

**Werner Hegner
Veteran**

**Interviewed by
Bill Payne
American Legion Post, Saugerties, NY**

BP: Now can you tell us were you drafted, or did you enlist?

WH: I was drafted, I was hurt I was supposed to go in the 50s, but I got hurt on a bulldozer and they deferred me for a whole year. I was under the doctor's care after that when the doctor ok'd me I was in [unclear] I was in.

BP: So, you worked in heavy equipment before you were in the army?

WH: Oh yes straight through.

BP: And where were you living at the time?

WH: Wittenberg.

BP: Wittenberg New York right not to far from Woodstock New York.

WH: Yes when I went into the service Wittenberg, right not far.

BP: What was your first days of service like, do you remember?

WH: It was [unclear] but there was a lot of guys there, and we got to talking and fooling around and we were having a good time after a while.

BP: You told me you went to Fort Devens Massachusetts.

WH: Fort Devens Massachusetts.

BP: You had boot camp there?

WH: Yes, we were only there for a little while just to have our shots and then all our examinations and all like that. Then we stayed there for a while and got all of our clothes and then in about a week or two we got put on a train and headed for Camp Chaffee Arkansas.

BP: Camp Chaffee Arkansas. Now what time of year was this?

WH: About June.

BP: Now you mention it was very hot down there.

WH: Oh it was hot oh I took my basic training all through hot weather oh it was hot.

BP: What kind of training did you have, what did they do with you?

WH: We had training we started on the 105s, training on them but then they took me off of that.

BP: What were your instructors like do you remember them?

WH: Yes, we had a couple good instructors yes some of them were a little bit (laughter) nasty, but we had pretty good instructors yup.

BP: So you got through boot camp okay?

WH: Oh yes, I got through boot camp okay and then they sent me up to school for 10 weeks and I passed that with flying colors.

BP: Was that in Fort Chaffee?

WH: Yep that was right in Arkansas.

BP: Now this is when they took you off the 105 howitzers.

WH: Yes, they took me off that yup.

BP: And they put you in heavy equipment, right?

WH: Heavy equipment yup and school for mechanic work and do all kinds of heavy equipment work and all yup.

BP: And you served during the Korean War, right?

WH: Sure Korean war yup.

BP: Where did you go after you got done with your training for heavy equipment where were you staying?

WH: I went to Camp Stone California and I was there for oh I guess 6 weeks so many other fellas I was with were there too, but I never got KP (kitchen patrol) there at all they were wondering what happened I never got KP so the last day I had to go to Sacramento California with the trucks to help load some stuff and the time I got back they said pack your bags you're ready for the ship.

BP: So you worked on a ship where was that located?

WH: Frisco.

BP: Frisco?

WH: San Francisco yup.

BP: Now you were on board the ship?

WH: Right on board the ship.

BP: What was the name of the ship do you remember?

WH: No I don't I think it was the Sultan. I came back on a navy ship.

BP: Did you travel with your heavy equipment or?

WH: No, just the troops going over that's all.

BP: Now you told me that was a pretty rough cruise going over.

WH: Oh boy the second day out it was terrible I didn't think the boat was going to stay afloat [unclear] and then what happened was the staff that day fed the old guys cream of wheat and that was the worst thing they've ever done oh man oh man, but I never got sick and when they said everybody fall into detail for cleanup I jumped right in my bed and I went (inaudible sobbing) I wasn't going to clean that up, you went up four steps you came back three (laughter) oh it was terrible. And we were down below the water though, hot, oh it was hot.

BP: Where did you land?

WH: Japan.

BP: You landed in Japan where about, Tokyo?

WH: Tokyo Japan yup and I was there probably 2 weeks and they set us up, got us all ready for Korea then they put me on a box car and they flew us to Korea

BP: Flying box car?

WH: I thought that thing was going to fall apart, that box car the wings were going all crazy and we were at 10,000 feet. Wow I just said. Then we landed in Seoul.

BP: What happened then?

WH: Then they took us over to our company, 1903rd, I was there for, I can't remember how long I was there, I was there for oh probably a couple of months.

BP: Now you were in the army but working building the airfields.

WH: Yes, I was in the army, working for the air force, I was in a special category army one air force. So this was 1903rd engineer and aviation department. I worked there for a while and these are the pictures right there that I worked on all that kind of stuff.

BP: Yes you mention that this right here is a big shovel, what was the name of that called?

WH: [unclear] shovel.

BP: That's a great big piece of equipment you have.

Yes right. When I was in 1903rd they would call us out and we had to go move that.

BP: Now you mention here is a concrete laying machine.

WH: Yes that's when I was in Korea.

BP: You were the only one who knew how to operate that right?

WH: Yes, I was the only one. I operated the whole thing for them.

BP: Now you mention one time you and the major had a little discussion how'd that go?

WH: Well that's when I was over in Korea and they were building the airfield they had this [unclear] in the dirt for the airfield and he said, "well we had a good day today, 200 yards" and I said what 200 yards? I said, that their shovel should have [unclear] a lot more and he told me "how do you know so much this and that and I told him I was in

construction quite a while. So when they had other questions he said you keep quiet he said you know everything so keep quiet.

BP: Didn't make yourself so happy with him?

WH: Well he was...

BP: He was?

WH: He was...no good.

BP: This is a picture of you here with a big steam shovel I see right?

WH: No a crane but

BP: And you operated that crane

WH: Yup I did all that kind of stuff

BP: And you mention they took you up to another base that was called Pyeongtaek

WH: Pyeongtaek, there's where I stayed right until I was ready to go home

BP: You mention you went up there on the railroad.

WH: Yes we moved a lot of equipment up on there, we worked three days on the train oh boy we were filthy, dirty, and of course we went up there to protect and the only food we had were those k-rations and we used to start the machines up and put them on the manifold to keep them warm

BP: So you ran the engine to keep them warm.

WH: We ran the engine to keep them warm yup

BP: Now you mentioned you had set all over you from the—

WH: Yes, all the tunnels we had the old Steamers over there they have a lot of old Steamers. The great big ones they must have all went over there cause... oh man then we couldn't get off the cleanup then we had to stay there another day because the Marines wouldn't let us off they said it's your job you protect it and we got really (laughter) mad

BP: So that was your job doing all that heavy equipment. Were you involved in combat did you see any combat?

WH: No.

BP: Any casualties in your unit, people get hurt?

WH: Nope no one got hurt. Not my unit?

BP: Now I mentioned about the food there, you had K-rations most of the time.

WH: Yes, they would have turkeys and George Washington [unclear] oh my god they were terrible, and we had powdered eggs you could use for the soles of your shoes that was terrible all that stuff.

BP: Not like home cooking?

WH: Oh man it was awful.

BP: Did you have enough food?

WH: Oh yes, we had lots of food, we had enough food, we had plenty to eat.

BP: You had enough of supplies and equipment all that?

WH: Yes, we had all that stuff.

BP: Now you were awarded to National Defense Medal and the Korean American Service Medal with 3 Battle Stars and also United Nations Korean Service Medal, right?

WH: I should get it cleaned or get new ones they're getting so old [unclear].

BP: Were you able to keep in touch with your family this whole time?

WH: Oh yes, I wrote back and forth, my family wrote to me.

BP: Did you feel pressure a stress? This is kind of a silly question.

WH: It was kind of lonely, you miss your family and everything over there but we kept busy all the while and lived in the tents.

BP: How long were you there all together?

WH: I was there until May of '53.

BP: So over a year?

WH: Yes, so then the Warrant Officer, he was a good guy he let me go a little bit early and gave me all the names of the other guys I was supposed to meet over in Japan [unclear] matter of fact I got letters from them they wanted me to go into the service as a Warrant Officer, and another one I could have been was Lieutenant for the heavy equipment, and I said no I didn't want that either because if they smash it up you have to stay there (laughter).

BP: Is there anything you did in particular to keep yourself in good luck or did you do anything like that?

WH: Well no they thought I was doing a good job.

BP: Now how did people entertain themselves was there anything you did for fun?

WH: No we just (laughter) had our own little fun.

BP: Did you have any entertainers over there or anything like that?

WH: No [unclear] in the service [unclear] USOs were in the states.

BP: What did you guys do to entertain yourselves as far as pulling pranks on each other or anything like that, that kind of humor?

WH: Well no not really.

BP: Now one photograph I see is a picture of you here on a Russian made tank.

WH: I did not operate that though.

BP: That was an enemy tank that was captured?

WH: Yes.

BP: That was a Soviet T-3485 tank?

WH: And the equipment we had over there was all the WWII equipment the [unclear] four-five-ton [unclear] and all that [unclear] trucks, all the old equipment and they had brand new equipment in Japan on the shores just wasting away with the salt water, brand new equipment, we had all old equipment and we were putting motors in and rear ends in and all kinds of things.

BP: A lot of hard work.

WH: Oh yes.

BP: What did you think of your officers and fellow soldiers?

WH: Well the soldiers were good, and our commander was good man we had 2 one had to leave he was an ace the other one was fair enough, he was really good.

BP: Did you keep a personal diary?

WH: No.

BP: Now you mentioned to me before, before you came home you got sent from Korea to Japan for a little while.

WH: Yes 'til all the other boys came over because they left me a couple weeks earlier.

BP: So you had some time in Japan.

WH: Yes, I had some time in Japan.

BP: What did you do while you were there?

WH: Walked around went sightseeing things like that.

BP: Mostly around Tokyo?

WH: Tokyo was beautiful it looked just like New York City it was all built up nice Tokyo was beautiful.

BP: It was all re-built since WWII?

WH: Oh boy it was in beautiful shape it was all in Tokyo.

BP: Now you came back to United States you came back on a Navy ship you told me.

WH: Back on a Navy ship but I don't know what one it was but boy we have good food then the problem there was they used to put the butter out in squares and we used to gobble it up at after that they took all the good stuff away from us the good rolls and bread and everything like that and we went nuts because we were so used to it boy it was such good food but then they took a lot of it away from us.

BP: Do you remember what it was like when you came home how did you feel?

WH: I landed in San Francisco the first thing I did was call home ... we were there for most of an hour I pulled KP once there in the kitchen.

BP: You already had worse duties then that.

WH: Yes right (laughter).

BP: Then they send you across the country to Fort Dix.

WH: Yes, they put us on a train and we went to Fort Dix.

BP: And you got [unclear] out of Fort Dix?

WH: Then I came home.

BP: What did you do after you got out of the service?

WH: I worked in heavy equipment.

BP: And you continued to work in heavy equipment right along?

WH: Yes matter of fact when I came home on referral one time the boss I was working for I worked for him for the whole referral.

BP: That was what you did on your leave right

WH: Yes right on my leave, he wanted me back in the worst way, so I told him I said I'll work for as long as I can then I go back.

BP: That's a picture of you getting on the airplane going over there?

WH: Picture of me getting on an airplane going to California.

BP: Commercial flight, right?

WH: Yes

BP: Now you belong to the American Legion here in Saugerties?

WH: Yes

BP: Also you belong to the VFW in Saugerties?

WH: Yes.

BP: Any other veteran organization to belong to?

WH: No.

BP: But you are very involved in Project SOS [unclear]?

WH: Yes, I got into that too.

BP: Tell us a little bit about that, what you do.

WH: Well, Monday, excuse me the 30th we just packed all the boxes and sent them over [to soldiers] like razors and soap and other things they could use, matter of fact the last one the 30th they were looking for pillows we put pillows in the bottom of the box and we filled it up with food games cards all kinds of things like that.

BP: All kinds of goodies for the troops over in Iraq or in [unclear].

WH: And they got a call one person was in turkey, and that was the last thing we had an extra box and we just sent it over there.

BP: Now that's been going on in town here for a couple of years now?

WH: Yes but I only just got involved into it.

BP: Did you get involved in any reunions with your troops that you were serving with anything like that did you keep in touch with any of those people?

WH: No well the warrant officer he used to call me, write letters he wanted me to come back in he said I'll get warrant officer for you (laughter) but I said no I don't want that.

BP: How do you think military experience affected your life and how do you feel about the war general and so forth?

WH: I'm glad we went over really, I enjoyed it I think it was okay I enjoyed it very much so.

BP: Anything else you'd like to add?

WH: My father he was in the first World War he was over in France.

BP: Who was he with over in France army?

WH: Army he was a truck driver.

BP: They [unclear] trucks back then

WH: The truck in front of them got blown up right in front of them. He would have been next. But otherwise I enjoyed it, it was a good experience for me. My mother didn't kindly like it because she got all filled up and everything, but I had a pretty good time in San Francisco too.

BP: well thank you very much Werner for sharing your experiences with us and thank you for your service