

Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

AN INTERVIEW WITH EARL ROBISHAW

INTERVIEWED BY

KEITH LUDDEN

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CUSHING, MAINE

TRANSCRIBER

MEGHAN COCIU

Reviewed by Keith Ludden

Keith Ludden: It's April 18 [2010] and we are in Cushing, Maine. I'm interviewing Earl Robishaw. My name is Keith Ludden, and Mr. Robishaw you were a veteran in both the Korean and Vietnam wars, isn't that right?

Earl Robishaw: Yes.

KL: Okay great.

ER: I was a "lifer", what you call a "lifer". [laughter]

KL: You were a "lifer", okay. I'd like to start, you know, just talking a little bit about...

ER: I'm going to talk about my whole experience. Okay? From day one right on up until I reach Korea. Okay?

KL: Great. That's exactly what I was going to suggest.

ER: I'm going to start right now.

KL: Tell me a little bit about how you grew up.

ER: Well I grew up in this community, but not here, in Rockland; I attended all the Rockland schools. I'll start off.

KL: Okay.

ER: My name is Earl James Robishaw, United States Army, Infantry, retired. My father served in WWI. I had three older brothers that served in WWII, and on February the tenth, nineteen-fifty-one, I was in high school at the time, I left high school, and I says, "About my time to go to Korea." I wanted to serve in Korea.

KL: So this was a choice for you.

ER: Hmmm?

KL: This was a choice for you.

ER: I didn't get hit in the draft because I joined, see. Well anyway, I went down and saw the Army recruiter, but first I saw the Air Force and Navy but they had a six-month waiting period because everybody tried to avoid the draft and joined these two units, see. Well, they told me, "Try the Army." I went down and saw the Army recruiter and he says, "You're going to have to have your parent's signature because you're only seventeen-years-old." Well, my mother lived

in Westbrook with my father at the time because that's where he worked Blue Rock Quarry, and I got my oldest brother to sign, because there's eleven from my family, so I don't think my mother wouldn't mind at all, you know. So I got my birth certificate and showed it to the recruiter, why I just turned seventeen. He says, "Okay," he says, "I want you to fill out this paperwork." I looked at it and [thought], "Okay." Said a spot for males and a spot for females, I done the whole thing, even the female; I was so anxious to get started, see. Well, I had to do that all over again.

KL: I'm going to stop for just a moment.

[BREAK to turn off the marine radio]

KL: Thank-you. So you were anxious to go see the recruiter.

ER: Yes, yes, yes. But I tell you the first of it, oh I didn't tell it to too many people. I left high school; I went down the hallway, and I snuck underneath the principal's door, and right on out the front door; I went downtown. So, like I say, I saw the Army recruiter; I had to do the paperwork all over again, I messed it up. So, he says, "Got to have your mother's signature, or your father." But they wasn't there, so I got my oldest brother. He said, "Well what we're going to have to do tomorrow," he says, "We're going to bus you to South Portland; take a physical examination." So I had to have the physical examination. So there was four others that went with me, the Allen boys, three others, the Allen boys and Eugene Preston; they went with me for the physicals, and we all passed, and then from there we was on our way to Fort Devens, Massachusetts for basic training. So I took six weeks of basic training; you know you get familiar with all of the weapons they have in the infantry and all different, the ranks, they learn the ranks of the officers and enlisted men; I spent six weeks [of] basic training at Fort Devens; after I left, after I completed that I was moved over to another billet because they were going to assign me to mortars.

KL: Mortars?

ER: Mortars.

KL: Okay.

ER: M-O-R-T-A-R, mortars, S. I learned the sixty, the eighty-one, and the four-point-two, this one right there. We had training there for about two weeks, and then from there they shipped us to Pine Camp, New York, which today it's called Fort Drum, for extensive mortar training, with the M2 mortar; that's an old mortar, a WWII type, and we done tearing it down, digging the gun position, everything that we're going to do in Korea, see. Well, after I completed that, why the company commander his name was Cecil B. Smith, he's from the Tennessee National Guard, that's who gave us basic training, the Tennessee National Guard, they used to call us Yankees you know. [laughter] Okay, that was alright. After we completed the training up there we had a

formation and the company commander came out and he said, "Look," he says, "We need volunteers for Korea. Put your hands up." Now, nobody put their hands up; they didn't want to volunteer, but I said to my buddy on the left, one of the Allen boys, to my right, left, I says, "You want to go?" "Yeah, yeah, we'll go." So the company commander says, "Come in the orderly room and we'll start your paperwork of clearing post, and getting you shipped out." See. So he says to me right off, he says, "You want to go to Korea? You're awfully young aren't you?" "I'm seventeen-years-old." "Oh, well, okay. Alright." So we filled out the necessary paperwork and we left post. We was on a fourteen-day leave. After the fourteen days was up, I went to Portland and caught a plane to Chicago, and from Chicago we was put on a, I forget, United Airlines there's a four engine prop to Seattle, Washington, so we got on the plane and we left for Seattle, and somewheres over the middle of the United States it was all cloudy, really heavy clouds, and as I was looking out the window, I could see this dark spot up ahead, and as I got closer, and closer, I can't believe this, there was a man rowing a boat on top of the clouds, believe it or not, that's what I saw. I didn't tell nobody because I didn't want that plane [to] turn around and take me back home, and as I was passing it, the individual stood up in the boat and waved to me, and [of] course we went right by it, and I said to myself, I said, "That must be my Guardian Angel going over with me." Well, he's got a long way to row going across that Pacific you know. Well anyway, we got to Seattle, then they trucked us up to Fort Lawton and we received some orientations and we were issued additional clothing, they said I would fly over because my M.O.S. was critical because the platoon got wiped out; just about the whole company got wiped out by Chinese, that was in the fifties, see. So, finally they said, "You're going to go by boat." Now I can't remember the boat, the name of the ship, I think it was a Breckenridge<sup>1</sup>, I think, I could be wrong. Well, we left for Korea, and we stopped off in Hawaii, took on some additional troops, and we stopped off in Okinawa, and then the next place was Yokohama, Japan. Yokohama, Japan we off-loaded the ship and got on a troop train and they took us to Camp Drake, Tokyo; and Camp Drake Tokyo was were they issued us an M1 and then more additional clothing.

KL: An M1 is a rifle, right?

ER: The M1 is a rifle; that was my main rifle, the M1. When we was issued the weapon we went down to a cleaning area which had a lot of (inaudible) that weapon, and we used cleaning material to clean it all off and everything see, get it spotless, and then after we done that, why, we went out to the rifle range and zeroed the weapon; after that we went back to the barracks and we had supper, and they had another formation, they said, "Well I'm going to call out a bunch of names," he said, "and I want you to tie a white towel on the end of your bunk, because you're going to be leaving early in the morning." Okay, I done that. Of course along about three o'clock in the morning I get a tap on the shoulder, "Let's go bag and baggage outside." We went outside, [of] course, we had a little breakfast first, but not much, and we loaded up on a troop train and we left for Sasebo, Japan. That was a, just about a two day train ride. After we landed in Sasebo I see this great big field and I say, "Boy look at the troops out there heading for Korea,

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<sup>1</sup>Perhaps the U.S.S. General J. C. Breckenridge, commissioned June 30, 1945.

there's a lot of them going." So they put us on a Japanese, we call it a "luxury liner", we slept on a straw mat overnight because it was an overnight trip from Sasebo to Pusan, Korea, see.

KL: I'm going to back you up for just a moment. I think you said something about "zeroed weapon", what do you mean when you said you "zeroed the weapon"?

ER: Get the sight fixed and everything, you know.

KL: Okay.

ER: Well, after we done that, after we reached Sasebo we went to this big field, marched over to this big field and put our equipment down; they said we could use this little PX, but there wasn't much in it, so we bought toilet articles, and shaving blades, and shaving cream, and after that, why, that evening we went down and loaded up on that Japanese ship, and it was an overnight ride to Pusan. As we was arriving towards Pusan the fellas were saying, "Well, that's Korea right there." As we got closer, why, I noticed that the people were walking along side the hill and carrying stuff on their heads; I've never seen that before, see, but that's what the Orientals do, I don't know if they do it today or not, but they did back in them days. So after we landed in Pusan we went to a replacement depot to get assigned to a unit and I went to the Second Chemical Mortar Battalion. After that we was issued some winter clothing, but we still never had no winter boots; we still had our regular combat boots, and back in them days there the ones with the buckles on the side, and it was a brown, rough leather.

KL: What was your rank at this time?

ER: I was a PFC.

KL: Okay.

ER: So we loaded up on a troop train and started heading north, and the train went so slow, and as I was looking out the window I could see these trucks burnt out, these tanks burnt out, "Hey this must be it." You know? [laughter] So we continued on; the train stopped, and "The people assigned to the Second Chemical Mortar Battalion, there's a truck out here waiting on you." So, we went over to the truck and got on back, you know, and they drove us up to Battalion Rear, and Battalion Rear was where they assigned us to a company in the Second Battalion Mortar Platoon. So anyway, as I went up to B company, they signed me to B company, and as I got up to B company I went in and reported to the Lieutenant who was a company commander, and I looked and I said, "Gee, he's Oriental. I can't figure this out. Why isn't he American." He was American, he was a Japanese American, you know. Well, he saw my orders where I've had extensive mortar training and he says, "But I can't send you up on the front." "Why?" "Because you're not quite what I'm looking for." I think he was looking for some Lieutenant FO's, you know...

KL: Some Lieutenant what? I'm sorry.

ER: FO's, forward observers, you know. I says, "Well I'm here; I've had the training." I says, "I'm ready to go up on the front." He finally says, "Okay, but you're going to have to sign this paper." So I signed the paper, my signature, and there was a jeep outside took me up to the First Platoon B Company and I was assigned to the second squad. This is over behind White Horse Hill, that's where I first started my service over there. The first night that I was there they said I was going up on the hill and be lookout for the night, that's what they do to newcomers you know; the rest of them go to sleep. Well I went up there, and [of] course I had a landline communications with the CP tent, and along about midnight I was up beside a graveyard too, there's a graveyard up on that hill, and I kept looking down [at] the graveyard and I swore I saw people moving behind them stones and that made me nervous, and I had my M1, fully loaded, ready to go, and I thought back to when I took basic training, never, never, eyeball straight ahead to a certain object, because your eyes will play tricks on you; look to the left or look to the right of it, see. So that's what I did and I didn't have no more problem. But there was a big Buddha, oh a big heavy-set Buddha sitting there looking down at me, you know where I was at, that kind of made me nervous too. Well the next morning I went down off the hill and took the landline with me and we had some fire missions, and I got to know the ropes and everything. So they assigned me as a jeep driver when I started out. They told me take the jeep down to this river and clean it up a bit because it's all muddy and everything, so I done that and came back, and the next day, I don't know what I did; I hit the side of the mortar and broke my glasses, and I only had one pair of glasses, and it's the type like this, you know, and I broke it. So the next day they sent me by ambulance back to a M.A.S.H unit, and they fixed a couple pair of glasses for me, right then and there. Then on the way back we stopped at this intersection, there's a road going off this way, one to the left, one to the right, and the ambulance driver says, "Do you think you know your way back now? If I let you off?" [Of] course, knowing me I say, "Yeah, I do." Because I could remember riding in back, it was a closed ambulance, but going around turns and stuff like that, so this road off to the right I said, "That's it right there." So I dismounted and I started walking to the road to the right. I walked and I walked; I went around the hills and everything you know, and then all of a sudden I came on a military police check point, and as I was walking by, "Soldier! Where are you going?" "Going back to my unit." "Well we're going to leave here because them are Chinese troops right up ahead." I said, "Oooh, that's not it. That's not it." [laughter] He says, "You come with me." So I jumped in back of the jeep and we all took off the other way, see. He asked me, "What company are you with?" I says, "Second Chemical Mortar Battalion, First Platoon, B Company." One of the MP's says, "I think I know where it's at." So they went back down to that intersection and then they went up the road this way, see. That's when I should have walked up that road, but I didn't. So, he took me right on up to the area where I belong, and they all said, "Where you been? We were looking for you and everything." You know. [laughter] I didn't tell them that I could have been captured by the Chinese, you know. It'd been an easy capture for them. So we stayed in that area and fired missions over White Horse Hill and then all of a sudden the word came down and they said, "CSMO." That's "Close Station March Orders" see, in military term, but we call it "CSMO",

same thing. That means, “load your equipment, we’re going to move out. We’re going to another area.” The areas that we supported...

KL: What was it? White Cross Hill?

ER: White Horse.

KL: White Horse.

ER: White Horse Hill.

KL: Okay. Horse you would ride. Okay.

ER: We left White Horse Hill and, we mainly went up in the Punchbowl area. The Punchbowl area I’ll show you this, It’s quite an area; you can see it right here; this is the Punchbowl area, this is it right here, see. It’s a big valley. [Of] course the Chinese is over here, and this is our side.

KL: Where is this near?

ER: Near?

KL: Yes.

ER: Well, you’ve got places like Bloody Ridge, Snipers Ridge, and Heartbreak Ridge, and Heartbreak Ridge is where I got hit in the back, but it’s a funny thing, when we went to that area we had the whole battalion on the side of the hill because the Chinese was trying to probe for a weak spot so they could attack, see; but we had the whole battalion set up behind Heartbreak Ridge and of course each platoon, each company had twelve mortars, you know, and you take three companies set up, side-by-side, you know, thirty-five meters apart, and you’ve got quite a few mortars there; you’ve got what, thirty-six mortars, and so each gun prepared a hundred rounds, and we broke up the Chinese attack; they had to fall back because we just tore them all to pieces. We fired eighteen, we fired WP.

KL: Now, about what date was this?

ER: That was in the summertime, because when we left Heartbreak Ridge we went over to [Tekton] pass, which was on the sea of Japan.

KL: This was what, 1950?

ER: Oh that was about in ‘52.

KL: '52?

ER: '52 and we went around this big pass, you know, and down in another valley, and [of] course we had smoke generators down there, and smoked the whole area up, so the Chinese couldn't see who's going through that area, see. So, we went up to this other area, and we set up there, and we stayed there about three months, because it was cold, and the Chinese don't like the cold either so they leave us alone in the firing, see. What we done was, you can see in the pictures, we built new bunkers and we built new gun emplacements; we built double seat toilet, all covered and everything, way back in the rear, and we had quite a time now. First of all, let's talk about, people has asked me, "How do you stay clean?" Well, we had to shave every morning. I had a steel pot, helmet, and you take that liner out, that's what you use, you fill it up with water and that's what you use to clean up with, see. You get a little rag and wipe your body down and everything, shave and it's good, because the Lieutenant we had at the time was, his name was Marvin Dawson, Lieutenant Marvin Dawson, First Lieutenant; he would check us, and so we would clean the jeeps up and everything, then fire missions would come in; when they started coming in, when they started coming in you could hear the 120 mortar that the Chinese had because it had fins on it, see, on the round; you could hear it whistling coming in. [Of] course the four-point-two, the Chinese used to call it, "Whispering Death," because it had (inaudible) and grooves inside the barrel, you know, so when you drop that round it would spin going out, that's what kept it in flight, see. And so, we stayed there quite a while and this one particular, I believe it was in July the fourth of 1952, we received the new mortars, the M30, and the M30 we didn't know too much about it, but they did send people over see, there it is. This weapon weighed six-hundred-and-fifty-four pounds.

KL: Wow. You had to move that around?

ER: (Inaudible) We break it down into section. This here, this is the tripod, and this is the, well the standard,, this is the barrel, this is the bridge, you got the base ring, and the base plate. Now, it takes a five man squad to run this thing. Oh well, you could do it with three men if you had to, but we got some extra men in because they broke up a colored unit, and we got about seven or eight colored people in our platoon, which was great, you know. And this one guy I had in the squad here, he had great big hands, (inaudible) about like that with one hand, could put his hand right around a round, you know, and touch his fingers, he had such big hands, colored boy, but nice fella. We got the new mortar in and that time I went on R and R to Japan so I didn't do much training on it; I got pictures of it in here. So we spent a week in a place called, just above Sasebo, where it was. I can't remember the name now, but we spent a week there, and [of] course I took a lot of pictures; I had this Brownie box camera, and it took six-twenty film, you know, that was the nomenclature of it; I took a lot of pictures that's where these come from, see. So you can look at them if you want to. So, when I returned back from R and R I was given a position of squad leader.

KL: Squad leader?

ER: Yeah. [Of] course prior to that I worked my way up from jeep driver, to ammo bearer, assistant gunner, gunner, and then squad leader, but I was real fast on both guns, I could set them up real fast like, get the aiming stakes out back, you know, that you had to set up, and the deflection, and the elevation, and everything. This gun here would fire about six-thousand meters; that's over a mile. The other one would only fire about four-thousand, so we had two more, and we caught the Chinese set up in different places, they couldn't figure out how the hell our mortars were hitting them; they didn't know we had the new one at the time. So after that, why, we were supporting an element of the Eighth ROK Division.

KL: The eighth what Division?

ER: The Eighth ROK, which is South Korean.

KL: Okay.

ER: Republic of Korea. This one particular night, it must have been around midnight, I could hear this, feet, the ground shaking, say, "What the heck is that?" I went down to the CP tent and said, "Something isn't right out here." So they came out and they listened and they could feel it too, and all of a sudden I could hear helmets falling off heads. That ROK outfit ran off in that hill 8-5-4, ran right through our position, so we was the front lines, the ROK's, they went way back. Well, as the Chinese came over the hill there wasn't many of them because they came down part way, you know how they scooch down, and they look through binoculars; I could see them them doing this, and they just stopped. The platoon Sergeant at the time, he says, "Prepare to destroy the mortars. Prepare to destroy the ammo. We're going out on foot and heading towards the sea of Japan and the Navy will pick us up." Well, I had throw my grenade to go down the tube, one on the base plate, the other on the site so that they could not use that mortar if they captured it, but they said, "Hold up, there's a tank company coming through." So there was a tank company that broke through the lines, and they came up and set up in our position, and we loaded everything up and got right out of there and went back to our secondary position, and set up, see. So when the Chinese did get up to where our bunkers and stuff where we was going to pour it on them with mortar fire, see. Well, we didn't have to do that. So that same night we had a night withdrawal, and it was pitch dark, pitch dark, and there was a Marine unit that came back from way up north, and they came down, and the—night withdrawal, they was ahead of us, and we was bringing up the rear, of course it's hard to see, and all we had was just these little (inaudible) lights, you know. You can't see off in the distance, but you can see just a little bit, but not much. So we moved and went around Tekton Pass and I think we moved on over to Kumhwa Valley again because this is where I was going to go home; I had my time in. The way it worked was you're in line unites you got four points a month, and if you're in artillery you got three points, and if you were further on back you got a point, and if you were married you got a point-and-a-half; if you accumulate thirty-six points you're eligible for a rotation providing you have a replacement; I didn't have a replacement so I had forty-two points before I got out of there, see. So the platoon Sergeant and myself, the next morning they said, "Robishaw, (Helk?), you're going home; pack your gear, leave." We were over by Kumhwa Valley then, you know;

We was over there several times, Kumwha Valley, and that was real nice. So, we went back to company rear and turned in all our equipment that we had, you know, and then we went back to battalion, and then from battalion we went back to an area called Inchon, and there's a big replacement battalion there. This was in about the last part of October because I can remember we had a formation out there, and we was raising all kinds of hell.

KL: Was this still 1952?

ER: Yeah. We was raising all kinds of hate back there, so the company commander came out and said, "Look, if you guys don't stop raising Cain we're going to send you back up on the front lines." Everything quieted right down then, you know. Then I was there when Eisenhower got elected president, okay, so after that, why, we went down to Inchon, at the harbor, and loaded up on a U.S.S Marine Lynx, it was a troop carrier and then they took us home, see. And took another twenty-three days to go to Seattle and after we reached Seattle they took us up to Fort Lewis in Washington and they issued us all new clothing, new uniforms, the whole works; I was glad of that because my other stuff was getting kind of small; because when I went to Korea I only weighed 128 pounds and I think my belt size was, something like 130, give a little room in there because of the kind of clothes that you wear, and so that was the extent of my duty, and they flew us back to Fort Devens. I think it was West Overfield where we landed, and went into Fort Devens, and gave us a thirty-day leave, and we all went home. I still had time to go yet because I didn't get discharged until 1954; I was on a three year hitch. Went back to Fort Devens and from there they assigned me to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and I was assigned to a ninth MP company, the ninth division was up there then, at the time, and then before that, the sixty-ninth was there. I got discharged from Fort Dix, which was in 1954, March of 1954. I went back home, there wasn't no work, just like it is now, no work. You had the sardine factories going full blast.

KL: You had what going full blast?

ER: Sardine factories.

KL: Sardine. Okay.

ER: Yeah, and then I said to myself, I worked there a little while, but then you smell fishy all the time, you know, and so I said, "This enough for me, I'm going back into service." But in the meantime I had joined the reserves so I could keep my rank, which was Corporal, see. I made Corporal.

KL: So you left Korea as a Corporal.

ER: Yeah. So, I joined the reserves, active reserves, so I could keep my rank and then I decided to go back on active duty, and I did; and I went to Fort Dix, New Jersey. I had to take a two week refresher course. Then from there I went to Germany. I took a carrier company to

Germany, and they landed there in Bremerhaven and in Bremerhaven why, we went up to Augsburg, Germany and over to an area called Reese Barracks (inaudible), had about five different barracks there, and then they assigned us to a unit. I went assigned to the Heavy Mortar Company, the 5th Division, the Diamond Head, and so I stayed with them a while; and of course I got married over there; I married a German girl, and the division finally rotated after two years and they went to Fort Ord, California. That's where I was, and I was in Fort Ord, see in 1962, I went back to Korea, after the war was over, you know, and I tried to locate some of our old positions but everything was in the demilitarized zones, so you couldn't get out in there, because it's all landmines and everything you know, you didn't want to go out there.

KL: Yeah the truce had been signed by that time.

ER: Oh yeah, oh yeah, the war was over. It had been ten years. Ten years or nine years. So, after that, why, I served duty over there, came back home, two years later, why, I got orders to go to Vietnam. So, I went to Vietnam. When I was in Korea the second time I was with the 1st Cav Division, but after that I was with the 9th Infantry Division; That was the last division that President Johnson said that he was going to send over there, and that was when General Westmoreland had the command over there then.

KL: When you were in Korea, did I hear you say a while back that you were wounded in Korea?

ER: Yeah. Behind Heartbreak Ridge we was set up, we had to carry the mortars up about a hundred meters going up the hill, and then we had them dug in, see. As we got ready to fire and everything, why, a man from the 4th squad came down and he talked to me, he says, "Corporal Robshaw," he says, "I've got this funny feeling I'm not going to make it rest of the day." I said, "Don't feel like that." I said, "We're all going to serve our time over here and go back home." Well, later on that afternoon he was sitting in his gun pit and I don't know if the round from the enemy came in or if it came in from a 1-5-5 outfit that was behind us, but there was a shot round that landed right in the gun pit, and it killed him. That's funny that he should tell me that, that he didn't... Well when that round came in, I could hear it coming in. I said, "This is going to be a hit on us." So, I ran and I jumped in my fox hole and I scooped down and that round lit, went off, shrapnel all over the place and when I was down, scooting down, something hit me in the back. So I got up a little bit, and I looked down it's a piece of shrapnel; jagged shrapnel had hit me in the back. The only thing it done was just prick the field jacket. It did not penetrate the skin or nothing. So, I was thankful for that. [laughter]

KL: Yeah.

ER: So, other than that, why, that was about it. Still a lot of firing though, in different areas.

KL: Why were you anxious to go to Korea?

ER: I just wanted to go because my three older brothers fought in WWII, and my father fought in WWI, and I thought it'd be my time to go to Korea, because President Truman needed troops over there, see. So I went, and I put a year in over there. I was on the front lines for a whole year.

KL: So if you were on the front lines you probably didn't have a whole lot of interaction with the civilian population.

ER: Well I tell you, I never saw many civilians over there because they was moved way back because Korea was a WWII type of war. You had a front line established, you know. We did not see, the only Korean we had was a house boy that used to do all of our washing, wash our clothes and everything, then we payed him so much a month out of our own money that we received from the government, see. He'd keep us cleaned up all the time, you know, fresh clothes and everything. As far as personal hygiene, just like I said, about once or twice a week they would take us back to company rear and we had showers, but they would tell us, "Look, you got about three minutes in there to take this shower and then we're going to shut the water off on you, then the next man can go in." So we hurried up and scrubbed down and everything.

KL: I don't imagine they were very warm showers, where they?

ER: Well, a little bit, not much. Not much. Then after that, once a month we got the big rations in, why, we received a case of beer for each individual and all, but the beer was 3.2 and that's just like water. You could drink a whole case and not even feel it. But it just gave you an idea we were drinking beer and we got other rations, you know, and we got cigarettes and everything. [Of] course I'd take my cigarettes and trade them off to somebody else and I got C-rations in return, see. [laughter] Mainly corned beef hash; I love corned beef hash you know. [laughter]

KL: Were there some USO shows that came through?

ER: Once in awhile we would have a USO show, and the colored people wanted to go to that that we had, so I couldn't go to that because we had to have somebody on the gun. So the two that I had in my squad, I said, "Go ahead. Go on. Go on." So they went back to Company Rear where they had the shows, you know, USO shows.

KL: Now when you say Company Rear that was farther back from the lines?

ER: Yeah. Actually you got Company Rear, back of the front lines, from Company Rear you've got Battalion Rear farther on back, you know, and so other than that, why...

KL: You staffed the mortars?

ER: Yeah, I was a squad leader, the gun number two. That which was a base gun, you know, individual firing by gun number two would do that.

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KL: Did you operate from a trench?

ER: Gun pit.

KL: A gun pit.

ER: I'll show you in the pictures.

KL: What were the gun pits like?

ER: Well, we'll show you some. We got some right here. Alright, there's one right there. This is the day that we received the M30 mortar.

KL: Is that you in the picture?

ER: No. That's one of my men. That's what the Lieutenant used to climb up there and holler out fire commands. This guy right here, this guy right here was a Chinese soldier. I see him come walking up towards my gun and he says, "Too much noise." He says, "Too much noise." He deserted his outfit and came up to us, and his feet was all swollen and hands; he had frostbite bad, you know. I gave him a pack of cigarettes and he liked that, you know. I turned him over to the KATUSA's<sup>2</sup> and they took him back. I don't know what they done to him, if they shot him or not, I don't know. This is over behind White Horse Hill. This is behind hill 8-5-4. This is over by Kumwha. Kumwha is above the 38th parallel, you know.

KL: Now is the 38th parallel the current...

ER: That's the dividing line between north and south. That's one of the bunkers we had. Couple guys sitting down, taking it easy. That's me, as you look at this on the extreme right, that's me. In our spare time, like I said, this is what we were doing, building bunkers, see. We'd go down chop down some trees, you know, trim them up, and kind of put some wooden frame bed work inside the bunker where you could lie down.

KL: You made them out of sandbags it looks like.

ER: Oh yeah. Sandbags.

KL: Would those bunkers withstand much?

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<sup>2</sup> Korean Augmentation to United States Army

ER: Well, we had a lot of stuff on them. We had sand, sandbags, four, five layers of everything. I don't know if we ever (inaudible words) on one, so I don't know if it would stand it or not. But it would stand it on the side if there was shrapnel. That's me when I was a gunner, I'm on the left as you're looking at it.

KL: You were about seventeen?

ER: Yeah. I might have been eighteen then, I don't know, I might have passed eighteen. Here's the M2 mortar. See the pit that we fixed up.

KL: Now why the pit? To protect it from firing from the the outside?

ER: Well, so the gun wouldn't bounce all over the place, you know what I mean? Give us some protection too from incoming rounds. Some of the guys here, here's another picture of me and Robert (Seeley?), the one to the left—they always stressed, "Keep the charges out of the pit.

Because when you fire round there might be a burning charge coming out and set the whole pit on fire." Them charges burn fast! Now he got burn up; all of his clothes got burnt up off him.

This is over behind Kumwha Valley and first degree burns all the way around, and they had to call one of these bubble-top helicopters and took him away. I don't know if he ever survived it or not. But this was our Lieutenant, Marvin Dawson. This was our medic here, he was leaning on me. [laughter] This was Douglas smoking a pipe. This is a Korean soldier, there's Hill 8-5-4 in the background. So other than that, why...

KL: Those mountains look like they could get pretty cold.

ER: Oh yeah. Well, the winter I was there it got so cold, and initially we didn't have the winter boots, all we had was regular combat boots. My feet got so cold, it was so cold that I used to start the jeep up and put my arms around the radiator to get warmed up, you know. Everybody done that to warm up a bit. It dropped down to about forty-below-zero.

KL: How did you deal with the cold?

ER: Well, we just deal. Hopefully we didn't freeze to death, you know? I've got a movie over there; it's a Korean War movie and it shows where they've taken bodies out of the pits and everything that were frozen, and they were stacking them up. Those were American soldiers, it got so cold. One place it got so cold it got down to seventy-below-zero. I'm telling you, Korea is a rugged country. In the summertime it gets so hot all them dirt roads there maybe about three or four inches of dust, and if you're traveling back of a deuce-and-a-half, you're going to look like a skeleton when you get out of there, you're all white, you know.

KL: A "deuce-and-a-half" is a truck, right?

ER: Yeah. So, that was the conclusion of my duty in Korea.

KL: So how did you deal with the heat in the summer?

ER: Well, we just deal with it like you do if you went out West, you know. [laughter] We had fatigues; we'd take our jackets off and everything, you know, and put our combat boots back on. We had to wear our steel helmet all the time. [Of] course if you got caught without it, why they'd court martial you. We had to have that on all the time, see, unless we were cleaning up or something of that nature. We ate a lot of C-rations; once in awhile they'd bring up a hot meal, maybe once every couple of days, they'd bring up a hot meal up and it was usually supper time when they brought it up, see. But in the meantime we ate a lot of C-rations. We had different kinds; we had scrambled eggs in them, and we had corned beef hash, beef steak and potatoes and gravy, that was good too, you know. We'd build a little fire to eat up the can, you know. We survived it. But when I got orders to go home, why I really felt good. I hated to leave the guys, you know, but I had my replacement in and everything and he took over. Sergeant Howe who was the platoon Sergeant at the time why, we went back to the Company Rear, Lieutenant Marvin Dawson, he hit a landmine and got blown up, but it didn't kill him. He told me about it later. When we was over in Kumwha valley, where I left from, a few days after that, the Chinese must have lobbed in a thousand rounds of ammo on us. He says a lot of them got killed in the 1st Platoon in B Company.

KL: This was a few days after you left.

ER: Yes. So that was bad. We had line-crossers that'd run right through our position...

KL: Line- crossers?

ER: Yeah.

KL: Explain that to me.

ER: Line-crossers, they'd come up and see what's there and look through binoculars and write down stuff, you know, and head back. But they ran right through our position. They'd say, "Shoot them. Shoot them." So I ran in my tent to grab my M1 and I had it disassembled because I was getting ready to turn it in in the morning, so I couldn't shoot them, but they ran into a machine gun nest, there (inaudible) at the end, so they got them birds. This picture right here's where Lieutenant Dawson would climb up here, see, and these canisters that the rounds came in, we'd fill them with sand and stack them up because they'd stop shrapnel.

KL: Okay, this looks kind of like a bunker up on stilts.

ER: Yeah. This was a fifty-caliber ground mount, air mount. We had an air mount and then we had a ground mount, you know. Then we had the light thirty-caliber machine gun, and we had the water cool heavy thirty-caliber machine gun. This is taken behind Hill 8-5-4.

KL: Now, what was your mission? Was your mission to advance the line or hold the position?

ER: No, our mission was in support of the units in front of us. If they needed support we would give it to them. If they needed mortar fire, we'd give them mortar fire. When we was over behind Hill 8-5-4, they had these big searchlights way, way back, and they would light up the front lines, you know. You could see everything that was going on up there, and we used that quite a bit, and when we was traveling in different areas they had these smoke generators that they'd smoke up the valley, you know. Done a good job because you could see nothing in front of you. [laughter] Hoping you didn't have a head-on collision, you know.

KL: What were the living quarters like?

ER: Bunkers?

KL: You lived in the bunkers?

ER: Yeah. Right here, see.

KL: So they weren't tents.

ER: Oh no, no. No they weren't tents. Here's one of the tanks that came up to get us out of this area, where we was in. Where is that? It must be it right here, yeah. Here's one of the tanks that came up and set up in our area so we could get out of there before the Chinese came swooping down on us.

KL: Now the Chinese border wasn't very far from you.

ER: No, nope. No it wasn't. You can look at these pictures if you want to. There's a lot of them here. This one here particularly is over by Kumwha. Kumwha was all torn to pieces anyway. All I saw was brick chimneys sticking up, everything else was all torn down.

KL: Okay, here you've got some tents.

ER: Yeah, we had them up up in Kumwha valley, these tents, yeah.

KL: So this was farther back.

ER: Yeah, but when we went out to support somebody we didn't have them tents.

KL: You slept in bunkers.

ER: We slept near the gun pit, or our fox holes that was dug to the rear of the gun pits, see. Yes sir, a lot of work. I think my base pay was \$65.00 a month, plus \$45.00 combat pay. That's the money we got back in them days. So any other thing that you would like to know, I think I been talking over an hour.

KL: How are you doing? Are you getting tired?

ER: I'm doing alright.

KL: Okay. Great.

ER: So is there anything else?

KL: So you started to talk about Vietnam a little bit.

ER: Well, I really don't want to get into that because that'd be another couple hours.

KL: Okay. [laughter] Maybe we'll make that another time.

ER: Vietnam was another type of war. There wasn't no front lines.

KL: Yeah, I can't imagine trying to fight in a jungle.

ER: It was guerrilla warfare type of war. I went over with the 9th Infantry Division from Fort Riley, Kansas and we were stationed up in an area called (inaudible) and then after that we went down in the delta; we stayed down there quite a while because we was in one area near Vung Tau and we built an airstrip so you could land these Caribou aircraft down there; there's an aircraft that's built by the Canadians and we bought a bunch of them, but the Army had them then the Air Force got ahold of it that we was getting their aircraft, and they didn't like us with that aircraft because they said that, "You're becoming an Air Force." [laughter] With all these helicopters and small fix wing, and then the big Caribou, you know. [laughter]

KL: The Air Force was unhappy?

ER: The Air Force was unhappy. So they finally took the Caribous away. We had a lot of helicopters. All of our traveling in Vietnam was by helicopter. I was all over the place. After six months I got transferred because what they do is break half of the division up and ship them out to various units so that everybody wouldn't rotate home at the same time. We worked on a year over there too, you know. After you served twelve months you're eligible for a rotation. What I done was I went to the 52nd Aviation Battalion, which was nice because all my traveling wasn't on foot, it was by helicopter, see, I liked that, it was good. I got picked to go down to an area called Buon Ma Thuot and I was down there.

KL: What was the area called?

ER: Buon Ma Thuot.

KL: Okay.

ER: That's right near one of the Cambodia, or Laos, or it's right near the border there were [of] course a lot of North Koreans would come in that area too, you know. There's a camp down there that one of our Presidents used to go to, the hunter, I don't know if it was, it wasn't Roosevelt, Teddy Roosevelt, might have been Teddy Roosevelt; he used to visit over there; he used to go to that one camping site and go hunting and that camp is made out of teak, and boy, let me tell you that stuff is some hard, the termites couldn't even tear it up. You had to use a high speed saw with water on it to even cut it. I'd like to have a home built out of that, because it last two or three lifetimes you know, probably longer than that. So I used to provide security for the 1-5-5 Assault Helicopter Company and I used to go around and search the (inaudible) area, so I was there until my other six months, and I used to go out and secure down helicopters and make sure they got out of there safe, you know. I'd take a few men with me and we used to have a musical band that used to come down from one of the hills, Montagnards they called them, you know. They're sort of like our Indians back in the early days, you know. That type of people, but the Vietnamese never like them, you know. They didn't liked Montagnards.

KL: What didn't they like?

ER: Montagnards, they didn't like them, because they're dark complected people, and their features are different. They're like Indians, you know. They used to come down and put on shows and sketches you know. It was nice. I liked that.

KL: Tell me a little bit about the music.

ER: It was different music. They had a different type of guitar playing music and it sounded good you know, sounding real good. After that, why, they'd go back up on the mountain again. They real, not bad people, I didn't think anyway. After I served my time over there, why, I came back home again. Of course I was near retirement too because I got back in 19, let's see, when did I come back? I retired in '72, February 1, 1972, actually it's January the 30th, I retired at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

KL: What was your rank then?

ER: Staff Sergeant.

KL: Staff Sergeant.

ER: The first guy says, "Well I know you're retiring next month so I want you to do something for me." "What's that?" He says, "I'll give you all the trainees you want." He says, "We had a Sergeant that went awol and we have to go clean his quarters." I guess he was on orders to go back to Vietnam and he didn't want no more part of that so he took off. Probably went up into Canada some place you know. So I cleaned the quarters and took about a week to do all the scrubbing and cleaning and it wasn't in very good shape when he left, you know, but I got it up to par again and he took me off the duty roster and then I got transferred over to a replacement there at Fort Dix and that's where they had issued me all my papers I needed on retirement, see. That was it. That's just about all my army Korea.

KL: Well you've been very generous with your time. I appreciate you taking the time.

ER: That's alright.

KL: Is there anything you want to point out to me that I might have forgotten to ask about?

ER: Oh go ahead, I can't remember anything.

KL: Let me just check some notes here, let's see.

ER: Like I say, in Korea we supported on Pork Chop Hill; we was up, below Pork Chop Hill, and we was behind Kumwha; we went to Kumwha quite a few times.

KL: Now, Pork Chop Hill is a region I've heard about before. Apparently it was pretty significant wasn't it?

ER: Well, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, that's all it was over there, taking them hills; we'd take the hill and withdraw and the Chinese would come up, and we'd take it again and there's Sniper Ridge, and White Horse Hill, Triangle Hill, Bloody Ridge, Heartbreak Ridge; Bloody Ridge is right next to Heartbreak Ridge, and we supported people from all those places, and there's a ROK outfit, Republic of Korean Soldiers, we supported a lot of them and then the 2nd Infantry Division we reported elements of the 2nd. Just about all of them, 3rd Division, 9th Division, we supported a lot.

KL: So you were born in Rockland.

ER: Yup.

KL: Okay, and what year was it...

ER: Oh yeah, another hill we supported...

KL: I'm sorry, what?

ER: Another hill we supported.

KL: What's that.

ER: Jane Russell.

KL: [laughter]

ER: Yeah, let me show you. It's true. They named that hill Jane Russell<sup>3</sup>, I'll tell you why.

KL: [laughter] Let me guess.

ER: Okay, let's see. Let's go to the Punch Bowl...The only thing I was disappointed in over there was the CIB. The 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion never received the CIB.

KL: Now what's CIB?

ER: Combat Infantrymen's Badge, that's it right there. Now, in 1953 they changed the name, The 2nd Chemical Battalion to 461st Infantry Mortar Battalion, that's when they were issued the CIB, but we had the Chemical on it, and the chemical units didn't receive it.

KL: What was different about the chemical...

ER: Well we never fired no chemicals. The only thing we fired was HE<sup>4</sup> and WP<sup>5</sup>. Okay, now look at this. This is mainly up in the (inaudible) area. Triangle Hill, Jane Russell, right there, and right there, them two knobs they're really high. [laughter] So they named that Jane Russell. Yes sir.

KL: That's good. And what year was it when you retired, you said?

ER: From the Army?

KL: Yes.

ER: I retired in '72. 1, February, 1972.

KL: And that was out of which...?

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Russell, American film actress. 1921-2011

<sup>4</sup> HE: High explosive

<sup>5</sup> WP: White phosphorus, a smoke producing agent.

ER: Fort Dix.

KL: Fort Dix, okay.

ER: I could have went back to Fort Devens, because they let you go back to the post that you entered in, see. So I took my basic training at Fort Devens, but I didn't want to go back there. I mean I was all set at Fort Dix, you know. I was taken off the duty roster; all I was doing was just clearing post; took my time clearing post, then after that, after I clear, why they issued me my orders and everything.

KL: What's meant by "clearing post"?

ER: Oh, they give you a sheet of paper where you have to clear the post office, if you have any mail there, the medical facility, you had to clear that, you had to clear finance, just the post in general.

KL: Basically wrapping up business.

ER: And they sign it and everything, and after it's done you take it back to the company, why, you've cleared post, see. And then after you do that, clear company you sign out, and then I went over to a replacement where I received all my orders for retirement and a picture of my retirement papers, you know. And that was it, I was gone; I was a free man.

KL: That must have been an interesting day.

ER: Oh it was a nice day. It really was a nice day. I didn't mind the service I enjoyed the service, I was always called a "lifer" you know, I like that too, see. [laughter] So that's the way it goes.

KL: So you enjoyed your career in the military?

ER: Yeah. I enjoyed it, yeah. [Of] course, surviving Korea, and going to Vietnam, you know, I was a little bit older, I don't know if I was going to be as fast as I was before, see. But I survived. A sniper almost got me in Vietnam. I was going out and checking the troops that was putting these steel girders down for the air strip, and as I was walking out I heard a shot fired, and then I heard the round go right by my head, but it sounded like a bumble bee going by, you know? I said, "Damn there's a sniper around here somewheres." And I looked, and then all of a sudden I was looking in the direction where I thought the round came from and I looked up there and I could see him; he was dressed in white. He fired another round and I says, "I better get on the ground." Now that bullet went on the left side of my head, missed that. So I done all this like I was hit, you know staggering and everything. I could see him looking up like this at me, and then I fell to the ground. I could see him jumping out of the tree. He threw his weapon

down and then he jumped out of the tree. Since he didn't kill me, you know, I didn't shoot back. I could have shot and killed him, I was that close, but he ran through the jungle, an old looking fella.

KL: Pardon me?

ER: He was old looking.

KL: Why would he be dressed in white?

ER: I don't know. He should have been dressed like the jungle. [laughter] Because that's where he was at. So that was a close call.

KL: Yeah.

ER: But like I say, my Guardian Angel was right there with me, all the time.

KL: Sometimes that's what you need.

ER: Yeah, that's right. So did I give you enough?

KL: Yeah, like I said, you've been very generous with your time. Oh, I need to take care of the release. Let me get a pen.

ER: I've got a pen right here. I think it's black ink if you want black ink.

KL: Now, is there an "E" on the end of Earl?

ER: No. E-A-R-L. J. Robishaw.

KL: R-O-B-I-S-H-A-W?

ER: Right.

KL: Okay.

ER: We spell it the English way.

KL: Okay.

ER: But on my father's birth certificate it's R-O-B-I-C-H-A-U-D. [Of] Course he came from Nova Scotia, Canada, my father did. When he was drafted in the army, why, once he served in the military he automatically became a U.S. Citizen after that, see. Okay.

KL: I will send you a C.D. copy of the interview if you'd like. And is it also alright if I send a copy to the Maine Folklife Center in Orono?

ER: I don't care.

KL: Oh, and I'd like to get a photo, (inaudible)

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----