

Edward W. Falk
Corporal, US Army/811th Signal Battalion
Korean War 1950-1953

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Herkimer Fulton County Historical Society, Herkimer, NY

EF: My name is Ed Falk, I live in Newport, NY, next to the West Canada School. I am not a WWII Vet, I was in High School at the time, but I was in the Korean War. I was Infantry trained, went overseas, and was transferred out of the infantry into the Signal Corp, where I spent a year in Okinawa doing telephone work. Vietnam, Okinawa was taken in spring of 1945, I was there July 1951, and I was shocked at what was left from WWII on the beaches, bombed out barges and debris, and that was only one of so many places - it is what really got my interest in WWII.

I: Tell me about when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

EF: I was a teenager. I remember it was a cold, Sunday when they announced Pearl Harbor, to most - Hawaii was so distant, we all knew there was unrest in Europe, but no one knew what was going on there, and it was shocking. The infamous thing, Like President Roosevelt said it really did get the people united to end this, and it took until 1945 to do it.

I: What do you remember as a child once the President declared war?

EF: The draft started and people started enlisting. One of my older brothers went in the Cadets to learn to fly and participated. As a kid, the Boy Scouts were actively involved, I was Senior Patrol Leader, and we helped with the blood drives. Back then they used rubber tubing and glass bottles. The Boy Scouts would wash out the rubber tubing to be sterilized for the next use, and sometimes a bottle would break, loss of a precious pint of blood, and would make an awful mess. But we all pulled together with the war effort. The Scouts also helped with paper drives. I remember a vacant lot on the corner of Main St & Park Ave, they put a fence up where everyone would throw their aluminum, and it would be reprocessed for the war effort.

Rationing: Sugar was almost impossible to come by. My Dad worked the meat department at a Victory store, and they had colored stamps, red for meat, and blue for groceries. Cars, there weren't such thing as a 1943 car, because everything was Military, there were a few 1942s.

Gasoline A, B, and C stamps: Normal person A stamp, DOD workers B stamp, Farmers and etc.. C stamp. It was tough on my Dad because he had customers for years and then had to limit them to the stamp rations.

War Bonds: \$18.75 you could buy a \$25 war bond, it would mature in 10 years, and kids would have \$.25 stamps, and fill a book and turn them in. Schools would have competitions who could get the most stamps, kids didn't know how serious it was, but everyone had family who were in, and the town was emptied with eligible members, older and married men.

In the evening paper there was hardly a day that someone wasn't hurt and wounded. When I was in school, this one boy had lost his father, he walked around to each class with a Purple Heart that his Mother had received, it was sad that he would never have his father.

I: Your brother was in the war?

EF: Yes, one of my brothers was in college, but he quit and enlisted in the Military, my family was upset but all he wanted to do is fly, so he became a cadet and earned his wings. He was a co-pilot on a B-17 Bomber Plane (in/around 1944) based out of England, I think he had 17 missions he survived. He finished his career at a LT Col in the Air Force, but it was the Army Air Corp when it began and then Airplanes became the thing. He was brought back to the United States, when Germany surrendered and sent to South Dakota to train in B-29s for the Invasion in Japan. It was going to be horrible, so natural I don't have any feelings about dropping the A-Bomb because it ended the war then and there. We didn't know that they had such a big bomb to wipe out a city like it did.

EF: I want to back up a bit. My Dad I have his Civil Defense Patch, he was a Warden, he was responsible for certain blocks around Henry Street, and had record of all the people located in each house. He wore that shoulder patch and a white steel hat, and go around when we had air raids, and made sure they would cover their windows and turn out the lights. In Herkimer we really didn't have Air Raid training in school, maybe we went to the inside walls. But my wife remembers in West Canada they would have dog tags for all the kids, in case something happened to them to identify them, and practice going under desks.

I: How did you stay so involved in the WWII?

EF: Just seeing the amount of debris and what was left after the war just in Okinawa alone years later, and me serving in the Military, I was interested in WWII. After I got home the VFW/Legion Magazine always had interesting articles about things that people never would think about.

I: What did you think of a small town America and their support in the war, and how would events be communicated?

EF: Everyone was very proud, and had someone in the Military and knew we were doing the right thing. We had a lot of spirit, but also a lot of heartaches. Other than in the Newspapers, movies with the News Reels would show clips of certain part of the war, and Lull Thomas would narrate where the troops were at the time. My Dad was a widower, so my Uncle would come down and take care of us kids, he had a European map, because he was concerned he followed the progress of my brother, Jack and the guys over there. It was a different time, so many of us didn't have a lot, so if gas was short, we didn't notice. My Dad did have a 1931 Dodge, and it was on the road some of the time, so my brother would drive us or we would borrow my Uncle's, or walk.

The footlocker: In Herkimer NY, Mr. Watson was a widower raising his 2 sons. During WWII James enlisted as a fighter bomber pilot. Bernard had medical issues so he may have been drafted, but he was killed in the Invasion of Sicily. Within a year James was lost in a mission over Germany, the body was never recovered. Mr. Watson a widower, loses both sons within a year time, he is all alone. Mr. Watson told my father to send your boys up. Frank and I go up to Mr. Watson's house, and he shows us the boys closets and said "take anything you could use, they aren't coming back". He left us and went downstairs, and I don't remember what we took, it still cracks my brother up til' this day too. There were Victory Parades and have the Gold Star Mother's Float: for Mother's who lose their sons in war, and Mr. Watson was always on it, no body deserved to be there more than he did it raising the boys alone!

Every time I look at the footlocker up in my attic, I can't help to reflect on the unbelievable amount of sorrow, suffering, loss and waste that went on throughout the world during WWII. Mr. Watson was such a nice man, he was a janitor at the school, and he was always so kind and upbeat. He had remarried later a teacher at Herkimer, Miss Moore. He had passed before her, and they never had kids. When she passed away, her nephews came from out West to have a house sale. Our daughter was getting a job and set up an apartment in Syracuse. My Wife, I, and Joanie went down to see what she could use. Then I see the footlocker sitting there for only \$10, and I was a little short, but they didn't understand what it meant, and he had no connection with Mr. Watson or the boys. So I took it home, it was in the 70s. I keep my military/WWII memorabilia in it.

I: You mentioned the Victory Parades.

EF: They were upbeat because we had beat them, and everyone was happy when people returned. And cars, and batteries and things you couldn't get started coming back out again. There was a lot of spirit with parades and bands.

I: There was period of time when WWII ended and then you went into the service the Korean War.

EF: They call it "The Forgotten War". I think everyone was sick of war when the Police Action came up, other than those effected. If you enlisted it was very doubtful you'd get your job back, but if you were drafted they had to give you your job back. So, I was drafted and it probably saved my life that I worked for the NY phone company. There were 13 of the 500 of us taken out of the infantry and put in the Signal Corp and sent to Okinawa instead of Korea. We didn't know why at first, but it ended up being because of our phone specialties.

I: What was your family situation when you were away?

EF: I was single and 21 years old, living at home with my Sister and Dad then. My Dad wrote almost every week, and my Aunts and Uncles would write too, and I would try to write as often as I could.

My assignment was supposed to be 18 months, when I was there just about a year, my Dad had a heart attack and I was sent home emergency leave. We were on a Carco/Mail plane, talk about a flight: Okinawa, Iwo Jima, Wake Island, Johnson Island, Hawaii to Travis Air Base to get me home. What was interesting I was a Corporal, there were 2 or 3 of us, the emergency leave guys got on first every time we got back on the plane, then the officers, then the enlisted. I got my job back, and they moved the garage from Little Falls to Herkimer, so that was close, and with wage progression for two years, I was making more money, so things were good. I got married in 1955, and we had four kids.

I: Tell me about when you would to speak with the kids.

EF: My wife and I would go to speak to an 8th grade class about what we knew of during the WWII time period, the students seem really interested in it. We let the kids know that there is a lot of real living with a lot less of the material things that we are used to having. And to look out for one another and the United States, to not be selfish and think about what some of those people sacrificed and gave up during WWII.

(He showed us the Foot Locker, with a 1946 newspaper and his brother, Jack's Air Corp Badge Military Memorabilia (left a German pistol and a M-1 at home)

Transcribed by Misty Straus