

**Frank Charles Fendt
Veteran**

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Interviewers**

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Buffalo, NY**

Q: Could you give me your full name?

FCF: Frank Charles Fendt

Q: Where and when were you born?

FCF: Buffalo, NY. . . September 14, 1933

Q: What was your educational background prior to entering service?

FCF: Prior to the service I had 8 years of school. . . I did the rest in service

Q: You went in the service in 1950. Did you enlist or were you drafted?

FCF: No, I enlisted. . . I ran away from home.

Q: How old were you then? Did you have to have your parents sign for you?

FCF: 17, yes, my parents were separated but I looked up my father and got him to sign before everybody blew up and then my mother finally gave in.

Q: Why did decide to enlist?

FCF: Oh, I liked the idea right from the beginning of going in the Army. . . I was raised in a boy's home and fighting was terrible. I figured I wanted something that was going to make a man out of me and it did.

Q: Why did you pick the army?

FCF: I figured that would be the roughest challenge for me.

Q: Where did you go for your basic Training?

FCF: Cape Cod . . . Camp Edwards connected to the Air Force Base and the town, believe it or not was called Buzzards Bay

Q: What kind of training did you do there, just the very basic?

FCF: I was some kind of gung ho.. I took my regular training and then in the off hours, I would take it on my own because I wanted to be the best I could be.

Q: How long were you there?

FCF: I can't say off hand but I know we went to Watertown for training for a little a while and then I went to school to teach CBR warfare. . . Chemical Radiological Warfare. I took a class on that in New Jersey and then came back and taught then we shipped out and went to Korea.

Q: Now you ended up in a Nanny Aircraft Unit. Where did you train for that?

FCF: Right in Cape Cod. . . we used to fight over the ocean.

Q: What kind of guns did you train on?

FCF: 40 millimeter [unclear] , I was on a machine gun called the 55's. There was 4 guns on a [unclear].

Q: Did you go to Korea as a unit?

FCF: Well.. a lot of them for some reason, they transferred out.. in fact a good part of them.. so.. I'd say there was less than half.

Q: How did you cross the country? By train?

FCF: Yes

Q: You took a ship out of where? California?

FCF: We went to NY, we came back around South America - for some reason they wanted to pick up Columbians and different troops and then we headed back up to California and then crossed over. So we went through a canal.

Q: Did you go directly to Korea or did you stop in between?

FCF: We stopped in Hawaii, we stopped in Japan and then to Korea.

Q: When did you arrive in Korea, do you remember?

FCF: Not off hand, no. . . the thought of it was kind of terrifying.

Q: Why was that?

FCF: I remember we got there and we went into the laden craft and went to the beach and I said somebody lost a duffle bag. . . and I was so scared I didn't even know it was mine . After a while the feeling passed.

Q: Did you go up in the front lines?

FCF: Yes, I was up in a forward observer post

Q: Now did you come under fire often?

FCF: Not that often, no. . .[knock on table] we were fortunate

Q: When was the first time you were under fire, do you remember?

FCF: It was right after we got to the outpost, I remember that.

Q: How did you feel when that happened?

FCF: Actually I guess you get like a little kid. I was crying. I wished I was back home, but then you brush it off.

In fact I think the biggest shock I ever had in Korea, I mentioned before was when we were going onto the train in the front lines, I got kind of into a “to do” with the people with me because we were eating sea rations with the can opener and they were throwing the cans out of the window and the little kids were cutting their mouth and I blew my cork and I guess that’s what got me to pick up the language and I became an interpreter.

Q: Oh, did you ever have training before you went over?

FCF: No...They threatened me if I kept giving my food away and these kids were [unclear] it’s a hard thing to get over when you first see that.. remember, I was raised in a boys home and was sheltered and to see these kids starving. I think that was the roughest thing for me.

Q: How did they use you as an interpreter?

FCF: I used to go to work and go home at night. . . My day would start in the morning - I would go to work and sit in the village and talk to people and come back and tell them everything I heard. I picked up Korean and a little bit of Japanese. . . not German, I could never learn to speak German.

Q: Can you talk about some of your experiences when you were up in the front lines?

Q: Did you live in Bunkers?

FCF: We lived in a tent and I guess we got a little goofy. Once you are there a while you play silly games. We had a tent down here and a radio way up. Pull the pin on the hand grenade until you hear it come. We didn’t think anything of it, but after we got back we did. [unclear] The thing that bothered me the most .. we had land mines around our site and some girl was walking over them and blew her leg off and that bothered me for the longest time. I guess I got so friendly that it almost was like a family thing.

Q: You became very close to some Korean people?

FCF: Oh yes. Being raised in a boy’s home, I wasn’t raised with my mother and father. When you go down to the village you have a mother a father a family instantly and to me, that was great.

It’s a hard thing to get back in the swing of life. I still have night time flashbacks but luckily not too often. It is hard to adapt to being peaceful.

Q: How did your equipment work, your radios, were they pretty reliable?

FCF: Oh my gosh. Yes. I had a pet duck. That was one of the funniest. . .We had a fire barrel outside of each tent you put water in because tents were flammable. . .I had a pet duck and when they told we were moving up to the front, I couldn’t take my duck with me. We had what they call houseboys that take care of the tent. I said to take the duck home and I don’t want to know what you’re going to do with it but bring me back a piece of duck. The word for duck is “otey” and I said to bring me back a piece of the ducks leg.

He took the duck home and brought me back a piece of the animal a few days later. I was eating it thinking it was sweet and I said “is this otey” and he said “yes, Lotey”. . . Well, Lotey is dog. . That is a delicacy over there..dog. I was eating a poor dog’s leg.

Q: What kind of weapon did you carry over there?

FCF: Just my carbine, I had a side arm but I had it sent home [unclear]. . . then we had the grease gun. I don't remember what it really is now but we called it a grease gun.

Q: Did you get to see any USO shows when you were over there?

FCF: No, once I heard Josen [unclear] was over there and I didn't make it. There were a few others but I don't remember who they were.

Q: Did you ever get wounded or have illnesses when you were there?

FCF: I guess you get the Asian flu in fact I was the first one on the record to bring it back in the country they said. . . the Asiatic flu. It probably is written out somewhere. There were three of us who had it.

Q: Your wife said you lost part of your hearing over there?

FCF: Oh, yah that's because were stationed right next to an air base with jets taking off, but I never did anything about it.

Q: You never applied for compensation through the VA?

FCF: They gave me a hearing aid but I don't like it.

Q: What were the men in your unit like - especially your officers? What were they like?

FCF: Very cold and uncaring I thought. I shouldn't say but they could run over a Korean as well as look at them. I couldn't be that way. Maybe because I was raised by nuns

Q: Were there any people that served with you that you remember more than others?

FCF: Yes, a fellow named Ray Thunderbird from South Carolina I think it was. God he was a . . . marksman. I guess because he was a Southerner, he used to go hunting a lot. He was really good. Don Stasio..he just died not too long ago. He joined up with me and the guy that makes Petries cookies in Silver Creek – Ron Petrie and Mattie Kanter.. he joined up and Don Stasio just died recently. He was really close. It was like losing my own brother.

Q: So all four of you joined together?

FCF: Yes, we joined in Buffalo and took the train in together. . . stayed pretty much together the whole time but Don and I were never apart.

Q: So they put you all in the same unit together.

FCF: Yes - Mattie was a cook. Petrie was a baker. Don was a mechanic and I was an interpreter.

Q: Everybody survived and came back together?

FCF: Petrie lost an eye. I forget which eye

Q: What happened?

FCF: From what they said [unclear]

Q: How long were you in Korea?

A: 2 years. In fact my kids can sing some Korean and speak some Korean.

Q: Did the army use you as an interpreter or just on your own?

FCF: Just on my own. If I wanted to get the designation I would have had to go to Quantico, Virginia and I'd have to also take another [unclear]

Q: What were the winters like there?

FCF: I never saw such cold in my life. I got frost bite. We had summer boots through the first winter and summer sleeping bags and I didn't know they had winter stuff until I met a guy from the Air Force and he told me about Mickey Mouse boots and finally we raised hell and they gave them to us and winter sleeping bags. Even now, it gets cold and it makes me feel really unsteady. My wife hollers when I turn the heat up to 90.

Q: Do you get flashbacks when it gets cold?

FCF: Yes I think it makes a connection. I never connected it too 'cause I can be under an electric blanket but get out and cold and then get a flashback.

Q: Did you ever live in the bunkers or always in tents?

FCF: The closest would be fox[unclear].. It was funny.. I used to be on the gate for a while. They had mounds that they bury the dead in. After a certain time, I'm not sure if they burn them or bury them somewhere else but for some reason they move them. [unclear] We check in everybody at the gate. . . someone came with a big rattan basket and folded up and we were checking everybody. I said "open the bags" and there was a corpse in there and I said "shut the bag". I guess they bury them near their house or ashes. . . There was a lot to laugh about there . . . a lot to cry about but a lot to laugh about.

Q: Do you have any other instances that stand out?

FCF: Just they couldn't understand why. . . my commander would say to put on Korean clothes. I look about as much as a Korean as nothing.. so I wore whatever clothes I wanted. But they accepted that I was part of the village. I don't know if they ever got anything out of it. I used to turn in reports every day though.

Q: When did you leave Korea?

FCF: Probably just about at time of my discharge.

Q: When was your discharge?

FCF: '54. Then for a while we worked with the Turk and then we worked with a Russian compound. For being raised in a sheltered home by nuns I really did a hurry-up job and got the needle on people and wouldn't trade it for anything.

Q: After you were discharged, did you ever use the GI bill?

FCF: No, I didn't use the housing thing. In fact I never even went to the Vets hospital for the longest time. Finally she [my wife] told me to so now I go to vets.

Q: Did you ever finish your education?

FCF: Yes, I got my four years of high school twice. I took it once in the [unclear] and then I decided I wanted to take it again. And that I ended up with a year's credit of college. To me it

was the most beneficial thing. But my son went in and he didn't appreciate it. He didn't like it at all. I guess the policy now is if you don't like it, get out. That's too bad.

Q: Did you join any Veterans organizations at all?

FCF: None of us four that were in it felt comfortable because we figured it was done.

Q: Did all four of you stay close friends?

FCF: Yes -Petrie finally ended up in California. I don't know he's still alive. Ray is still here in Buffalo and Don just died.

Q: Did you stay in contact with anyone else in service with you?

FCF: No, just the 4 of us. We had a reunion but it was disheartening. Lots of the ones were there were the people that dropped out. Most of the guys at the reunion didn't go to Korea but they played around saying they were a soldier.

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

FCF: Well at the time I met her (his wife), I was going to try and get married to a girl in Korea but I came back and within the first month of coming back my mother said you see that tavern over there, never go in there, there's all kind of bad women in there. Well I would have never met her (his wife). The priest that married us said I'm not marrying you two, you are too hot tempered. But then he went and married a nun. (FF wife said: we've been married 48 years and got married by a justice of the peace. The priest ripped up our paper our paper and said that doesn't count)

Once in a while I used to do magic in Korea. So I do that once in a while. . . entertain the kids.

Q: Did you ever entertain the soldiers with your magic?

FCF: Only after I got out. We were both President of the Society of American Magicians. We did a show for the Vets hospital. We do a lot of events but I'm the only sword swallower.

Q: Do you actually swallow a sword or is it a trick sword?

FCF: Yes, I actually have fun once in while when I had to have my stomach examined and they have a camera on a tube and I told the Dr. 'no needles in the neck.' So I took the tube and put it down my throat and got to look in my own stomach. The other Dr. came in and said "do you know what he did?" And the other Dr. said "oh yes, he's the sword swallower."

Q: How did you learn how to swallow a sword?

A: Believe it or not I read a book. I used to practice over the bathroom sink. I took a coat hanger and all of a sudden I woke up when night and said "I did it." Each time it got easier. The only thing is I think I ruined my sphincter muscle because now I have reflux. Hazards of the trade.