer and by the time that I left for the service, why, and stayed in the service, we didn't have much contact with each other. But I have a sister and she is currently retired down in Florida now [where my parents finally retired. She was the actuary, or not the actuary but the

controller down there for Disney World down there before she retired. She had her master's degree from the University of Florida there and her husband was a teacher there at the University of Florida. He was Dr. Wheaton. So her last name is Margaret Wheaton, she in fact still lives down there, and I talk to her periodically.

Interviewer: Do you recall December 7, 1941? The day Pearl Harbor was attacked?

Ed St. John: 1941?

Interviewer: Yes. December 7, 1941?

Ed St. John: On December 7, 1941, that was a Sunday and I was bicycling back from my friend that I used to play chess with when I was 15 years old. Well, we were friends all the way through grade school and I was on my bicycle when I left about 3:00 in the afternoon it seems like and by the time I got home I heard that on December 7, Pearl Harbor had been bombed and shortly after that I was either, I wasn't 16, I was 15, I think, about 15 and going on 16. After that I, a year and a half later I was in the service. I went into the service when I was 17.

Interviewer: And you enlisted?

Ed St. John: No. The way that, well, you say enlisted, I was in high school, my senior year in high school in Mrs. Holland's class and that was about 2:00 in the afternoon, it was our homeroom class. She had a knock on the door there, she went out into the hall, and there was an NCO there. He wanted to talk to her and she come in and she said, class, the sergeant wants to speak to the class so he came in. He said I want all the boys who are 17 years or older to please stand up and file out into the hall. We went out into the hall, they had a bus standing by, and they took us directly down to the post office and swore us into the military service.

Interviewer: Oh.

Ed St. John: And I don't think we had more than two there that were 18 and the rest of us were 17 years old and that was after the marine corps had been devastated there at _____ (9:41) and they lost a better part of their corps. They were so desperate for personnel that they just conscripted us and took us into service. So if you say did I enlist, yes under, you know I would have gone anyway but maybe when I was 18, not 17 you know. So when I went home that night my parents were surprised to find out I was in the service and I was taken out of high school and reported down there. They put me on the train and off I went.

Interviewer: And what branch of the service were you in?

Ed St. John: They gave me a choice, you want to go Army or Navy? I said Navy. They took me up to the Great Lakes. I stayed in a holding center up there for almost two months in a giant airplane hangar. Then they shipped me off to Camp Pendleton and put me through the marine corps boot camp out here at Oceanside, California.

Interviewer: And after you were finished with Oceanside?

Ed St. John: They gave me a 30-day leave and then shipped me out to Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: You went to Pearl Harbor.

Ed St. John: We got on our consolidated steel ship, right out of the Kaiser Shipyards. Maybe it was, I don't know, I know it was consolidated steel because we were scared to death of the Kaiser ships. They were falling apart. They were putting them up so fast that they just really weren't sea worthy. Some of them made it. They called them victory ships and this ship was a good one. It was named the, I pronounced it the "O-Needa" and I found out late from one of my friends that served on it said it was the "O-Nida" so you can take that either way. It was the APA-121 Oneida. It was a 20,000-ton ship. Normally it takes four and a half days to travel the 2,500 miles to Pearl Harbor, about four and a half to five days. It took us nine days because we were out at sea for two days and we hit a horrific hurricane, or in the Pacific, we call them typhoons, and we had waves out there that were five stories high. You can't believe it. This ship was 20,000 tons. It tossed us around like a cork in a bottle. I was in compartment C401L down there and there was a big solid steel beam behind my hammock and it went up through the ship as many did and I noticed when we hit this storm, there was a hairline crack in that steel and I noticed as we would go over one and then to the right and then we'd go through a wave and we would drop I don't know how far. It was like in an elevator. We were up in the forward compartment, like I said, C401L, and I noticed as that went on for three or four days there that steel began to crack and began to go up the _____ (13:34) just solid steel. The deck plates up there were twisting back and forth. We had servicemen that had been in the Navy over 20 years that said they had never been at sea in a storm like that. We had equipment, all the supplies for the LCTs on our deck up there, jeeps strapped, chained, big chains strapped to the upper deck. Those were all torn off by the waves, we rolled at not quite a 45-degree angle, and the captain of the ship, I was told, had our logs sealed and put in the shooting tubes with the floats because we were expected to go down at sea. We had over 5,000 troops on that ship and we nearly sunk. They lost two of our destroyers that were escorting us. They did sink at sea in that storm. So when we came in we had been already in combat and we came in listing at about 37 degrees. The ship was over to one side and cables and what have you was all hanging down. The troops were beat up and falling around in the internal sides of the ship and I almost got killed by the piano that broke from its straps and slid across the deck and shattered less than 3 feet from me and a piano hitting you coming across the room is like a shotgun shell and that was my introduction to get to Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: So you landed in Pearl Harbor and then what?

Ed St. John: Then after I was in Pearl Harbor, why they sent us over to process at Iroquois Point and from there, after a couple of days, they moved us up to the top of the island there to a place called Aiea where it was beautiful. I mean it was just lovely. You could look out across

the Waikiki Beach and see Barber's Point, Diamond Head Mountain, and all of that. It was just lovely.

Interviewer: What was your job assignment?

Ed St. John: They hadn't given us an assignment yet.

Interviewer: Okay.

Ed St. John: They were just shipping us.

Interviewer: All right.

Ed St. John: And they didn't know themselves. In those days, things were totally disorganized. Everybody was confused. Nobody was, it was total chaos.

Interviewer: But you did get an assignment eventually, right?

Ed St. John: Yeah. It was, and the best thing that happened up at Aiea was the pineapple juice. We were so starved from those nine days on that ship that you craved anything that was citric acid, you know. I think I drank a pitcher of pineapple juice the first time. But as it went on and as we stayed up there, we found out we got pineapple juice every day and then you got to where you got a little tired of pineapple juice, you know because they had great big pitchers of pineapple juice. I thought that was great and we had good rations up there, good food. Everybody was very kind to us. And then we took off on the Randolph to ship us, we were on our way to the Pacific, wherever. They never told us anything or where we were going. All of our letters, if we would write letters, it always went to one officer, whoever the officer was in charge of our group, and they would censor and cut out everything in there that they thought would indicate where we were going or where we had been. After that period of time on this ship we had a number of, we had naval troops and marines. By the way, I have left out before I shipped out to Pearl Harbor, in my training over here at Oceanside, California, I was assigned with a landing beach battalion, six marines over there, and my job was to carry what they called an angry nine. It was a radio unit, composed of a generator and an operational unit and I forget what the third, I guess the antenna. My job was to carry the generator on my back and that's a heavy little unit. We already had a pack on our back in the marines and then I had to carry this generator on my back. If you've seen these little boats that go up and land, the small boats, the personnel boats, they called them the LCBPs, landing craft personnel and when they hit the beach, the gate drops down. With us, they would drop the gate down out there in six and eight feet of water and of course we had all this gear on us and in that particular case you'd sink right down to the bottom and you had about two feet of water over your head so you had to struggle with your pack and the generator on your back to get into shore, and as far as I was concerned it was a mess. But that's what we had to do. Well, anyway, we had some training in radio work so they had me labeled as a radio operator or repairmen replacement. I was unaware of that but that's what they had me slated for. On this ship, the Randolph, one thing

that I never forgot on the Randolph was that I was on deck and we had these care packages from the Red Cross with books to read and a lot of times, like for breakfast, they would hand us an apple in one hand and a pancake in the other and that would be breakfast. They had so many troops that we didn't go down, sit down and have a nice meal or anything. It didn't work like that. We had too many troops. So you just stayed in place and they'd pass things around to you. But I noticed, I saw this steel bulkhead door with a water security handle on it there to clamp it down, the bulkhead, and they had an air hole about an inch and a half there. By the way, in the Pacific, it is extremely hot out there. I mean it was, with the humidity and it was just almost unbearable out there, the heat. That was on deck. And in these deck quarters like that, or really storage quarters, I saw these MPs, or SPs as they were known, they brought out this guy that couldn't stand up and he looked like somebody that had been in one of these Chinese prisons for a couple of years. He was just totally, he couldn't even hold his, his head was completely gone and he looked terrible. I understood that he had stolen a watch and they had put him in this engine supply room for 30 minutes and in there it's close to around 140 degrees. It's like going in an oven and he had to put his mouth up to this inch and a half hole to get air to breathe to stay alive. And the metal had burned his mouth it was so hot. It was all red around there. They took him down to sickbay and of course he had total dehydration and two days later, he died. So you know I'm sure that it was reported that he either died in the service of his country or missing in action. But we had things like that happen and I hear this stuff today and they talk about punishment being so hard. They don't know what did go on in World War II and in Korea. I mean, that's another thing I wanted to brief us on, that in the military service in those days, you didn't only have to worry about the enemy to fight, you had to worry about staying alive with your fellow servicemen because there were servicemen that you might have said something wrong to or they might just flat don't like you. They would either scheme, they would form cliques, and they would literally kill you.

Interviewer: Hum.

Ed St. John: And, I mean it's like this gang business, between the gangs. So you had groups of classes and normally you would fall in with your own, however you were raised, your moral group, your moral class, and you would have your buddies as a group for your own protection. So you had to concern yourself in those days with staying alive within your own group and if you ever got out, it was like a lamb that got out with a pack of wolves loose. If you got away from your group, you got zapped.

Interviewer: Hum.

Ed St. John: So these things have never been brought up in the various wars. War is more than just we and them and we are looking to fight them. So I think that's important to know. We are so spoiled today in the military of going after the people that are in authority that we're going to be our own worst enemy. We're going to destruct our own services to where we're going to have to get permission from a senior officer to shoot at the enemy to protect ourselves from being killed and it's getting down to the ridiculous state of having to justify doing your job in the service. I see that every day and that's part of my frustration. You know, I started in as a

recruit and I ended up retiring as the XO to the deputy post commander over 17,000 troops and had the responsibility for 17,000 troops so I know from the bottom up. I've held every grade in the service through the ranks. In fact, I'm what is known as a mustang. There's very few of those, those that have gone to college and directly in as an officer. There are those who have worked their way up to the rank of master sergeant or chief petty officer or that have gone through the ranks but didn't go higher but I have gone through the ranks and I have held every grade up to the grade of 16 with the exception of the warrant officer. I wasn't a warrant officer but I've held every other grade in the service. So I have a lot of history of understanding. No one could come up to me and say well as an officer you don't know how we as enlisted think or how we feel. I have felt every bit of enlistment and survived.

Interviewer: Did you see combat in the Pacific?

Ed St. John: I was in combat, yes. I have two silver stars and three bronze stars of combat service in World War II. I was in combat in the Palau Islands and in the Western Caroline Islands. We were under fire from the, bombed in straight from Truk Island and yeah. We were, in fact, when I was on the way from the Carolines up to the Marianas I was in a little, the LSM-874, a small tin can of a ship, a landing craft ship out in the open seas and I'm a survivor of that. It went down 342 miles Southwest of Guam in the Marianas. I went into Guam there and was placed into the hospital there or what they had set up as the aid station there. Then I was reissued my clothing. All I had on was my dog tags and my underwear drawers when they got me out of the ocean there and picked me up at sea.

Interviewer: How did the ship go down?

Ed St. John: The front ramp had been hit and we took on water from the bowel and it went under. I'm not sure about that number 874. It's just that you're going through an old man's memory. In sixty years, it could be another number, or I could be off a number or two, or it could be, I know it was a 600-numbered ship, that I know. No, I said eight. See, 8 -- whatever I said it was. Some things come out automatically. Some things will be correct and some are not. I'm not responsible for my mouth so...

Interviewer: Tell me about your most memorable experience. Maybe some of your notes that you have written down there.

Ed St. John: Well, there were some, we had some decent times down there. I mean you're not out there firing your weapon every minute because the enemy is not around you all the time. I was in with a group of men that were at, well, I'm missing part of my story here because I had some frightening times that I think are memorable.

Interviewer: Well...

Ed St. John: I have all these. There's my memorable times right there.

Interviewer: Okay. Go ahead.

Ed St. John: We went past Enewetak and Midway Island and all the trees of course were stubble. Then we headed for the Western Carolines and in the Western Carolines, that group of islands, there was a great, probably volcano as big as Fujiyama over in Japan. The very tip or the apex of that volcano was a few feet above the ocean and in so being it had formed a string of circular islands, small islands around in a circle twenty miles across, which made a beautiful harbor out in the middle of the ocean and they called it the Caroline Islands. My particular island that I was on was called Island Azor, and Mog Mog and Palolop (sp) 32:57 and Saraine and Fasari. I saw these islands and I was totally disappointed because I thought my Lord, these are, you know when you have visions of what an island is down in the South Pacific you think of some beautiful island but these were really very little of what I expected. They were just dots in the ocean. Then an LST-455 took me down to the Palau Islands down there. They were still under siege when I got down there. At that period of time they had me slated for the sixth marine JASCO and their job partially was what the Navy Seals do today. In other words, the night before the invasion you swam in and cut all the barbed wire under the beach so that the guys didn't get hung up. The Japanese have on each side bunkers, concrete bunkers, down in the ground. They can't escape. Their job is to set up a cross fire of machine guns and they have an unlimited amount of ammunition and while you're out there with your britches and your boots caught in this barbed wire, they just set there and spray you out. I mean there is a total just massive execution you know. So our job was to go in and cut that barbed wire and clear the underwater wire so that at low tide when they came in on the invasion, they usually try to come in at high tide so their ship goes over that barbed wire and then they hit the beach but also they have to go through this area of crossfire. So that's what constitutes an invasion. They had already hit Purple Beach, we were coming in behind them, and so we had a little time off to get ourselves together. There had been a big battle up just north of us along the beach there and I had been told to go up on a patrol and see what was up there. Here I am a kid with a Carbine with 17 rounds. So I went up there and there was a massive field out there of just bodies all over, both Japanese and American, just laying there. So then, it went up to an embankment like, and then dropped down probably 10 or 12 feet into the beach area, the sand that went out. So I was going through this battlefield there. I noticed one poor old pooch there, a brown-haired dog, he was chewing on something yellow like that, and he was hungry. What he was chewing on was a doggone sawdust stick of dynamite. I said doggone, the poor dog. Anyway, I went around and I heard a commotion over on the other side of this berm that went around there and I got down on the ground, thank God, I crawled up and looked over and I saw the most frightening sight I had ever seen in my life, about 35 or 40 20-foot crocodiles out there, salt water crocodiles. I mean there's not, these are the giant alligators. You can't imagine. They were fighting over bodies that had washed in from the sea for meat to eat, you see. I didn't realize it but these crocodiles can run 40 miles an hour. I am there looking them in the face. Fortunately, I can't remember, I just turned. I can't remember my feet touching the ground. Man, I just flew back across that field and got back up and I just reported that there was no activity down there but the crocodiles down there at that beach. And I remember that. I've often thought about that and I said did I just dream that? They've gone since back to, I saw a National Geographic on Palau Island and they still have salt-water crocodiles down there. I

saw something that one of them was fighting that looked like an anaconda. It was either a sea snake that was that big around across and that thing was holding its own with this giant crocodile down there. If I had ever got a picture of that, well they would have had, it's in my mind. That's one of my experiences there. So then the following day, they took me down, since I was a qualified radioman, and they had the avenger aircrafts down there that look like a greenhouse on top, with torpedo underneath, and they had what looked like a bed sheet. They had pulled this rear gunner. It had a pilot in the front and a rear gunner and radioman in the back. The rear gunner had a .50-caliber machine gun in the rear. So they were pulling this kid out of the cockpit, they tossed him down on the ground there, and they bundled him up in a sheet and carried him off. I said, "He got shot?" And they said that's right and they said he's number 17 that's been killed in the last two weeks. I thought, well. And they said you're his replacement. I said Jesus, you know. I was stunned. I didn't know what. So I said well, this is it. Then we were strafed by the Japanese at this time. We all took cover. The siren went all clear and we got out. They had a call they said. I was also, fortunately, my hobby as a youngster was Ham radio. So I had put down that at 15 years old I had after school, I worked for the Bell Telephone Company so I had worked up as a central office helper to the repairmen out there and I had experience in the technology of radios. In fact, I had a little Ham station there, _____ (41:12) at home, a little 10-peak transmitter. They said they need a radio tech man up at Ulithi, Azor. So they got me in an old C47, they flew me up to Ulithi, and that saved my neck from that poor kid that replaced me down there as a radioman. I'm sure he got it and that was slated for me and I got out there and reported in to the senior enlisted man there, Rodney Dallas. He was just a real fine person. He was like a big brother to me because I was still 17 you know and he was the old man at 23 years old. We called him the old man at 23 and he conducted himself as the old man at 23 because he looked after his boys. He must have had a fine father and mother because he certainly was a gentleman in all respects. So I reported to him and I had a nice job up there pretty much. We took our strafings from Truk Island but I was on this little island of Azor, which I showed you on that old document I had there. This old document here. And Azor was an island, here's a little map that they drew in here of that and Azor Island, this is Azor right here. This is Palolop (sp) 43:22 where there was a little marine air base there called MAG 45 (Marine Air Group 45). I was on this little island there. That island was 2,600 feet long, 900 feet wide and 8 feet above sea level and that was my station there. And then there's Soraline, and then Mog Mog was the, and then we had over 1,000 ships, battleships, the entire fifth fleet was located in this 20-mile area around these islands in there. We had submarine screens under water that allowed the ships to come in so they'd be protected from the submarines, in that area. That was the invasion force for Japan that was forming up in 1943. Admiral _____ (44:15) secret weapon. I was on Azor and I was nearly killed there. There were a couple of guys there that were stealing from the supplies and sending them back to the states. When I was off duty I used to swim out a little ways in the ocean there on the reef and I would go hunting for what we called cat eyes and these little shells that were very beautiful, turtle shells, and you could make necklaces out of them. They were all different little colors and cat eyes, you could string them up with wires, and they were beautiful shells. So that was my fun time. When I came back in, I would go through the mangroves and the scrub bushes there. I saw this giant box about the size of this table here and it was marked for shipment for Port Hueneme, California. I said what in the world is this? I saw this serviceman's

name on the corner of the box to his address. So I went and got my senior NCO, who was Rodney Dallas, who was in charge of the whole group and I told him Sir, as a kid I think you'd better look at something I found. He came with me and he saw that and he said I'm glad you found this son, he said that's where we've been losing our key crystals and our radar tubes and all of our classified equipment and we didn't know where it was going. He said you don't say a word about this to anybody. I said I'll keep my mouth shut. So they caught these two guys. They got them but they didn't put them in chains or anything. They let them still stay loose. I didn't realize it but they had friends and one of their friends was named Lindstrom from Alabama. Lindstrom held one grade higher rank than me, my rank. So actually when we would go on detail he was in charge of me and I had to follow his orders, which I did. So there came a time when we had to disassemble an electrical station there and they have a big control panel there and a lot of voltage going through, 26,000 volts. I just had my underdrawers on. It was really hot there so we didn't really wear uniforms too much out in the Pacific. He was on the other end of the Quonset hut, he was to cut the voltage off down there from the 35 KW generator, and he told me it's safe to take your clines and cut the cable up there. Now this cable normally carries 26,000 volts. So I said are you sure it's off. He said why are you taking your time? I saw a pair of rubber gloves, sleeve elbow gloves hanging up there and my father was always safety minded and I had been working with the phone company. They always taught us that safety first. That was the motto there. I said even though I'm hot and sweaty, I'll just put on these gloves, even though it's a dead cable, what the heck. So I did what my dad taught me to do and I put the gloves on. I cut the cable and there was an explosion there that totally blinded me. I mean it knocked me about 11 or 12 feet completely away from the panel. It blew me away from it. It was just like a bomb went off. It blew out the 35 KW generator and that was that end of the island's power supply line. It blew that thing out. Lindstrom went down there and said Oh, I'm sorry. You know he was apologizing but he knew what went through there and he had that figured to kill me. Rodney Dallas, he ceased operations that afternoon and got me over to the medial aid station. I was totally blind for two days. I couldn't see at all. I got my vision back, thank God. But still in this eye periodically, it's like a black hole builds in the center of my vision and if I was here looking at you, you would be just totally blocked out with my left eye. I must have caught something in my left eye from that. But that's a case of where they'll get back to you. If they are told to do away with you, you're done away with you know, in the service. That goes on all the time. I don't like to get into the, we're continually hit on with homosexuality. We were always harassed with that side of it but I'm not going to get into that group of people. You have these people that are always, so like I say, we form our own little group of those that are morally correct and have come from decent homes I would say, and then we have a certain element in the military that is like in any large organization, undesirables.

Interviewer: Did you celebrate the holidays in any way?

Ed St. John: When I went home?

Interviewer: No, while you were in the Pacific.

Ed St. John: Well I did. I was thumbing through this and I came across Thanksgiving out there on Ulithi. I saw that. I didn't know I had it before but that was what we had on that particular time there. I didn't know it was tucked in there until I was looking through this little pamphlet here.

Interviewer: Ripe olives, celery sticks, turkey, so you had everything.

Ed St. John: Yeah but you gotta remember the turkey came out of the can and all of those items that you see there were in canned rationed items.

Interviewer: Even celery?

Ed St. John: So they didn't quite taste like you'd taste back home. It looks good on the menu and we got exactly, we got turkey, but it was canned turkey like canned tuna. So we didn't get the drumsticks and the turkey didn't come in like they get over in Iraq over there. They come in and the President sits down and they're talking away in an air-conditioned hooch and being served. I'm going to tell you these kids today in war, I don't like to be the old grinch talking about the old days, but we didn't have that kind of treatment when we were in World War II. By the way, there aren't many of us left. There are about 1,500, I understand that were in World War II, 1,500 a day we're losing or dying just from old age and whatever, overindulgence. And then those that were in World War II and Korea, there's a few more of those left alive but there are very few left that fought in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. I've had one long tour in World War II, I had two combat tours in Korea, and I had two combat tours in Vietnam. And I didn't do like Senator Kerry. I didn't go there sixteen weeks, run down to the base exchange at Pusan or at Saigon and get myself a movie camera down there and then get one of my buddies to take pictures of me fighting the war so I could use it later on in a political campaign. So I gotta get that dig in because I happened to have been at Cam Ranh Bay when he was there. I had traveled from Nha Trang down to Cam Ranh Bay and I picked up a jeep at Nha Trang, went down to Cam Ranh Bay. You're supposed to travel in convoy and I told them I wanted to get down there so I went by myself, which was not unusual. A patrol of VC chasing me about a mile and a half as I was traveling down there and I had gotten injured in my right arm. So when I got to Cam Ranh Bay I reported in to the medical aid station in there and who was this guy in there arguing with the doctor that he had shrapnel in his arm and it turned out, I found out later it was old brother Kerry in there pleading with the doctor and making a report. The doctor was laughing about it. He said you know that's like skinning your knee and then asking for the purple heart. The saying over in Vietnam was if you have three purple hearts you get to rotate back to the States. We didn't get purple hearts for shrapnel. You got shrapnel every week over there. There's nothing wrong with shrapnel. That's part of the job. I mean a round hits you there and concrete hits you in the nose and skins your nose, that's shrapnel. You don't get a purple heart. I counted purple hearts when you lose a limb, eyesight, or your life or a body part. If you lost a body part then you got the purple heart and that's just what we went on. My God, if I counted all the shrapnel, I've still got pieces I think up here in the side of my head. I got shrapnel wounds all up and down my whole left side. I would have had 15 or 20 purple

hearts if I did what old brother Kerry there did. He's the son of an ambassador so he apparently gets, you can cut that out of your tape, of what I think about that you know.

Interviewer: So were you in the Pacific when the war ended.

Ed St. John: No. I was back in the hospital here at the, I was in the hospital at the Naval Station there in Norman, Oklahoma.

Interviewer: Why were you in the hospital?

Ed St. John: My left lung was injured and I was evacuated out of Guam there. I had used up all the medicine they had for me there so they said just ship him back. So I was shipped back under medical conditions.

Interviewer: So the war was over, did you get out of the service?

Ed St. John: I got a nice letter from President Truman for my service, and I was discharged, and then I went to the University of Oklahoma there and got on the ball team. I wasn't heavy enough for right end there. I had to get off the second string so I wanted to supplement my GI check, which was \$65 a month, to go to school. One of my roommates said why don't you go over, sign up, and join the reserve officers training corps over there with Colonel Waters, the PMS&T over there? I said okay. He said they'll pay you \$33 a month. I said, oh great. That brings me up to \$90 a month. My God, I was living in tall cotton with that. I signed up into the military again and I was in the PO artillery. Colonel Waters was an old field artillery officer down there at...Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Gate four down there. Because I had seen service in World War II and was a veteran, they put me in the senior class of ROTC and made me a cadet lieutenant. I went through the ROTC program there and was a commissioned DMS there as a second lieutenant in the military. I went off to summer camp at AP Hill. When I was at AP Hill up in Kentucky, that's where General Patton up there was getting his tank corps ready to go for the next war, I, well, no that's where he had prepared for World War II. We were out there in training and when I finished my training up there (I had all these various pictures here I was going to show you) I got my orders for Korea. That was 1950, August of '50. The Korean War had just broken out. In July, I believe is when it started. When I arrived there at the end of August, the war had only been on for six weeks. I went into Camp Drake there at Tokyo and there wasn't a military man there. They were all Japanese. When I got there all I had was my class-A uniform. I took and bundled that up. They took me down to the barracks there. I looked around and it was like a ghost, I mean they had the seventh cav horse blanket (that's a yellow patch with the seventh calvary with a horse head) over the smoke stacks and everything on base. These two Japanese completely, in about a matter of 30 minutes had me dressed in my fatigues, my pack on my back, they had my .45, my ammunition, I mean I was ready for combat there in about 30-45 minutes. They had me on a train going south to go down and pick up my 58-man platoon to go over to Korea and get on the line and get to going you know. I almost felt like I was AWOL to the war, I was absent without leave. I got there when I was shipped there and I couldn't get there any quicker. Anyway, when I went down to the 8069th

_____ 62:37 depo done a replacement battalion and I got my men there, 58 of them. We shipped out. It's just an overnight cruise from Japan to Pusan over there and the ship, this Congo Maroo (sp) 63:01 is like a ferry that goes back and forth taking people over there daily, overnight. I was trying to think of Kyushu down there. The island of Kyushu and I forget the fort down there that we shipped out of. I remember the ship's name but I can't remember the port. But anyway, I got there and they assigned me to the United Nations. They needed some officers. They needed some blue helmets. That's when the UN was brand new. So I didn't know what to think of it. I signed up with the US Army and I ended up as a UN officer, liaison. And then I got my orders to report up to the First Turkish Brigade. Hell, and I don't speak Turkish, you know and I thought oh my, what am I going to do? So I got up to Taegu and I reported to the officer in charge. Now the Turks had a battalion over there. They called it a brigade but they had a battalion as I recall. Their personnel are made up of the prison personnel from Turkey who are trying to soldier out of prison so all of their personnel are the best crooks and gangsters that they have in Turkey, and Turkey is a rough country. These gangsters are the cream of the criminals. So I reported to this captain in there and he spoke a little English. I reported in to him and he had a tent there, a squad tent. He had a corporal with a rifle on guard, a Turkish rifle, and or a Turkish guard there. I reported in to him, he told me to get over in the corner over there, and stand, he had some business to tend to. He called this Turkish lieutenant in there and I noticed he had on his uniform was this, he had a wool uniform on and it was filthy. He had what looked like grease up around his jacket, his tunic there, and his cuffs were just filthy dirty and his hands and fingernails. I thought for a captain you know, even though it's war you try to keep yourself at least to keep your sanitation clean anyway but wash their hands once in a while. He looked wild. Anyway, and he looked mean as the dickens. So I kept my mouth shut and stood, did what he said to do. He was a captain, he was in charge, and he was tough. He called this lieutenant in and the lieutenant went through a little spiel and told him something and then he barked back something to the lieutenant and the lieutenant barked a little bit back to him. He unstrapped his .45 down there, and I noticed it was a U.S. issue .45, and he pulled it out and he blew the side of the lieutenant's head off right in front of me and it splattered me with blood. That was my reporting in and the corporal on the outside looked in, called for another soldier and they came in and drug him back and the squad tent had a little field table where the captain was and the lieutenant was there. In the back, I noticed when they hauled him back in there, they had three or four of these blue coffins stacked up on end back there, you know, not anything in them. I heard them then, they just threw him in a box back there and hammered the guy in there and took the box back out the door. Then he turned around to me and said okay, now where's your orders. I gave him my orders and I was with the First Turkish Brigade. That was my introduction with that group and I was very uneasy about that assignment. That's the only time that I had seen any cruelty like that among our, but fortunately, it was not U.S. troops. It was the Turkish troops.

Interviewer: Did you see combat over in Korea?

Ed St. John: Well, yes I did because I was, I assume that if you're shot at you were in combat. When I arrived back for reassignment after I finished up with the Turks, I got a little bit ahead of myself because my first assignment was when I arrived there we only controlled the most

southern tip of Korea, which was Ulsan on the...no, Kaesong on the west, Taegu in the mid part of the perimeter, the old Davis perimeter, and Ulsan next to K9 air strip on the east. Just like Korea is a peninsula as you know and down here is Pusan and up here is, here is Seoul there, here's Taegu there, and over here was Ulsan and Kaesong was on that side there and we got just this tip there. That's all that was on the line. We were just about, in fact, our commander over there wanted to coordinate with Tokyo over there with the H-Army headquarters for evacuation of our troops off of Korea because the sea was to our back there. So they shipped me up to Taegu. I joined them up there. The firing was just on the outskirts very much like if it was up here on Buffalo and Ann Road in that area there. That was our line and down there at the strip down there was where the town of Taegu was. It was a sizable town down there. We were in an old school yard down there. I had only been there just a few days and they were preparing to retreat. They had what they called the Red Diamond, which was the rail line to go back to Pusan and they had the Green Diamond, which the Green Diamond went also back to, but now you have to remember that Korea is a very mountainous country, mountains and hills all over the place. I mean it's up and down and up and down, probably like Afghanistan, between Pakistan and Afghanistan there, all that terrible mountain area. These mountains are something else. That was when the Chinese had released their 13 Chinese armies. They had come across the border. MacArthur was relieved you know of his command. Truman relieved him. The Chinese came over and chased us all the way from Seoul down to Taegu. Oh, I'm backtracking here. MacArthur hadn't been relieved yet because they had us down there with our backs and so we had to retreat down and the airstrips over there had numbers. They had K9 airstrip was over on the west coast and K4 airstrip was just west on the east coast. K4 was just west of Pusan down here on the corner of that Southern capitol down there. We were to go down and regroup down there because we only had 256 men in our company and Captain Connelly was our company commander. So when we formed up for our convoy we had to go around these mountains. We had been completely surrounded between five and six thousand troops of Chinese that were already blocked around us. We had 256 men. We had close to 6,000 on our back. We had to retreat through them. So they're up in the mountains gunning us all the way and we're losing, trying to get back. I had one duce nap (sp 74:03) truck with about nine men, as I recall. I had a machine gunner, a gunny sergeant, a .30-caliber machine gun, I had three or four Katusa South Koreans and the rest were enlisted personnel there, and myself. What happened was my truck was hit and damaged and we stopped, just flat stopped. The mess truck, which was ahead of me had got hit and it went down the ravine and so we sat there and fortunately one of my Katusas, I guess he was a mechanic. He got out there and got the hood up while they were shooting at us and sucked on the, got his mouth on the carburetor and in some way cleared the line or whatever the trouble was. We got the motor going again and got the dickens out of there but we were lost. We were behind, the convoy had passed us by so even the trails truck was gone so there wasn't anything but us. So what happened was by the time, that was at about 3:00 in the afternoon, and when we got down there, there was a Y in the road. I didn't have a map. I had a compass. But there was a Y in the road. You could take right or take left. I figured that the left was to Pusan and the Y would be to K4, the airstrip and I was wrong. I took Y and what happened was I came around by Kaesong and the people were out there jumping up and down, the villagers, waving their arms and glad to see us so I figured that we were on the right trail and they thought that I was the lead truck for the convoy coming

through and the troops were moving up to push the North Koreans, or the Chinese back. We didn't know that, or I didn't know it. We went up as far, and the only thing that saved us was it was still smoking when I got out there, a complete concrete bridge crossing the river up there had been totally blown out of the water so there wasn't anything there. I couldn't go, the road ended right there in the river. So I had to turn around and go back and I thought well, I'm retreating. Well fortunately I was. But I was clear up past the line. I was in enemy territory and didn't know it and it was night so fortunately, the night patrols were out but they're out prodding the lines in those days and so the road was clear. I finally got back to K4 about 4:30 in the morning. My battery commander there, old Charles G. Brown was the captain and he just, I reported to him and the next thing I was totally flat on my back. I'm looking straight up. He had busted me in the mouth and flattened me out and said don't ever come in late again like that you know. He said you stay with the convoy. Of course, I didn't, so in those days, he was upset of course. We didn't have our troops. We were standing out with our guide-ons on the runway out there trying to get, troops were lost from their units. Everybody was fumbling around trying to get an organization going again so we could, and I was trying to think. It wasn't Westmore. Who was over there? Oh, shoot I can't remember the generals over there now. Who was that? He told us, he said you're going to hold your ground or you're going to die. We're not evacuating you and he meant it. And he came over. Van Fleet. General Van Fleet. Mean as hell. He said no retreat to us. It's here or death. So that's where we stayed and got ourselves together. Eventually we got reinforcements. Oh, and MacArthur had saved us. MacArthur took and moved the replacements, a fleet _____ (79:39) came up the China Sea and around by, totally all the way up to Seoul, up there to that port just west of Seoul. I can't remember the port now. It's a very famous port up there. Hardly any resistance at all. They literally moved in in a matter of hours and took Seoul because MacArthur figured, and he figured right, that they were all down on the line, pushing us off the peninsula. They had very few troops back up. They had cleaned out all of their combat troops, most all of them, in Seoul and just had the caretakers there. And they literally came in behind them. All of a sudden, all of this firing all along the line down there just quieted down. We thought the war was over. Well for us it really was for a while there because they were retreating back up to engage the troops that were in Seoul to fight. There was Osan, Osoney [sp] (1:17:41), Suwon and then Seoul. So they had to go back and take all those towns again back up there.

Interviewer: What was the food and provisions like there?

Ed St. John: I can't hear you.

Interviewer: What was the food and provisions like there?

Ed St. John: The food and provisions.

Interviewer: Yeah. What did, did you live in tents or...?

Ed St. John: We had our mountain bags. Wherever...we didn't have any base camps. We had squad tents that were packed away in our duce-and-a-half trucks. If we had a chance to stop

we'd put them up. If we didn't, we didn't. We just...I've slept in my mountain bag and woke up in the morning with a foot and a half of snow on top of me. So I had to dig my way out. It's nice and warm down in the snow because it protects you from the wind. A mountain bag, if you fluff it up is a beautiful insulator. It's nice and toasty in that mountain bag. Now I know that Anderson, this one guy was really stupid. He thought the more blankets he put on him, the warmer he'd get. The more you pack down, the colder you get. You don't want a bunch of...you want that air insulation. You want loose clothes and plenty of sweaters underneath with air pockets and you'll stay pretty comfortable. But you have to learn the hard way you know. We lived out of cans, rations. In World War II, it was a K-ration. And people don't know what a K-ration is. It's a block. I don't know what's in it. It was supposed to be chocolate. There wasn't much chocolate in it. But it was chocolate and millet seed and I think just flour or something. It tastes terrible. What you did, you took your knife, your bayonet and you'd peel it off and you'd put the peelings in the bottom of your canteen cup and you'd take your canteen and pour water in it and then you'd set it on the radiator of the jeep and fire the engine up on the jeep and heat up your canteen and then you'd drink it. It tastes terrible but it kept you alive. That was in World War II. In Korea we had five-in-ones, ten-in-one rations. You had a box that was good for one person for five days or for five people for one day and they called them five-in-one rations. You got beans, you got pork, and you got different meats. Cigarettes. They gave you cigarettes then. I didn't smoke. Fortunately I never smoked. That's why I'm still living today. As far as the food goes, we got hungry but when you're thinking about your salvation, food falls down on the priority list. If you're thinking about living or dying, you don't think too much about a steak dinner or a Big Mac or something like that. You don't think about those things. You think about what am I going to do next to stay above ground you know.

Interviewer: So were you in Korea during the whole war?

Ed St. John: Pardon me?

Interviewer: Were you in Korea during the whole war?

Ed St. John: Well no, no. I went in in '50. In '51 I...I was there the end of 1950, '51, '52. I was there '50, '51, and '52. Then I came back and was reassigned and given a basic training company to train troops to go to Korea as a young company commander. I was there from '50 to '52 to the end of '52, maybe '53. It's on the record there. Then I was three years assigned to the regimental training command, which was really a boot camp or a basic training company and I was a young company commander, an L-company of the third battalion. We took kids off the street and trained them to be soldiers. Basic training was a 16-week stint. We'd get one batch in and me and my cadre would train them and then we'd start in with another group later on. We did that for three years.

Interviewer: And where was this at?

Ed St. John: This was at Fort Lee there. At Fort Lee, the commanding general was Major General Peckham, and General Peckham... Under that command we had a regiment of two

groups. I was in the second group. There was a first group and a second group. Each group had three battalions assigned to it. The three battalions and then a battalion has four companies assigned to it. So there were a number of officers. Well our adjutant of the third battalion was a real bummer of a captain. He was treating his poor wife and his two little twin daughters just like dirt. He was running around with some other girl there on base. So his wife just, they didn't have any food for the children. She had about a quarter of a box of rice crispies left for their food and this captain is running around with this girlfriend of his. It was a crying shame. General Peckham at Fort Lee there, he lived in a little house right there in front of the officers' club and he had this little home right there that he was quartered in, in those days. So around midnight or a little thereafter, her husband wasn't at home, the children had not eaten for two days and she knocked on his door at 1:00 in the morning and she just didn't know anybody else to go to so she went to General Peckham. General Peckham got up, put his robe on, and he sat there and talked to that girl for two hours. Then he called the Provost Marshal and he got all of the provost marshals initiated there. They went down to the entire regiment and...I'm not saying this because I'm sitting here but there were some total of 87 officers. They relieved every officer out of the command of that regiment. There were times when I went down to my company, I lived in my company almost. My BOQ room, I was very seldom in my BOQ room. I usually slept vertical in my chair because there's no use going to the BOQ. I could take a shower over in the first platoon, put on a new uniform, and go back in the morning, and make reveille and I didn't have to drive back and forth. That's the way I looked at it so I'd just sleep in my chair. Because I'd go to bed, I mean to sleep in my chair, I'd go to sleep about 10:00 or 11:00 at night. I'd wake up at 4:00 in the morning so I could make reveille. I would inspect the company before we made reveille. So I'd just practically lived in my company. It was all that mattered to me. I woke up and my first sergeant came running in to me and said sir, he said, there's no officers. I said what do you mean no officers for reveille? No officers. No sir, not an officer in sight. I said well, what happened. I said I am AWOL from a meeting or something. He said I don't know sir. He said we don't know but it's just the enlisted personnel. So here I am a company commander and my old executive officer I had, which was Lieutenant Bingham, he was up in the second battalion, he had his company up there, and Paul was up there. I called him. He said I'm here. He said there are no other officers up here. So General Peckham had moved through and had relieved 87 officers, a total command, except for me and Lieutenant Bingham and we were the considered nuts because we were always with our company, totally dedicated down there. I mean it was home to me. But they had been relieved and they had them under house arrest over in the base hospital over there, under guard, and they were being shipped out to Fort Hood, Texas for Court Martial. That included my...You're all right if you're out of tape, why....

Cameraman: No, I'll just switch it real quick.