

**Frank J. Cipriano
Veteran**

**Wayne Clark
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on September 18th, 2019
New York State Military Museum**

Q: Would you please state your full name, date, and place of birth?

FJC: My name is Frank Cipriano. I was born in Brooklyn, New York on September 25th, 1946.

Q: Did you attend school in Brooklyn?

FJC: In Brooklyn, New York I attended Elementary. In high school I attended St. Francis College, which is also in Brooklyn. Ultimately, I went to law school in Westchester County, Pace University.

Q: Was this before you went into the service?

FJC: No. Prior to the service I had finished high school and about a year of college and I was a full-time musician. At the time I was in a rock'n'roll band. At 17 I was making a lot more money than my father had. It was always a fun thing in the family and In January of 1966 I was working too much so I dropped out of a full-time school, I was going to my Brooklyn College, and I transferred to a community college so I could go into work a few nights a week. As a result of that, my status changed and in early March of 1966 I got my draft notice, gave up my deferment, went out to my draft board and said, "Let me finish the semester". Which they did, they gave me a new reporting date which was June 9th of 1966.

Q: Where did you go for basic training?

FJC: Well, Basically the first time I really left the city of New York I lived in a housing project. My parents were immigrants, my father actually served in World War II, just to mention that I think it's an interesting story. My father, when the 2nd World War started, my father was an enemy alien he was an Italian citizen. So, he had the option of going back to Italy and back into the army. He ended up being in the First Division, went to England and was involved in the Normandy Invasion and well, he was on the beach. Oh, so you asked where I was at and I went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina for induction for the first couple of days and transferred from there to Fort Gordon, Georgia and did my training there in Fort Gordon, Georgia.

Q: What was that like?

FJC: uh, you know basic training was, it didn't seem all that difficult to me. I was very fortunate. I left on the morning of June 9th with 3 other friends, who all lived in my housing project, all played on my same PA a little league baseball team, all the like Python friends. So, four of us for all went in on the same day from Whitehall Street New York. We took, we took the railroad down on the train down to the Carolinas for basic training, and all four of us were in the same platoon. It was an exciting time, so we didn't have that much separation that maybe a lot of young fellows went through. We got to compare notes and it was just during that tremendous buildup, so a lot of our friends left in March and May of '66 and they were in front of us down at Fort Gordon and then when we got our first Sunday free in the afternoon, we worked across the parade grounds. They were a month ahead of us, they were starting to get a little hair growing back into their head shape. In the fourth week we'd all laugh together and buddy up and it was you know, I mean the training part is what basic is, it's an it's

interesting it's invigorating it's indoctrination it's all of that but I didn't find any hardship and I don't believe my friends did either. After basic training we got first leave, we came back. I was getting myself and one of my friends we're going to Fort Dix New Jersey for infantry and that's when we ended up at 11 Bravo MOS and we went to an infantry training, advance infantry training, and while we're, when we finished that, I guess had some good scores in the military and on the exams. They offered me an opportunity to go to OCS, but I didn't reject it, I didn't accept it I just kept it on the bottom of the waiting list for a while and then they kept me as a hold over at Fort Dix a few months and they explained to me that if I did go to OCS, you know, I would – I would end up in the infantry most likely. My background is my brother, my older brother is a chemist and when I was in college before, just before I got drafted, I was taking chemistry courses I said, "what could I do to get into the Chemical Corps?". They said there aren't any guarantees and what comes out of the top 5%. So, I thought I would pass on that. I'm waiting for orders from Fort Dix and at that time in early '67.

Entire companies and entire, I think battalions were being shipped right from Dix right over to Vietnam, so we were expecting that. I think out of a whole Louisville platoon, two of us, myself and a friend of mine got orders for Korea instead of Vietnam. We thought that was the greatest at the time. So, I had another leave and in May of '67 I left for Korea. Which was a great experience in many ways. I remember the flight across from New York to Seattle, that's the first time I had been on an airline and then I got to Fort Lewis, over there for a few days maybe up to a week before we shipped over and I got on the plane, American planes from New York, from Seattle to Japan. When we got on the Airline once again in Japan to go from Japan to Korea I ended up sitting next to some old grizzled "NCO" and he said "look around fellas because you know the stewardesses you're going to see, you're not going to see any more white girls". You know and sure enough when we were coming over, getting into my tempo it was the nighttime. I'm used to New York City, I'm looking out, and she was telling me you were coming into tempo and all that. It was dark, well it was a blackout in those days still, but it was dark and desolate, and I got off you know, the plane opened up, started up. Then the first thing you noticed you noticed was the owner, there was a different kind of smell from anything I've been used to, natural human fertilizer and everything was different a different kind of thing. I still didn't know where I was going, I went into a reception and I said in the morning, you know right after you got, you're going up to the DMZ. So, I got on a little kind of military transport and I was with another fellow. We went across, went up by the Indian River, which is the last I guess natural battery that boundary before he got to the South Eighth and the DMZ. Going across that I saw there was security, a lot of security, just to get on the bridge they checked everybody. Going across the bridge on the long side the military bridge that we were going over with were the remnants of a blown-out ridge from the Korean War, and that's where we were passing through all this. It looks like movies that I'd seen. Then on the other side of the bridge there was even more security. Anyway, we went a little further up and we got to headquarter company of the 3rd of the 23rd infantry 2nd division, where I was assigned and where I spent my almost 13 months. I was assigned to an infantry patrol, youth group platoon, and for the first few months while I was there, basically we walked patrols along the south tape, the southern border of the DMZ. Sometimes we would get duties at nighttime we would have to go up by the guard post which were spaced along the south tape of the DMZ, we'd go into 2- or 3-men foxholes, which were more like dugouts than foxholes. We'd spend the night there and during that period of time, there was quite a bit of activity.

Q: So, you saw the North Korean Soldiers?

FJC: So, we would hear them, and we would see them, and every once in a while, they'd be around they'll be fire at and stuff like that. There were there were, that was during the

time also in at the beginning of '68, when the pueblo was taken, and everything was on real high security and there was a lot of infiltration going through the American sector. Sending commandos down to try and kill the president they stormed the Blue House which is the equivalent of our White House. There were a couple of, I mean minor types of skirmishes, a couple of little shootout things and that was the type of experience that I had. That was the serious part of the experience that we had, we had some guard dogs there and you know we had a kennel and they would sometimes walk the guard dogs around the perimeter. One time one of our security people shot one of our dog handlers and I remember I got involved helping him out, getting help at that point, I think I was a Corporal at that point. Ultimately, I became a sergeant and buck sergeant and I was in charge of some of the details and things that went on and it was mostly an experience that I look back on now with a lot of good memories.

Q: Now, did you have much contact with the civilian population?

FJC: I think I had more than most. I was very interested in meeting the local people. We did have a couple of Koreans, we had "ketosis" right, they were the Korean Military assigned to the United States and we had them, some of them you know, on our military base. And then we had some civilian Korean workers that worked some of them were house boys a lot of them worked in the, we had an NCO club and before it was part of the NCO club part of the regular. So, we got to meet them and I made friends and I got to go make a couple of trips south, to back on the buses going across the river and got to meet, have some nice meals with some of the Korean families and I had a wonderful experience with that. Years and years later I ended up joining the Korean veterans who served in the Korean war obviously I was also there preventing that, and I remember what my father did with the VFW and other things when he was still alive. So, I did have substantial contact with the Koreans and then some. Mostly very good contact stuff.

Q: Now, it says on your application that you were exposed to Agent Orange?

FJC: Yeah well actually in, I want to say it was probably later in '67 and early at '68 understanding what the DMZ was it was just the DMZ was just the demarcation line and on a mile north of the DMZ and a mile south of the DMZ was just an area of land that was just, by regulation, to be kept vacant and it was all defoliated using Agent Orange. I didn't know about it at the time, didn't know anything about it at the time, but after I was back out I, over the course of my life I've developed very specific types of cancers. One that had metastasized, I had multiple surgeries and treatments even things like that, and the DEA took good care of me and I found out a lot more about it as the years went on, and I'm still treating by the VII still presently have what known as a schwannoma. It's a type of an Agent Orange specific type of cancer, it's a tumor that wraps around the nerves and actually comes from the spinal column. That's caused me some sometimes some problems with my hand, my thumb, and my neck. I consider myself very lucky that that's as far as it went.

Q: What about your equipment, were you well equipped and well taken care of?

FJC: I was well equipped and well taken care of. We had great equipment, we were, you know from the weather, obviously you know Korea during the wintertime is a harsh hard place especially up by the DMZ. But we had what they used to call they used to call Mickey Mouse boots. We had a lot of heavy gear and gloves, didn't make too much of a difference when you were out at night in and around our compound which was north of the engine, so it was always sort of on it, semi on it, alert type of a thing and you were out there. You would, it's freezing brutally. Brutally below zero at times, and that leads me to another story, because in November of '67, came down with pneumonia and I was in one of the Quonset hut types of places that we lived in, sleeping in. I was just burning up with fever and one of my buds went and got the medical officer and I was really burning up with fever and he put me in a vehicle and this was I guess about 2 days, 3

days before thanksgiving of '67. He, plus they put me in a Jeep, covered up the Jeep, drove down to the military hospital. I'm not sure if it even was a military hospital because there were more Koreans in the hospital. There were only a couple of American GIs and I was seriously ill with double pneumonia and I remember they were putting different amity chemicals into me some silver stuff to help force the liquid out of my lungs and I was in the medical are and I sort of had a couple of days in there that I was mostly, not too much contact, I was in a bit of a haze.

But on Thanksgiving morning the commanding general from the area came around, and I remember I had, it was the first day I was feeling a little better. General came over and said, "how're you doing son, how are you feeling" I said, "I think I'm feeling a bit better" he said, "is there anything I can do?" I said, "I'd like to get back to my unit as soon as I can." I may be spent, another 2 or 3 days. I went back up to there on the 23rd and I seem to have a memory that made me for another 2 or 3 weeks I was kept on like restrictive duty to do, it was great. I think I probably got close to Christmas before I had to really do any military work thereafter. My energy level came back, I was still a young fellow and when the work started and it was its own trouble, it was a different kind of world for, I would say February and March and April, and it was much more high intense kind of stuff. I think I came close to being killed one time, it's on my papers and it's a story that has nothing to do with the enemy, and it was the day that ML King was assassinated which is April of '68. I was already almost becoming a short-timer, I was going to be going home in the beginning of June, and I was pretty good buddies with a couple of black soldiers. Couple of fellow from Chicago, from different cities, I'd say I'd become pretty tight with especially one of them, a fellow by the name of Eugene Kelly. We were in our Quonset, and he came in with another fellow, another black fellow, and this fellow was in a sense, a wild with fierce anger. With Kennedy being assassinated and he was just crying and screaming and cursing every white person in the world, he put his m14 2 feet away from me and said he wanted to "freaking kill me" and you know, and I said you know, this is going to be what it's going to be and you know I didn't know where that was going to end up and Eugene Kelly said "come on, that's frank you know frank right" by that time I was I was a sergeant, so this was actually somebody who was under my command and I just kept my cool and Eugene talked him down and he put his weapon down and that's how that ended. People always ask me if I was ever in a dangerous situation and that's when I was in the most dangerous situation.

Q: Now, you mentioned a Lieutenant Marty O'Gorman.

FJC: Oh yeah, Marty was, Marty was an Officer that I worked with for a while and we had some hilarious experiences. I don't know if it was because I was from the inner city, but a bunch of the officers took a liking to me and they let me hang out with them at the officer's club which was on top of the compound hill. We had a lot of fun experiences. With Marty, and there being in the military about for a year after I came home, but he ended up becoming an usher in my private party in New York and I became an usher in his private party up in Boston Massachusetts. We maintained a very close friendship relationship for most of our lives.

Q: Are you still in Contact?

FJC: Well I am until the last couple of years because he, his immediate family relationship broke up years later and he relocated from Massachusetts to Hawaii and then from Hawaii to Thailand and that's where he's living at for retirement.

Q: When exactly did you leave Korea?

FJC: I left Korea on the first week of June of '68, and I got back to New York City, came from the west coast then came to New York, and I got home with enough time to have a meal with my mom and dad. I didn't go to see my friends or anybody yet, I was kind of tired and I went to bed and my mother woke me up late that night, you know, towards

the middle of the night and she said “Frank, they just shot Robert Kennedy.”. So that was the night I got home. I think that was June 5th, June 5th to June 6th of '68. It was a tumultuous year, '68.

Q: Did you notice any difference, you know, from the time you left to the time you got back to the States?

FJC: There was no comparison, no way man, no comparison between when I left and it still, it was like a national feeling, even from New York City itself. Yeah, there was some protesting some disagreements going on, but it was still a great feeling to go into the military, at least that's what I felt. I came from a family that had military experience and all and I had a younger sister. She was just a kid when I left, she's 9 years younger than I am, and when I got home, within a couple of days I noticed she was wearing army fatigues, combat boots. Everyone I knew was anti, anti-military, with protests going on. That next day I think I had my dress uniform, when we were still living in a project.

Q: Were you still in the Military at that point?

FJC: Oh no, I was Discharged from Seattle. No wait, I was discharged from somewhere in California.

Q: Fort Ward was it?

FJC: You know I don't remember; it was Kind of a Blur. I'm sure it's on my 214. But when I got home I had my Dress Uniform on the next day and I just wanted to say hello to some of my old buddies in the project, went out there and came home and that was the last time that I put the uniform on at that point because it was, I didn't want any more confusion in my life, anymore battles. I've always been pro the military to this day, so my uniform went into a plastic bag and it started hanging next to my father's World War II Uniform, which it is to this day. Right now, it is in one of my closets, in upstairs, in my bedroom which I have my father's uniform and my uniform sitting side-by-side.

Q: Now you mentioned that you are CPR trained.

FJC: Yes that's true, that was, that was probably sometime after I had gotten sick and I'd come back to duties or was probably during the end of the year or during that period of time after I was convalescing after having pneumonia. My unit sent me down to a treating place in Seoul, in the compounds down there. I don't remember the name of which one and I went through about a 10-day intensive training period on chemical, biological, radiological thing to observe, thing to learn, you learned how to use the atropine to the R.E.D if you had nerve agents and all that type of stuff. Then I became, I guess I became the CDR NCO for the 3rd of the 23rd. I don't remember exactly when I got the promotion – from corporal to sergeant, but that may have been to help accommodate that also.

Q: Were you ever exposed to gases from the North Koreans?

FJC: No no no, the only chemical agent I probably ever came into contact with was Agent Orange.

Q: You received the Korean Peace Medal?

FJC: Yes, I think, I just assumed that was done automatically to anybody who served there. I didn't receive a special reward. I mean it's a special reward, I don't mean it that way. It wasn't an individual accommodation, it was just that everybody who served in the defense position up there, and maybe it was everybody that served along the DMZ which is also a possibility there.

Q: Ok, so you got out of the Army, then you went back to college?

FJC: I got out of the Army in June of '68 and during that summer I enrolled back into College, used the GI Bill to the maximum benefit I was able to get. I finished my 4-year degree. I got my bachelor's degree in management and accounting from St Francis

College in Brooklyn and then I went to work for a while, but it was always my intention I wanted to become an attorney. I had accumulated some money, I got a little bit of family help and I guess about '75 actually started '76, I started law school by 1980, and I was an attorney.

Q: Now, were you able to make use of the GI Bill?

FJC: The GI Bill helped me tremendously because I got married in 1970 and I didn't really have anything financially and the GI Bill helped me pay for my last couple of years in college and I still had enough benefit leftover that I was still receiving benefits from the first year of law school and I, I wanted a New York state scholarship. I think it was called the Military Scholarship. As a state resident here I applied for it, it was something that was available at the time for veterans. I took an exam and I got a scholarship for that and that helped some. Whatever money I was able to save helped me pay for my 2nd year of law school and my mom and dad helped me pay for my last year of law school. So, I was able to finish it in 3 years.

Q: And where did you go?

FJC: Pace University, School of Law. That's up in White Plains New York.

Q: I see that you were a Criminal Defense Attorney?

FJC: That's what I did, I was always attracted to that area of the law. Coming from the Inner City I witnessed a lot and was exposed to both, you know, all the dangers of crime and I saw well more than that I would have ever wanted, more than anybody else to see and I found it to be a worthwhile way of working within the system. Seeing that justice was done, see even as a defense attorney working with some people who may have just made a mistake. I'm trying to put them on the right way, and I found it to be a very exciting way of life.

Q: Now whereabouts was your law practiced?

FJC: My practice was, and I worked for a larger firm from 1981 when I was admitted as an attorney. So about 1984, I think in 1984 I started my own law firm and I was on my own for about 3 or 4 years and I took in a partner and then we became a partnership and that still exists to this day even though I'm 95% retired.

Q: And where about was this firm?

FJC: It was in New York City, most of the boroughs of New York City as well as national Suffolk County, which is Long Island and parts of Westchester County, Upstate New York, criminal cases wherever they took me and I had to work a wide range of all types of criminal cases from very serious felonies to some, you know, minor offenses.

Q: How did you end up in Saratoga Springs?

FJC: Well, when I was a 5 year old boy and I graduated from Kindergarten I was brought on the stage, one at a time and the priest from the catholic school I went to would say "what do you want to be when you grow up?" Now I lived in a project and I was never exposed to anything but the inner city and I said "I want to be a farmer" and it broke up everybody in the audience because they didn't know a farmer, so I said I wanted to be a farmer. But, I didn't really know anything about it, but then later on I think, actually in when I got out of the service my uncle used to come up to Saratoga for races and he took me up, my uncle John was also a World War II veteran who's my mother's older brother and he took me up to Saratoga Springs and I think I saw horses maybe for the first time in my life and I was attracted to them, and when I started making more money that I needed to live on as an attorney, I invested in a racehorse. I didn't even know what I was buying when I bought part of a racehorse. As fate would have it, that horse went on to win, so it sort of addicted me to that and I started coming

up to Saratoga, met some of the local horse people from around Saratoga, including Joe McMahon and his family from McMahon farm, which is a big farm out here in Saratoga and I got some horses with him and I got involved in the industry and I've been breeding and raising Thoroughbred racehorses now for about 26 years. So, I would vacation in Saratoga during the summer. You're asking how I ended up here, I would come here for the racing season, take some time off from my business and come up, and I would love the way of life, I loved the area, I loved everything about it. So, right after 9/11 I had been playing with the idea of packing it in and coming up here and where I lived in Brooklyn I was able to walk to the corner and see the Trade Center and when that day, when that came down, I said I had enough, we go find a little more peaceful place to be. So, we had a summer place up here in Saratoga, but we sold that, and we bought another home right here in the city of Saratoga Springs and happily I'll be a full time since 2003.

Q: Did you enjoy, did you join any veterans' organizations like the American Legion?

FJC: well yeah, back in Brooklyn when I was still living in Brooklyn and I want to say in the early 70s I was part of a crew that organized one of a local VFW chapter. I was active in that for a couple of years and then I just recently, this past year, joined the Korean war veterans' local chapter here in Saratoga Springs and I've been happily enjoying a time with the veterans' coral group that meets in Saratoga Springs. Managed to get back to my Original music roots.

Q: Let me just ask you, you said you were in a rock band, did you play an instrument or were you a singer?

FJC: Well I played an instrument; I played the guitar. I was fortunate enough to get a little bit of success at a young age. We were in a group called the Rainbows and we worked all around New York City. I worked with some very famous groups, some very famous people, Shangri-La's, Lloyd Price, I'm mentioning people to go back to the 60s, early 60s. I performed with my group at the New York World's Fair both in '64 and '65 until it closed. We had a regular job on Bourbon Street, appeared at the New York State pavilion, worked in a lot of the night clubs in Manhattan, and did very well, actually I enjoyed that. And just like that in April of our first. One of the fellows in the group was drafted, and then 2 months later 2 of us were drafted at the same time, So that ended that. I had an uncle that was a bandleader and when I came out of the service and the music was changed but I got back into it for a while and I was using it to make a few extra dollars to supplement while I was in college and that type of thing. But, I gradually got away from it but I never really gave up playing the guitar, I still do that to this day. I actually toured a little bit here, young kids in Saratoga Springs, neighbors mostly, a little bit in Florida because they do winter in Florida now at that point. So, one of those snowbirds means I leave after the holidays stay in Florida until late April and it's a good life there, I'm pretty happy with it.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to include?

FJC: Military experience, I consider all the highs that I've had in life. I've had a wonderful, a lot of wonderful things that I've experienced, mostly good health and disregarding some of the negative physical things that I've gone through. I'm going to be 73 a week from today and I feel pretty good and I considered my 2 years in the military to be a phenomenal growth experience, a very exciting part of my life and I feel proud of it beyond even what I can put into words and I just wish that most of the young people, especially the young people of today could get to enjoy that feeling. That's basically my feeling about it.