Dr. Nicholas C. Chuff
Veteran

Douglas Hofstra [?]
Unidentified Student
Interviewers

Perry Junior High School
Veterans' History Club, 2011

Nicholas Chuff **NC**
Douglas Hofstra [?] **DH**
Unidentified student **US**
Unidentified teacher **UT**

DH: Please state your name, your branch of service and your date of service.

NC: Dr. Nicholas Chuff, and I was a member of the US Army Veterinary Corps. Dates of service were June of 1977 through June of 1980.

DH: My name is Douglas [Hofstra?] and we are interviewing you from Perry Junior High School at 3:53 p.m.
How did you get into the military?

NC: Long story made short, I was drafted and I went in as a private. If I finished first or second in my company of 640 I was allowed to go back to college and get into ROTC, or I could have gone to Officers' Candidate School. I finished second in my company of 640. I went back to college, finished my four years of college, went to veterinary school, and then went on active duty after I became a veterinarian.

DH: What did you do as a veterinarian?

NC: At first I was in charge of all the food inspection in western New York State, I was the officer in charge of Seneca Army Depot in Romulus, New York, and I was also the officer in charge of Fort Drum up in Watertown, New York. When I volunteered for Korea, I was the Chief of Animal Medicine for 8th US Army, I was in charge of the Military Working Dog Program for the Far East. We had three veterinary hospitals, 20 technicians, and we took care of all the military working dogs in Korea and the private pets, and I was also the liaison officer to the Korean Cavalry.

DH: Were you the veterinarian to any other animals besides the dogs and some of the cavalry?

NC: Well, there were some pets, and we fixed a hawk one time that got shot and had a broken wing, but other than that it was pretty much just dogs, cats, pets, or military working dogs.

DH: So were you the vet for all of the dogs, the bomb dogs….

NC: Yes, bomb dogs, narcotics dogs and sentry dogs. We had three different types of dogs.

DH: What did you do for those dogs?

NC: Well, routine preventive maintenance, making sure they had all their vaccinations, that they were fed and watered properly, they were taken care of. We did dental exams; they all got their teeth cleaned twice a year because a military working dog without good, shiny teeth isn't much of an asset. If they had problems with arthritis, which they often did, we did x-rays on their hips. And we did routine surgeries if they needed to have something corrected.

DH: When you were there, did you take any other training for anything special in Korea?

NC: So, I was in charge of a field unit and I had an air drop field veterinary hospital, and I would take it out in the field and I would run it, bringing military working dogs in, and we actually worked on them in the field. We had a whole unit with trucks, our own generators, our own tents, and we were a self-contained support unit for the 8th US Army.

DH: How long were you in the field?

NC: We were in the field for two to three weeks at a time.

DH: How long were you in Korea?

NC: I was in Korea for two years.

US: What was your primary weapon issued?

NC: An M16 and a .45, I had both.

US: How did you like the M16, was it a favorite, or did you dislike it?

NC: It was accurate, it was a good personal self-defense weapon, but there were other weapons that were more effective for longer range.

DH: What was your most memorable experience?

NC: My most memorable experience. (Pauses) Probably flying in the helicopters with the helicopter pilots all over Korea. They used to fly me to the [unclear] sites to take care of the dogs. A lot of my friends were pilots, and they had to get time in their flights, so we flew all over Korea by helicopter, which was kind of neat, seeing different parts of Korea.

DH: Besides your four years of college before you went into duty, was that the only education you got?

NC: I had four years of college and four years of veterinary school. I had eight years of college before I went on active duty. I had finished only one semester when I was drafted the first time.

UT: I was wondering, when you went to school you were looking to be a veterinarian? Was that your intention the whole time and then you were drafted?

NC: I was pre-med, and I didn't get accepted to medical school and veterinary school. But I took a long walk with my dog and I ended up becoming a veterinarian.

UT: Yeah, nice! When they drafted you, they knew that that was something that you were…. they knew what you wanted to do and you were allowed to…. and that's what they used you for? Because sometimes they don't use you for what you should be intended for

NC: They really didn't know why I went back to school at that point in time. They just told me that I could go back to college, which is what I wanted to do. I messed up and that's how I ended up getting drafted in the first place. I went to college to play football and didn't go to classes very often, so that's how I got drafted.

DH: How did you keep in touch with home?

NC: Either telephone or letters. There wasn't much Internet at that point.

DH: What were the rations like? Was the food ok when you were in Korea?

NC: The food in the mess hall was just like you would get here, or like a college campus, very similar. When we were in the field we had rations, MRIs they called them, meals ready to eat. You'd have different types of selections inside of them. But they were basically nutrition, they weren't all that tasty.
DH: How did you feel about your military experience?

NC: I felt like it was an honor to serve my country. My family had served before me, and it was kind of nice that I was able to do that.

UT: I know that you said you tended to the military animals. Now you said they had bomb dogs and narcotics dogs?

NC: Uh-huh.

UT: I wouldn't have thought about that. What were the purposes? I mean, how many dogs or animals, military animals did they have in service? I didn't really think of animals in the service during the conflicts and wars.

NC: I had approximately 800 military working dogs. Sentry dogs were designed to protect an area, ok? They were at the base of the tactical sites where the radar could not read, and they would run loose inside those fences and they would protect an area. They couldn't be used among the general populace. The patrol dogs could be. These dogs could be worked on leash among people without any risk to the people unless their handler wanted there to be a risk. And they were cross-trained in either narcotics or in explosives, not both.

UT: They had a particular nose for one or the other?

NC: No, that's just the way they were trained. The bomb dogs, we used little cairn terriers that would run up and down the luggage racks of the planes because it was much easier for them to search a plane than a big German shepherd.

UT: Oh!

NC: We gave them a little rubber ball, and that was their reward for finding something.

UT: Did you help train them?

NC: Yes, I helped train them also.

UT: You did. Did you do any of that after you left the service?

NC: No. Just while I was in there.

UT: You said there's a difference between the sentry dogs and the—

NC: Patrol dogs.

UT: Thank you, that was the word. Now the sentry dogs were just taught to attack anything that came--

NC: Attack and hold until their handler came and released them.

UT: I didn't really think about that. In pictures, in other wars, I had seen dogs, but I had never really…. You don't think about it.

NC: We've always had sentry dogs. And they had tracker dogs in Vietnam, which were a little bit different, and tunnel dogs that would actually go down into tunnels, but we didn't have those in Korea.

DH: How did your military experience change or influence your life?

NC: One thing, since I was in charge of unit and I had a million dollar budget and no business experience, I was forced to go back to the University of Maryland Far East Division and take accounting and bookkeeping courses, and that's helped me in business for the rest of my life. I run my own business now.

US: Were you ever in combat?

NC: No. However, my friends and I did take a little side trip into North Korea just to see what was going on. My helicopter pilot friends had to get extra time, like I mentioned before, so they'd "fly the picket fence" as they called it routinely, just to do it.

UT: Fly the picket fence…

NC: Fly the picket fence.

DH: Did you learn anything special in Korea that you use today now?

NC: I had the best medical equipment available at the time, I had the most highly trained technicians available at the time. They had the ability to watch human surgeons work on people, and have them help me with my military working dogs, because my dogs were worth approximately $10,000 apiece by the time they got all the training and everything into them. If something was wrong with one of my dogs I couldn't send it back to the United States, so if a surgery was beyond my level of expertise, one of the human surgeons would join me on the surgery and help me. I was, like I said, able to help them on surgeries and it really improved my surgical skills also. I was able to sit side-by-side with the pathologist looking at tumors and other types of tissues on a two-headed microscope, which was very useful in training me. So I used a lot of time increasing my veterinary education while I was in Korea.

UT: When you came back, did you put that to use as well?

NC: Yes.

UT: While you were there, what was the most unusual situation involving an animal that you had? Or challenging?

NC: More challenging I would say was a disease condition called gastric torsions where their stomachs would actually twist. It was a life-threatening situation. I was able to find out the cause of it: they were feeding the dogs and then exercising them. So we changed

it so they weren't exercised after they were fed and the problem went away, but I had to operate on quite a few of them before we found out what the problem was.

UT: Did you ever lose a dog?

NC: Certainly.

UT: I would imagine, especially if you'd trained them, and then had to lose them that must have been quite challenging.

NC: When a dog came into my hospital, their handler into my unit and under my supervision. So until I released the dog, the handler was part of my unit. And then when I released the dog I released the handler.

UT: The handlers must become very attached to the dogs as well.

NC: (Nods)

UT: How do you not become attached to these animals when you are working with them that closely? I can imagine you must, and the handler is like family.

NC: And lots of times that dog saved his life. So there is a very strong bond between them. And when they left the country and they couldn't take their dog with them, I'd be responsible for transferring that loyalty to another soldier. A very difficult task.

UT: How does one do that?

NC: Very carefully and over time, that's all I can really tell you.

UT: How long was the training for the dogs?

NC: In San Antonio, where they were trained at Lackland Air Force Base, they were trained for two or three months. All our dogs were procured in the United States, and they all went through the Lackland Air Force Base training program before they were sent over to Korea.

UT: They have a lot of training, just like people.

NC: (Nods)

DH: Did you receive any awards or medals?

NC: I received the Meritorious Service Medal for developing and utilizing the only air-drop-able field veterinary hospital in the world.

UT: What do you mean?

NC: You could drop it out of an airplane and run it.

UT: Really?

NC: Yeah, dropped it with parachutes.

UT: That's fantastic!

US: You actually developed this method?

NC: I actually developed it. The one that they had previously had had glass bottles in it, which really wasn't smart and really wouldn't function. So what we'd do is drive some of our equipment out to the site but the majority would be dropped from an airplane. And then we became part of a combat unit. We were the service support for the combat unit.

UT: What inspired that? What inspired you to come up with that?

NC: My commanding officer asked me to do it. (Laughs) So it was done. And then he went to the Pentagon and he wrote it up when he went back stateside.

UT: What did you do in your downtime?

NC: Martial arts.

UT: So that's what you spent your time doing?

NC: My commanding officer gave me a choice. Either I could get up at 5:00 in the morning and do PT with the rest of the troops, or I could do the martial arts. And he wanted me to do martial arts because he wanted me to inspire my troops not to go down to the village and spend their money doing things they shouldn't be doing, and to train them in martial arts.
So that was the majority of what I spent my downtime doing.
Plus, a personal friend of mine was a Korean Special Forces veterinarian and I spent a lot of time with him out on the economy just visiting and doing things with our unit.

UT: Did your unit also learn martial arts? Were you able to inspire them?

NC: Yes, I had quite a few people that did martial arts. But yes we had a lot of young troops that got in trouble, and I was responsible for giving them Article 15s when they messed up. I tried to keep them out of trouble as much as I could. Not always successfully, but we tried. Do you guys know what an Article 15 is?

DH: No.

NC: Non-judicial punishment; in other words, I say what happens to you, and that's what happens to you. You don't get to go to a court or a judge; I'm the judge and jury.

UT: What kinds of punishments would they get?

NC: Take away pay, take away leave. Extra duty. Depends on the severity of the offense.

UT: How was your relationship with your unit?

NC: I think it was very good. I tried to be very fair with them, but they knew it was black and white, there was no gray. They knew if they crossed the line we'd have problems. But that's the way it has to be in the military, there can't be a lot of gray areas.

UT: It's a very different place… I think of it in regards to any sort of enforcement agency, military or law enforcement or anything like that, it is black and white—it has to be--in order to keep order and keep everything running they way it needs to be.

NC: Very strict interpretation of the regulations.

UT: Would you do that again?

NC: Certainly. I'd go now.

UT: How long did you stay in?

NC: Just for three years total. But actually my time in service extended from when I actually went in the first time, so I was a Captain with over seven years time in service for pay grade.

US: What style of martial arts did you learn?

NC: Over in Korea it was called Tang Soo Do, it was the predecessor of Tae Kwon Do that we see here today.

UT: If you think about the way that Tae Kwon Do is pretty popular in the United States, would you recommend that everybody learn it there first?

NC: In Korea, everyone has to learn it. It's their national sport, and also everyone has to go in the military. There are no options. So they're taught the martial arts while they're in the military. I think it would be good for everybody to learn how to defend themselves. And not just to defend themselves, but awareness so they can avoid situations. Awareness is every bit as important as being able to defend yourself.

UT: By awareness, you mean?

MC: Be aware of your surroundings and realize that you can't relinquish your responsibility for yourself to somebody else. In order words, you can't trust somebody else to watch out for you, you have to watch out for yourself. Everybody. You can't assume that your husband or your friend is watching your back. You have to watch your own back. That's your responsibility, that's a personal responsibility.

UT: And you would recommend the military to people?

NC: I certainly would. I think it has changed quite a bit from when I was in it, but I think that everybody should have the chance to experience it, and I think it has some really positive upsides.

UT: Where did you grow up?

NC: Frankfort (New York].

UT: So you are locally born and raised?

NC: I grew up on a dairy farm in Frankfort.

UT: How did your family feel about you joining the military?

NC: They were a little apprehensive, but my father had been in Gen. Eisenhower's office in Washington, DC, so he certainly understood why I did what I did. And my uncle was also in the European Theater during World War II.

UT: I think that having that kind of background definitely inspires patriotic feeling too. Some kids, some people don't necessarily have that feeling, but when you have a personal connection to it….

NC: We only have the freedoms we have today because other people are making sure we that have them.

UT: (To the students) Do you have any more questions?
(The two students ask each other, comments unclear.)

UT: I don't know that we asked you about the type of training? (To the students) Did you ask that?

DH: No, I didn't really ask about the type of training.

NC: Which type in particular are you interested in? Before I became a veterinarian, or after I became a veterinarian?

DH: Before you became a veterinarian, what did you do to train for being drafted into the military?

NC: Once I was drafted, I went through basic training like everybody else did. Physical training is certainly part of it. And combat is part of it, map reading, orienteering (which means getting from one place to another). Explosives, demolition, because I wasn't a veterinarian at that point in time. Communications, artillery. So we were taught in all aspects of the military. Tactics.

DH: How did you start out as an officer?

NC: When I went back to college, after going through basic training, I went through Reserve Officer Training Corps, ROTC, and when I graduated from college I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant for one day. They gave me an honorable discharge for all the time that I was in veterinary school, and then they recommissioned me as a Captain when I graduated from veterinary school.

US: Do you have any memorable stories that you'd like to share?

NC: Not that I'd like to share (Laughs) Maybe someday, guys.

UT: In Vietnam there were a lot of problems with drugs, I think we talked about that. Was there anything that made life difficult for the troops over in Korea, like what was the hardest thing?

NC: Being away from home. A lot of them were young and it was the first time away from their parents. They were easily influenced by bad behavior by other troops, or drugs, or alcohol, or prostitution. All of those were things the troops got involved in. They married Korean women who were involved in the black market, and so they'd buy things in the PX and they'd end up being on the black market, and they'd have to be punished for it. Some of them came home one night and there was nothing there—the whole apartment, everything was gone. They were responsible for it because they had purchased it and it had to leave country with them, and if they no longer had it, they were in trouble.

UT: So women took advantage of them?

NC: Definitely.

UT: So they married these women, and the women took advantage of them. So then what did they do, did the women disappear?

NC: Yes. Unless I could find them.

UT: Did the local economy cater to the troops, you know with the drugs, the alcohol, they made everything available?

NC: Definitely. There was a place called "E K Wan" [?] where the troops went, and it was very close to the base. We determined if a place was off limits or not, and if they were caught in a place that was off limits they'd be in trouble.

UT: So everybody was aware of this?

NC: There were places that were known bad places, and we tried to keep them away from them. And there would be just another place the next week, and another place the next week.

UT: What kinds of punishments could they get, like if somebody did get married to a Korean woman who disappeared like that, what would happen to them?

NC: It depended on how severe it was and the volume of stuff. If they had been warned and they continually did that then they might get a court martial and they could have been drummed out of the military. It could have been that serious.

UT: Oh, ok.

DH: Why were they responsible for things they bought in the country?

NC: Because they bought Them at the Post Exchange on the base. You see the whole idea is we were guests of the Korean government, and for us to do something to their economy was not allowed. And by us selling American goods at a cheaper rate than what it would actually cost on the economy, that was against their law too.

UT: That's what it means by the black market. You're selling it where it's not allowed.

NC: And for a cheaper price. Because you could buy the same thing in Korea [at the PX] that you could buy at any store here for the same price. That was an advantage that we gave the people that were in Korea, trying to keep things as much like home as possible. But for them to take that and sell that to a Korean was illegal. For them to take American money and sell it was illegal.

UT: They would sell American money?

NC: Yes. They would get 20-30 percent more, they'd sell it at a premium. So it was illegal.

DH: I can't think of any more questions.

UT: Well I think what's very interesting to me, is I had never considered…. You think about them needing doctors, but you forget about the fact that they need doctors for animals, too. I did not think about that as being something…. I think it's interesting to me the wide scale of what operations that has to happen when you go to war. It's not just one small thing. There's a huge amount of things that go on.

NC: There's combat, and there's combat service support, which are hospitals, supply and everything else that goes with it.

UT: We interviewed a man in our first year who had been in the Korean War, and he had no medical experience but he was doing medical things. That's what he got trained to do while he was there, and he said that's what they were doing, trying to save lives. I don't remember what they called them…

NC: Medics.

UT: That's right, medics.

NC: One other thing, you mentioned before, what was my most memorable experience with an animal? My most memorable experience overall was when President Park was assassinated and I saw the machinery rolling down through the streets, the tanks and everything else, and it was a very, very tense time for the American military when he was assassinated because the government was in anarchy. A very difficult time. At that point in time my wife, who was my fiancé at that time, was with me, and so I had things all set up with my helicopter buddies to get her to Japan. I told her to carry her passport and her jewelry wherever she went, because if I said she was gone, she was gone.
So it was a very tense time for about two or three weeks.

UT: Did you meet your wife there?

NC: Yes, she was a Department of Defense schoolteacher. She was teaching first grade.

UT: So that's where you met her, you met her over there. Did you get married there?

NC: No, when we came back here to my whole family. I went back into a veterinary practice in upstate New York.

UT: Where were you a veterinarian in upstate New York?

NC: Just south of Watertown, in Adams, New York. I went back into practice with a classmate of mine before I started my own practice.

UT: This has been very interesting to me because I knew nothing about this at all. I know very little. I'm not the history person, I'm the English person, so I get very interested in this because I know very little about it. This is how I learn through these.

NC: (To the students) Any other questions?

DH: I can't think of anything.

UT: Is there anything more that you would like to add? Anything you can think of that you would like to share?

NC: No I think that's pretty much it.

UT: Well, thank you so much. I appreciate it.