

Thomas J. Farnan
Veteran
Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewer
Interviewed on November 9th, 2016
Saratoga Springs, New York

WC: Today is the 9th of November, 2016. We are at the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York. My name is Wayne Clark, I'm the interviewer. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth, please?

TF: Thomas J. Farnan, born in Glens Falls, New York, October 13th, 1930.

WC: And did you attend school there?

TF: No. I attended school firstly in Mechanicville, New York.

WC: Okay. You lived in Mechanicville?

TF: Yes.

WC: Okay. And did you graduate from high school there?

TF: I did. But we moved out in the country in between. I went to country schools for two or three years, and then I went back to Mechanicville to seventh grade and graduated from there in 1947.

WC: Okay. Once you graduated from high school, did you go on to college at that point?

TF: Yes, I did. I went to RPI for a year and then to Siena College for two years.

WC: And then after your two years, I understand you went into the military.

TF: Yeah, I enlisted in the United States Air Force.

WC: Okay. Now why did you pick the Air Force?

TF: I always was interested in flying. I had a couple of years of college. I thought I might develop into a pilot or something.

WC: Had you received your draft notice at all?

TF: I forget.

WC: Okay, all right. Now where did you go for your training?

TF: I went to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

WC: Now, was that your first time away from home for an extended period?

TF: Yes, except for vacations and stuff.

WC: Okay, and what was that like?

TF: Well, it was very busy, because a lot of people had joined the Air Force then. The date, December 1950, it's right after the Chinese entered the war and were shoving us back over in Korea.

WC: Now, when you went into the Air Force, did they tell you in basic that you would probably end up in Korea?

TF: No.

WC: No?

TF: As a matter of fact, I spent eleven days in basic training, and they sent me over to the hospital because of the influx of troops there, and the weather. Everybody was getting sick and they were out in tents. They also didn't have proper uniforms. They were training in civilian clothes. It was a very cold winter and they put me in the hospital on an emergency basis to help them out.

WC: Okay. Now after you're basic, did they send you on to an advanced school?

TF: No, 11 days later they sent me to the hospital and I fought my neck off trying to get into a school. I never was successful to get to a school at that time.

WC: All right. Now, how much time did you spend in the States before you ended up in Korea?

TF: I went to Korea in February of '52. [1952]

WC: Oh, '52. For the first two years you were in the Air Force, did you stay in Lackland?

TF: It was February '52, it was almost just one year.

WC: Oh, okay.

TF: Yes, I did. I stayed in at the hospital. I was fighting to get into a school. I took the aptitude tests, and I was put in the medics after 11 days, and I was always after them to get me to a school. Finally I found out that I hadn't gone to the firing range and I needed to do that before I got into the school. Nobody was

paying attention, I was lost in the medics. Even though I liked the job, now don't get me wrong. It was a good job, eight hours a day, five days a week.

WC: Oh, and weekends off.

TF: Yeah. Well, depending upon your schedule. You got two days off. And I finally got to a firing range and qualified, and then they forgot me again. I kept after them, "When are you going to send me to a school?" Just like I got lost over there. I got a lot of mail. They told me in the post office at the hospital I probably got more mail than anybody there, a worker there. Pretty soon they gave me a job there. They had a vacancy and I got in as a post employee.

WC: At the hospital?

TF: At the hospital, which was pretty big because it was a big hospital. Plus they brought in injured people to that hospital from the war. I can't think of what they call it now, but they would bring them in and look them over and help them out and then send them to a hospital, hopefully near their home, where they had to go whatever the trouble was with them. There was people coming in and out on these airplanes, Evacuation Avengers, that's what they called it, something like that. They flew into Kelly Air Force Base, which was nearby. They brought them up to Lackland and treated them until they could go to some other hospital.

TF: I don't know if they were just Air Force guys or, but as far as the postal work, there was a lot of postal work. When you've got people in the hospital, whether they're trainees or these people who were injured overseas, they get a lot of mail as you might realize. It's tough to keep track of them.

WC: Sure, I can imagine.

TF: But it was a very interesting job and I liked it very much.

WC: Now, what did you do on your time off?

TF: Well, I went downtown to San Antonio, which was a nice city. There's the Alamo there, there's nice parks, churches. There's the River Walk, which was off base to military personnel at the time. That was a really big tourist destination for people to go to the Riverwalk in San Antonio.

WC: Now, did you get a pair of cowboy boots there?

TF: No, I wasn't into that. I learned a little bit about Western music and stuff like that. I used to go up to New Braunfels, to a park up there. I used to go up to Austin to see college football games. I hitchhiked up. I don't know, maybe sixty miles or so on at least two occasions. I ate a lot of Mexican foods. Had some

friends that liked to eat Mexican food. We played a lot of games between barracks and pitched horseshoes. I kept pretty busy there.

WC: And then you got your orders for Korea in February of '52?

TF: First of all, our postal supervisor told us in about December of '51 that we had the wrong job numbers. The AFAC numbers, they call it in the Air Force, and they was going to change those. I don't know what the wrong one was or anything, what happened when I got notice to go overseas and I got over there, they had me down as a clerk typist. I went into the base overseas and they says, "You're our new clerk typist." That's when I found what my wrong AFAC number was.

WC: I take it you knew how to type from college?

TF: No, I didn't know how to type.

WC: Oh, you didn't?

TF: I didn't know anything about clerk typist. But that's the number they gave us at Lackland and they gave us the wrong number, which the officer admitted. I thought they got it changed. And when he told me that I was going overseas, I didn't say to him, "Under what number?" I just said, "I'm glad to get out of Texas and go in the Far East." That's where he said I was going. I was happy about the whole thing. I didn't realize that the number didn't get changed in time.

WC: Now, how did you get over to Korea?

TF: We went over on a ship out of California there. [Unclear 09:06], California.

WC: How long did the trip take?

TF: Well, it took a long time, probably 10 days I think.

WC: Oh, did it? Did you get seasick at all?

TF: Nope. I went to the railing a couple of times. And the problem was, was that we went north. We went from [Unclear 09:22] north to Seattle and picked up 2,000 Army guys. That's when you get sick, when you're on the shore. Then when they get on, they all got sick. I was just lucky that I didn't get sick.

WC: How was the food aboard ship?

TF: I thought it was pretty good. They fed us twice a day.

WC: Now, when you got to Korea, whereabouts did you land?

TF: Landed at Yokohama.

WC: Oh, in Japan first?

TF: Yeah. And they took a train down to Itazuke Air Force Base, which is near Fukuoka, Japan on the lowest main island. That was quite a trip, because it was an overnight trip. When it got to be evening, they just folded the seats into beds somehow. They gave us some sort of light mattress and we slept right where we were sitting during the daytime. We wondered where we're going to sleep that night.

TF: I got there and went in and they told me I was their new clerk typist. I said, "I can't type my own name in five minutes." They said, "Well, we don't need any postal employees here." This was a rear base for a fighting unit in Korea. They called Korea there, where their main base was, the main people and wondered if they had any jobs for me over there in the postal work or what. I think because I had a couple years of college, they took me and they asked me if I was interested in information education specialist. They explained it to me and it sounded good and I took it and loved it the rest of my career.

WC: What did that job entail?

TF: Two parts. One was the information. I used to go to meetings about what happened yesterday with all the planes. They were bombing North Korea. They told us what they wanted the troops to know and we got it out to the troops. Then also, we had a base newspaper there for information purposes, and each troop had to once a week go to an hour information hour. That's what it was all gated to, telling them what was going on. The newspaper helped an awful lot. The second part was the education part of it. We had the United States Armed Forces Institute correspondence courses that we administered. There, a guy took courses and then they would take their final exam in our office under... One of us had to watch, administer the exam.

WC: What was the name of the base you were on?

TF: Taegu, K-2, Taegu Air Force Base.

WC: And were there any flights in and out of there?

TF: We came from Itazuke over C-470s every day, two or three of them a day. Couriers, they'd call them.

WC: What major city were you near?

TF: Taegu.

WC: That was the name of the city?

TF: It was a pretty big city. It's a city that didn't get captured when the war started. They call it the Pusan Peninsula. Taegu was in the north part of it. I stayed with American until we got our troops together and everything and drove back on them. One of the other things with education is the GED test. The guys could take GED tests, that didn't finish high school. We used to give them a pretest, and if they needed further education, we taught courses at night, along with the correspondence courses to help them pass the GED test. Also, University of California conducted classes on our base all the time. There was always a college course going on. People could sign up for that, and if they were qualified they could join in. The government paid three quarters of the payment for it.

WC: Did you take any additional courses yourself?

TF: I took six hours of history while I was there. I was in the administration program, but I did squeeze in six hours there. I took two hours of Boston College later in my career.

WC: Now the instructors there with the college courses, were they people or civilian?

TF: No, they were civilians working for the University of California. They'd come in once a week for six weeks or so, three hours a night, and the next day and they'd go to some other base and teach maybe the same course. There was a history professor. He was teaching history all the time in Korea. Next time it might've been public speaking, was one of them. Physics was another one they taught.

WC: Where these classes pretty well attended?

TF: Yes, and a lot of people bit off a little bit too much, like physics.

WC: Oh, I can imagine.

TF: The failure rate wasn't too good, but history was pretty good. Everybody's interested in history. It was nice to enjoy. I enjoyed it very much. I used to make extra money administering GED tests and administering the correspondence course final exams. And I went to the movies every night, every time I'd get a chance. Used to have movies every night.

WC: Did you have much interaction with the civilian population at all?

TF: No, the only interaction we had is our secretary was a civilian. We called it our illustrator. In the INE office, we did a lot of advertising for our courses. He used to make pictures and place them all over the base. We had two wings there. Two Air Force wings with six... Each had three squadrons of F-84 fighter bombers. That's what we were there to support those. The war was sort of winding down then, and then the commanding officer was very adamant and getting people to do things like take courses. And anybody that wanted a suggested course, if we could find a teacher, we could arrange for it. We had courses in photography, English, mathematics, which I taught, social studies, cooking, everything. We found a cook who would teach a course. We arranged for the course and the guys had a great time.

WC: Now how much time did you actually spend in Korea?

TF: Just about one year.

WC: Okay, and when were you sent back to the States?

TF: It was about a year later. I got back here in just about February or March of '53.

WC: Okay. And what you got back, let's see, you got back in March of '53. Let's see, you were discharged December of '54. Where were you during the-

TF: We had a choice over in Korea halfway through, what sector we'd like to go into when we came back home. I been living in upstate New York. I saw the Mid-Atlantic States and New England states. I was assigned to the Air Force Cambridge Research Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They were building a base at Hanscom Field, which is near there. Well, it hadn't been built yet. When I got here, I was assigned to bunk in the YMCA in Cambridge. The first day I went into work they said, "Here's our new clerk typist." My ding, darn job number had followed me.

WC: Did you tell them you couldn't type?

TF: Yeah, I said I couldn't type. "What the heck's going on here?" He says. Mr. Finn was the civilian in charge of our department, and he squeezed me in as an INE specialist.

WC: Now what is INE?

TF: The same thing. Information, education-

WC: Oh, okay.

TF: Excuse me. He arranged for me to go to school for it. This is two years or so.

WC: You finally, got a school.

TF: I went to Fort Slocum, New York, which is a base in the Long Island Sound. We just had to go to New Rochelle and get a ferry boat to Fort Slocum. And you know who was there many years ago when he was a recruit? My father.

WC: Really?

TF: I got a picture of him that says 10' [1910] Tom Farnan, Fort Slocum, New York. I ended up in the same place.

WC: Wow. Now, how long was that school?

TF: It was six to eight weeks, something like that.

WC: You must have had a leg up on everyone being that you-

TF: I had. It was a great school, but I felt very confident there. It was nice.

WC: Okay. Once you completed that school, you went back to Cambridge?

TF: Yeah. And then eventually I went out to the new base, it was built. We went out, we were the first ones to locate out there, our office. We went to work in the parachutes shop. They gave us a corner of the parachute shop. First of all, they put us in a house that had just been vacated, because the government bought the house. And we around twelve guys in the house that usually has four or five, and we immediately overtaxed the sewer system. You can imagine. That was fun. I was at Hanscom Field. In the meantime, right after school I got married to my girlfriend back home.

WC: From back here?

TF: Back here, yeah. We moved to an apartment in Cambridge, New York or Massachusetts and had a great time in Boston.

WC: While you were in the service, did she get a job too?

TF: Nope. She worked, she went to business college and she didn't go to work over there. And then later, our first child was born there.

WC: While you were still in the service?

TF: Yeah, just before I got out of service. That girl was born in the Murphy Army General Hospital, which was one of the two military places that we could go for a doctor, medical purposes.

WC: Okay. And your job was basically, you were doing the same sort of work you were doing in Korea?

TF: Yes.

WC: Okay.

TF: I wanted to say, I had some funny experiences in the service. One was, I was marching in a parade on Patriots Day, downtown Boston one year. The head Sergeant turned me in because my uniform was too tight. Here it is, April, I get out of the service in December. I went to the Sergeant major, whoever it was and he says, "Well you you'll get out."

TF: I said, "I'll lose weight if I can, but I don't even wear this class A uniform hardly. We wear it in parades, that's all." He let me off. It was funny. Then lo and behold, in October I went up for promotion and he says, "Well, you're getting out in December, aren't you?"

TF: And I says, "Well, not if I get promoted." My wife and I have been thinking about maybe staying in because you can take your family with you a lot of the time if you're staff Sergeant. I got to staff Sergeant job and then I had to make up my mind whether to get out of the service or not. We decided to get out of the service.

WC: I would imagine the Air Force was disappointed you didn't reenlist.

TF: I don't know. To tell you the truth, the Sergeant major during World War II, one of his jobs was guarding the Iron Bridge in Mechanicville.

WC: Oh, you're kidding.

TF: That was just such a coincidence. Maybe that helped me getting what he gave me. He was nice to me. I can remember going by at the school bus and the troops were up on their bridge marching during World War II. That was a key bridge.

WC: They had to guard that against sabotage?

TF: Yeah, they were stationed in the Army base in Schenectady, which was for supplies. A Depot, they called it. They brought them over there every day. They had a building to keep warm, and they marched across the bridge, back and forth, twenty-four hours a day.

WC: Well, you probably don't know, did they have to stop the cars or the school buses to cross?

TF: No, this was a bridge. It crossed the river and also crossed the highway. We used to try to go under them. In the cold weather, jeez those poor guys were out there, 20 below zero that we used to have. That was a good duty for him because he wasn't over there getting shot at. But the B&M Railroad was big and Mechanicville had large railroad yards. The B&N came over and went back all the time, bringing supplies. [Unclear 24:17] had a depot.

WC: Oh, I see, okay.

TF: Rotterdam had a big depot. Very important link in their system.

WC: That makes sense.

TF: But that's kind of a sided thing, but it was interesting. We came back and I finished college, outside of the GI bill, of course, out. We even got extra money because we were married and then a family. We had an apartment in Stillwater New York. We were in our hometown. I worked a number of jobs while I was trying to finish college. At the college I worked two or three jobs and my father used to get me on the farm.

WC: Now what year did you end up graduating?

TF: 1956, I graduated. A BS in physics.

WC: And you mentioned you went to work for Niagara Mohawk?

TF: Yeah, I got a chance to teach in Schuylerville. I got a chance to work in the paper company in Mechanicville, GE [General Electric], but I took the power company job.

WC: It was probably a good choice.

TF: Well, I don't know. Better than teaching, but my father was working with the power company. He was a machinist in North Albany. I went on a training program. People, they grabbed people up from the ranks and also from the colleges. I went on a three-year training program if you can believe that. But the three years, a lot of it was taking people's place when they were on vacation. But you can learn to work. Then I ended up getting my regular job up in Gloversville. I didn't even know where Gloversville was.

WC: Oh sure, sure. Now what did you do up in Gloversville?

TF: I was a journeyman line foreman. I was in charge of a bunch of linemen crews. Had to set up there jobs for them, visit their jobs and stuff like that. I was there just a year, because they told me I'd be there about a year. Then I went to

[unclear 26:39] for four years as the superintendent of the electric lines. [unclear 26:39] was a very nice place to work.

WC: Yup, college town.

TF: And I was there four years, then I went back to Gloversville as superintendent of the electric operations up there and stayed there twenty years. Eventually I ended up in Syracuse for about six years and retired from out there.

WC: Okay. What year did you retire?

TF: In '90. [1990]

WC: '90, okay.

TF: I've been retired twenty-five or twenty-six years.

WC: Nice. I did want to ask you, I kind of forgot, when you were in the service, did you, especially over in Korea, did you get to see any USO shows or anything like that?

TF: Yes, people I remember seeing was Eddie Fisher, Cardinal Spellman and Rory Calhoun are the ones I remember seeing. I even told Eddie Fisher, here's the closest I ever got to Elizabeth Taylor in my life.

WC: What did he say to that?

TF: He laughed. Then Cardinal Spellman come over in a cold, cold, cold day. And what they did is they cleared a place out in the airport where they brought planes inside, run a bunch of heaters and brought us all in there standing up. We were freezing. Of course when he went to the talk, they had to shut off the heaters. You wouldn't hear him. But it was interesting. I had a lot of fun over there, but I did have some problems that are worth mentioning, I think here, is that I was trying to get movies downtown to inform the troops. There's all kinds of movies, military movies you could get at this place, the Army place.

TF: One was Hill Number One, was the name of the movie. I thought that it probably had to do with the hills in Korea. There was Hill number this. I brought the movie out to show the troops and it turned out, I didn't review it, but I went to the first showing. It was about Calvary, which was a religious movie. You know what happened, don't you? By the time I got back to the office, I got you the head chaplain in Korea had called and said, "What are you doing showing religious movies to the troops? You shouldn't do this."

WC: Oh really?

TF: Well, you shouldn't show a Catholic movie to the troops. I told them that I made a mistake and I didn't review it and it would never happen again. That's the last I heard of it. Another thing, we got a base newspaper there. They had a contest to name the base newspaper. Everybody in the base gets to submit as many names as they wanted to name this base newspaper. I sent in twenty names myself. The idea was the top two names that the committee, the NCO committee, would go to the commander and he'd pick one of them to be the... One of the two names he sent to them was mine, but he didn't like either one of them, which is the Army way. He picked another name and the guy who won the contest would get a free R&R to Japan. But we had 261 names submitted. You can imagine the names over there. The Rice Paddy Gazette. The Kimchi Courier. It was terrible. There were good names too, profile names, but there were funny names.

TF: And one time, another incident, I took an R&R to Japan. Was on the Japanese Sea for three or four days and I flew back. When I went back to fly back, Eisenhower was coming over, right after he got elected president, to make a visit to Korea. No planes could go in the air while Eisenhower was in the air. I sat around, ten o'clock at night I says, and "Can't you get me a room here and let me go back tomorrow?"

TF: "No, there's a plane going out of here tonight at 11 o'clock." It was raining and windy. I got on one of these C-46s, which I didn't like very much. I got bad news about them. I had to fly back in that. They wouldn't put me up. But it was interesting having Eisenhower over there and everything, and me affected.

TF: Then other time, I went to Tokyo to an R&R where my first cousin was a big head chef. She took care of me very nicely in Tokyo.

WC: Now, was she military too?

TF: She was US Air Force. I had a lot of nice incidents. My career was a little bit topsy turvy with the job, number of business and stuff, and getting stuck with the medics after 11 days of basics. But it ended up, it started doing better when I got over to Korea, and then the last two years were very nice.

WC: Now, how do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

TF: Well, while I was over there, I taught courses for one thing. I decided I might want to be a teacher when I came back. Part of my last two years or a year and a half at CN, I took some education courses. But then when I had a chance to teach, I didn't do it because I liked the power company job better. I think it settled me down. I know it did, because when I went back to Sienna after being in the

service, I got all great marks. I was married with a child and settled down. My marks went from Cs to As and Bs.

WC: Now did you stay in contact with anyone you were in the service with?

TF: One. One guy I did, very close contact. He was the guy I knew in Cambridge. He lived locally and he used to have a basketball team and a softball team and I played on both of them. We played college basketball and we won our base championship in softball. We corresponded every Christmas. Two years ago I went to visit him after sixty-some years. He lives in Cape Cod, and a great time. You can imagine that.

WC: Did he look same, or totally different.

TF: He looked the same. I don't know I looked. We tried one thing that I wish that I didn't try while we there. We went to visit an air show and they had a B-17. I decided to walk through it. That was very hard because I'm so big. I scraped my legs and everything. It was terrible. We almost had to crawl through it. I said, "I don't know how I'm going to go any further."

TF: He says, "Well, you got to. You got to get out of this thing." Fortunately, another guy who was having trouble behind me, so nobody was pushing us. Then I tried to get down the ladder off to B-17, that was... Somebody had to almost catch me. I'm not going to try that again.

WC: Yeah. Did you join any veteran's organizations like the VFW?

TF: I've gone to the Korean War Veterans Organization here locally, which is a very active organization. We have meetings once a week, month. We have lunches once a month. We parade. I now ride. I don't march anyone. They're very active in the community. They go around to schools explaining the Korean War to them.

WC: Okay. Now in closing, is there anything we missed that you'd like to touch on or add to the interview?

TF: I guess I covered most of it. I just don't know why, when I got in Texas, the medics, they couldn't straighten me and send me to a school, but I don't think I tried hard enough, because I enjoyed the job I was doing. It was hard, but I never thought they'd send me any anywhere without a school. They sent me to the Far East and then everything ended up pretty good once I got there.

WC: All right. Well thank you so much for your interview.

TF: Okay.