Robert J. Choboy
Narrator

Wayne Clarke
Mike Russert
New York State Museum
Interviewers

Interviewed on 22nd of February 2006
Best Western Motel Delaware Avenue
Buffalo, New York

Robert J. Choboy	RC
Wayne Clarke	WC
Mike Russert	MR

WC: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, place of birth please.

RC: Robert Joseph Choboy, date of birth 6, 20, 31. Born here in Buffalo.

WC: Okay, what was your educational background prior to entering service?

RC: High school, I didn't go to college at the time. I was going to but I didn't, that was primarily it.

WC: Okay, were you drafted or did you enlist?

RC: I Enlisted.

WC: Why did you decide to enlist?

RC: Because we were at war at the time and a lot of people where I lived were joining too, so I decided to join. I was approximately nineteen years old at the time.

WC: Okay, why did you select the army?

RC: For no reason, I just you know, thought that I would wanna go there.

WC: When did you go into service?

RC: I went in to service in February of 1951, and I went immediately to Fort Dix foreign doctrine nation…

WC: That was where your basic training was held?

RC: I went to Fort Dix foreign doctrine nation, and then I went to camp Chaffee, Arkansas. At that point I was trained in basic training and then I went and trained on the 105 Howitzers. I was gonna continue to do that, I expected to go to Korea, using the 105 howitzers with the rest of the troops. But as I went along, we graduated from basic training there, then we went through San Francisco and we went to Japan. At that point they brought me out and said 'you're not going to Korea at this time', and I went to the Eta Jima Specialist School. That was in southern Japan, it was actually where the Japanese naval people were trained as they joined the navy. But in any event I sat down for five weeks and learned all Morse code. I thought I never in my life would understand it but I certainly did after a while and I was trained as a radio operator, high speed radio operator. Then after that I went to Korea and I went to the fifty-first signal battalion. There, we were in groups of three going close to the front line but not on it of course, backed up and receiving different reports from the line and then go ahead and sent them back to high core headquarters. We did bomb runs, the jets would go out there and bomb things and then we would get the report from them and of course send it back to high core headquarters. We were in groups of threes and that's all we did, we lived in a tent, had the radio equipment there and it was very scary if I can say it, because the North Koreans are all over these mountains looking for people like us and as a matter of fact one of them got killed. So like you know being nineteen years old, we would lock the doors and keep the weapons there to make sure nothing's gonna happen to us and I did that for a long time.

WC: Was this strictly Morse code you were working with at that time?

RC: As a matter of fact after we did Morse code we went into radio teletype and this was mostly on teletype. The Morse code itself we used but not that much because they were bringing in that new teletype in, so we used that quite a bit and I spent actually

spent 3 winters in Korea and being 19 again it was an awful long time, I don't have to tell you how bad the winters in Korea were, they were horrible. At one point I should say, my brother in law Eric Putnam, he was up there in Cheorwon which 20 miles away from where I was. He was using the 105 howitzers and at one point we happened to get together, I can't remember how it happened or anything like that but he came down and I met him for maybe 2 hours. It was just so great to see somebody from the family, you know in a place like that just spending two hours, I'll never forget it. Eric, he was up there on the 105 howitzers and firing these things, they had ear plug probably, I don't know what they had but after firing them for a long time, a year and a half or something like that, Eric right now is almost deaf, he can't hear because of [unclear , I always blamed it on the howitzers, I had to. It's very sad now, because I was just with him yesterday, he's got hair plugs, getting everything from the VA, and thank God for the VA because he's getting all this great stuff and but he's actually deaf.

WC: With the cold there did you have many problems with that new machinery, the teletype machines breaking down or seizing up or anything?

RC: No, no. Probably [what we had] had there was the experience because it was just coming out and some of the equipment we didn't know how to use like setting it up and stuff like that. We had to be trained from people like that, the transition there from Morse code to radio teletype it wasn't a continuous thing it just didn't all of a sudden go into radio teletype it was a transition and we finally did learn it. I was not real good at the time with that, I was doing that well versed with radio teletype, now as I remember it, it was good, it was better because Morse code is very difficult. I'll tell you why, because right around 5 o'clock at night you get awful lot of interference, what we call to QRM and you can hardly hear [unclear], doing it real fast, it was very difficult to copy, that's why radio teletype was so much easier because you would get it right off the typewriter. That was a huge thing because it was very difficult, as I've said before, to use Morse code late at night.

WC: How about your winter gear? Did you have good winter gear, where you were warm?

RC: That's a good question. Yes, we did have good mountain sleeping bags, we have the overcoat and stuff like that. No matter what happened it was still cold there's was no question like that. One of the funniest things of course the three of us are in a tent and there is six people in a tent and it's a small tent and we have the fire going and at 3 o'clock in the morning the fire would go out and now it's your turn to light that fire. When you wake up the whole inside of the tent is all frost, absolutely like you're in a refrigerator it's really funny, I'll never forget that either, that was something.

WC: What kind of weapons did you carry?

RC: We carried the forty-fives and the carbines, that's all we had.

WC: Did you have much or any trouble with your weapons being seized up in the cold?

RC: No, I really wasn't that involved in combat or stuff like that, we had to have the weapons, they were there, but that's about it.

WC: You were a pretty [unclear] forward right?

RC: Yeah.

WC: The Koreans never fell on you or anything, did they?

RC: One of them, the truck itself was broken into and the operators were killed. That bothered me for a long time, it had to. It was terrible, because you're always looking towards the door and people get killed like that. We always had problem with the people that go up on the telephone poles to string wire and stuff like that, they were always getting killed.

[Tape interruption]

WC: After your tour was over?

RC: After my tour was over, in Korea I returned to the US –

WC: You said you had an unusual duty working with the army engineers checking depths of rivers something?

RC: Yes exactly, the Imjin River. That was strange because we worried about the bridges going across that river up to the front. We had to check the depth of the river every hour on the hour to see how high it was and it was supposed to go up to a certain point, then they would take all the bridges back. I did that for probably a month and a half to two months, finally when we got to the rainy season the monsoons came so fast that the bridges were wiped out anyway no matter what we did.

WC: Now, how did you get assigned to this engineering unit?

RC: The fifty-first signal battalion, we as groups of threes would go with the 1st Marine division, the KMAG [Korean Military Advisory Group**],** which is the South Korean Division, for a month. Then we would go to the Turks, we were assigned to different people, different nationalities.

WC: What was is like, for example being assigned to a South Korean unit or a Turk unit did you have much inner relationship with people themselves, the soldiers themselves?

RC: Not at all, I'm pretty sure everybody was South Korean. We would know how to say hello, how are you, and stuff like that. I remember a lady and her son taught me a Korean song and I've been singing that song forever. Want me to sing it for you?

WC: Sure.

RC: [Sings Korean Song], I haven't done it in a long time.

WC: Do you know what it means?

RC: It's a song about Korean children, I often try to find out what it means, but I remembered that song for 55 years.

WC: What was your food like at the front lines, do you have rations?

RC: We ate with the marines and we ate with different Australians and stuff like that. We would use their food and drank their beer actually. We all know that's what makes the United States Army go around, is the good beer. I'll never forget that if you looked at a description of how your bunk should be and right in the corner it says X, X, X which means that's where you put your beer. That was always funny to me because the Army would never tell you, you should drink beer or anything like that.

WC: I noticed you received a bronze star, do you have the story behind that?

RC: Not really, no.

WC: Are there any other things you wanted to mention?

RC: Yes, I came back from Korea and went to Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. By then I was a field 1st sergeant and I taught the people coming in about being in the signal core, radios and what we were doing on the front lines. They became radio operators.
One thing I should say is that being in Korea for three years in [unclear], when I came back, now this is a long time afterwards, I became the sales manager for a tool and [unclear] firm. After 55 years, I was able to go back to Korea, I worked for the Hyundai car company, and we were making sea land trailers for them, working with process, pushing out holes and stuff like that. I was actually able to go back there and see the thruways that they have and all the transportation, it was a very modern country compared to what it was way back in [unclear].

WC: Were the people there aware that you were a veteran?

RC: Yes.

WC: How were you treated?

RC: Good! Great. We had a representative there, Mr. Kim, who was a very nice man and his wife and children. So glad that they had great accommodations and that time, that was really good.

WC: Did you ever get to see USO shows over there?

RC: Yes, Mickey Rooney, he was there and he was funny. I walked him back to the jeep and I took my arm and put over the top of his head, that was funny, I was like 'could I do that'. He was a real shrimp.

MR: Did you see anyone else there besides him?

RC: No, I'm sure I did but I don't remember that. Now, I want to say a little bit about Robin Schimminger. He is the assembly man there in Tonawanda, where I lived. He actually got all the veterans together on a Saturday morning, had us all over at this brand new high school and there was a lot of us an awful lot of us. He had all the families there and I don't think the families realize how important that was to the veterans because there they were and he said a lot of great words. He also had a monument build in Veterans Park, just like in Washington where you have your name in scripted on it, I thought that was super.

WC: Now what special award did you receive that day, I know each of received the same medal, didn't you?

RC: Yes, I've got the whole thing down in my basement listed the citations that we had from the Korean government, Robin Schimminger, that was great.

WC: Did you ever make use of the GI bill after you got out?

RC: The GI bill? As far as education –

WC: Or rent/buying a home or anything? Did you use it in any way?

RC: If it was available to me, absolutely I did. I got to say this it's so important. That hospital that we have here in Buffalo, the VA hospital on Bailey Avenue, I go there all the time, I think it's the best thing that could happened to us. I went there for therapy, anything you want [you would go there for it]. I was doing the therapy and he said 'you got to ride your bicycle' and I said 'I don't have one' and he said 'I'll get you one'. It's a training, a bicycle that attaches to a table, it was really nice. Also, this is so important, as I sat there in therapy, I saw these veterans from World War 2, Korea, and Vietnam and they could hardly walk. They have nurses holding them and on these guides and that is all they do back and forth and they are never going home, it'll make you cry. It really would, it's terrible.

WC: Do you join any veteran's organizations?

RC: Yeah, as a matter of fact the American legion that I belong to, I get the guys and we're going Friday again and we play euchre there ever second. Every two weeks we play euchre, eight people, we have a lot of fun. Great organization, and there is a good possibility that they will be obsolete and that would be terrible.

WC: Did you stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

RC: Not really. Like we all do, I started a couple letters and that dwindles after a while.

WC: How do you think your time in the service changed or had an effect on your life?

RC: Greatly.

WC: In what ways?

RC: Because I was out of Buffalo, I was into the world. I was in Fort Dix, down there in Camp Chaffee Arkansas, stopped right there because in camp Chaffee Arkansas we were on the firing line, firing those 105 howitzers. Then it was the weekend and I went into the town there and we were walking around having some beers. There was a woman that asked me a question and I said 'oh' – he was an actor, it was Sunday afternoon and he was an actor who was going to do Audie Murphy Yank in Korea. I happened to recognize the guy and then he got all excited. Then I went with this actor and we took pictures and all this stuff –

WC: You know who it was? You remember?

RC: Oh man, I was trying for last couple of days to remember that name, it was a Yank in Korea. He asked me 'where'd do you live' and I said New York and he said 'oh I'm going up there, do you want a ride on my airplane'. He actually came out there one the firing line looking for me, that was really great.

WC: There any other ways that it may be affected your life, your time in the service?

RC: Yeah, it affected my life sure. I would say that every young man should go in and do some time in the service. Strictly one thing, for discipline, I mean all of a sudden these little boys that are attached to their mother and they get away crying and stuff. The army makes a man out of you there is no question. Get out there, we have only us to depend on, the three of us, we're away from home and it does make a man out of you.

WC: You said something about New Year's Day 1953 in Korea, how that was a memorable event.

RC: I'll be damned, yeah! Jesus.

WC: Why was that so memorable?

RC: We had a party and its new year's, and we're having a pop [unclear]. The mess sergeant was there and he handles all the candy, all the chocolate and stuff like that, he's into the sauce pretty good and I said can I have some of them chocolate bars. He loaded me up like this, I had this much and I'm walking back to the tent. At that point they fired every gun that we had on the line, at 12 o'clock. Every weapon that we had was fired and I thought they were coming to get us, I threw all that chocolate up in the air and I ran like hell! I thought we were being under attack. That was funny, really.

WC: Okay, well thank you very much.