

Charles C. Currie

Sept 14, 1926

Interviewer: Now, you were talking about getting into the war, but could you go back...obviously you remember Pearl Harbor and....

Mr. Currie: Yes, I remember that...I think I was about 14 and one of my friends and I were at our house and one of my buddies came in and said the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor. It was a Sunday afternoon. At that point we never realized how much our lives would change. The buddy that came in ended up as a B25 gunner, a liberator. The other buddy was about 5 months older than I was and so he was drafted before I was, as a matter of fact, about the time of the Battle of the Bulge, he came to Camp Dixon in Jersey and he went on to Europe and into combat at the end of the war. I was drafted in February of 45. We were on the rifle range in basic training when the Germans surrendered. At camp Wheeler Georgia where I took basic training they had a lot of German soldiers from the war that were POWs; they were tough-looking guys. We were young recruits marching by and we looked at these guys; they were tanned, from Africa. We were free, and I was glad they were POWs, but then what happened after the war, of course one of the great American senators was Robert Taft in Ohio, and one of his constituents had a son that was killed in combat at 18 years and 6 months, so at this time they made all 18 year olds take another 4 weeks of advanced basic. So they sent us to Camp Rucker in Alabama. We went on a train and it was like going through a swamp. We wondered where we were going but we got there and it was a nice cantonment, so we had another month of basic. While we were there they dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. At that time when the Japanese surrendered it was like all the Army training programs almost stopped, so they just scarfed up all the young soldiers that were in training and sent us over as replacements, and they let all the old soldiers with 43 and 44 points; see you got a point for every month you were in the service and they were high point men, but when you were drafted you went in for the duration plus 12 months I think it was; you didn't know when you were ever gonna get out or back but that was the way they did it. We got over there and they immediately let the high point men go home. I got in to the band in Sapporo and the 77th division; first they occupied Hokkaido the whole division and they deactivated in January of 1946 and that was when General McArthur refused to let the Russians occupy Hokkaido and, well the 77th deactivated and I was in the band, so we had a choice to stay in Sapporo. It was nice in Sapporo.

Interviewer: Did you like it?

Mr. Currie: Yea, it was great.

Interviewer: How were the people in the area?

Mr. Currie: They were great. You see what happened, after the Civil War there were an American general and an American agriculturalist that went to Hokkaido and the agriculturalist founded an agricultural school which now is Hokkaido Imperial

University. When you hit Hokkaido, we went across from Nomura to Hakodate, there were seven ferries; five had been sunk by strafing so there were two left. We got to Hakodate, they sent us up to Asasegawa first, and in high school I had been a trombone player and they needed musicians in the 77th band so I got into the band from November to January when it deactivated. The 11th Airborne came up and the recruiter from the 11th Airborne said if we all went Airborne we could stay in Sapporo and some of us by this time had developed a few friendships so there were 10 of us in the band that decided to go Airborne. The dumbest reason in the world to do it, but we did it! They had a jump school down in Guinomi.

Interviewer: What was the jump school like?

Mr. Currie: A week of ground training and a week of jumping. You had to make 5 jumps. My buddy and I flunked out the first week. We had a choice to go back to our units or go through another week of jump school. So we went through another week of jump school and then we went airborne. That was something; you get in the plane and we're right along the ocean and went over the sea and we were airborne at 1200 feet and that's when we made our jumps. I remember the first time going out the door I said to myself "I wonder what the folks are gonna think of me now".

Interviewer: What kind of plane was it?

Mr. Currie: It was a C47 with one door on the left. And you go out and make a kick turn. You had your hands around your chute and you had to keep your elbows in or you would get wound up in your chute. So I did that then spent the rest of the time in the 11th Airborne band.

Interviewer: So you went through Infantry training in basic, got in the band, and then you went Airborne?

Mr. Currie: Yes. I went from the 77th band to the 11th Airborne band.

Interviewer: What did you guys do in the band? Did you just march around or...?

Mr. Currie: Well we practiced in the morning, all morning and in the 77th division, since they were gonna deactivate, we just practiced all day. But you can only practice so long before your lips wear out!

Interviewer: Yes, I played the clarinet, I understand!

Mr. Currie: In the 11th Airborne it was different. We practiced in the morning, then after you were off. In the winter time we'd go skiing on Mt Meriama and in the summertime we'd play baseball and went swimming. Had the Korean war come then; we had no training.

Interviewer: How were the living expenses?

Mr. Currie: We didn't have any. Our basic pay was about 110 dollars a month and we got 55 for jump pay. In fact it was my jump pay that I saved to get my wife's engagement ring. But after about a year we had enough points to come home. So I came home and went back to college and finished up, then I got married and had twins, then the Lord called me to the ministry so I went to seminary. I enjoyed my time there.

Interviewer: So when you came home did you get out?

Mr. Currie: Yes.

Interviewer: You were out of the military then?

Mr. Currie: Yes, but what I did; this was the most valuable thing I ever did in my life. When I got out at Ft Sheridan Illinois they had a card table set up and a guy sitting there where you could sign up for the enlisted reserve corps. I enjoyed being in the army; my year in Japan I got a dear john on orange stationery in basic training so I didn't really have any attachments back home, so I went over and gave them a thumb print and a signature and I was in the enlisted reserve for 4 years.

Interviewer: Was it the same kind of training?

Mr. Currie: No training. The only thing they had to endure every month, they gave me a sheet of activities of the different reserve units. When I got into Cleveland after I got married they had an active reserve so I went into the active reserve and I was in the 75th reserve unit. Then the Lord called me away to seminary. I went to seminary for 5 years and while there the Lord called me back into the Army. So I went there and I was a chaplain in the Army in 1956. They didn't have any vacancies for a chaplain at that time; to become a chaplain you have to finish seminary, have an ecclesiastical endorsement and there has to be a vacancy. Every denomination had a certain quota; say if you were Methodist, well for every 250 Methodists there were in the Army they authorized one chaplain and Baptist and so forth. I happen to be a conservative Baptist and there weren't any vacancies. However, on the list I got every month they happened to need some Airborne chaplains, and since I had been Airborne as an enlisted man, I volunteered. That's how I got back on active duty.

Interviewer: And what year was this?

Mr. Currie: 1956; I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne. I made enough jumps; by the time I ended up my 3 years in '86 I made 67 jumps. You had to get 65 jumps...or no, I did more than that...to get your master parachutes...with the wreath and the star. Then I went overseas to Germany for 3 years then came back and was assigned to Ft Campbell. I made 13 jumps here. You see, you had to make one jump every three months. Here are some pictures; in fact I have a whole album of my time in Japan. My daughter is the librarian at Richview and she called me and asked for some stuff for her bulletin boards. This is one from my time in Sapporo.

Interviewer: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Currie: I have a sister and I have a brother.

Interviewer: Older or younger?

Mr. Currie: Younger.

Interviewer: Now, after Pearl Harbor happened, did you all just wanna jump in and get involved with the war? Only being 14...

Mr. Currie: The war was sort of distant until we turned 18. Then it became serious.

Interviewer: Do you remember the rationing?

Mr. Currie: Yea, I remember they collected tires. Outside our city there was almost a mountain of tires that they had gathered. These are the pictures I gave to my daughter. She had all the kids that had fathers in the war bring in pictures. They had sugar and gas rationing. People didn't go on vacations anymore because of gas rationing, and if you wrecked your car you were in big trouble. My girlfriend's mother at the time, she wrecked her car and they had to move into the city in Cleveland and use public transportation.

Interviewer: Were you involved in any scrap drives?

Mr. Currie: They had stuff like that going on, but I was too little for that. I had orders for Korea; I went for 13 months '65 to '67. We had a Christmas program here at Chapel 14 and we had just a week to go to put on our Christmas cantata when I got my orders. I was supposed to report the 20th of December and I asked if they would let me finish the Christmas program and they said no. My wife directed the choir at the time. The week before I ended up in Korea I had seven Christmas services at the church. Being in Korea for 13 months meant I was over there for two Christmases.

Interviewer: How long have you been a Christian?

Mr. Currie: Since 1942; next month it will be 61 years. May 24, 1942 I accepted the Lord in Preble, Ohio. There was a pastor Rev Charles Fuller, he had a broadcast during the war; he was sort of like Billy Graham. He came to Cleveland and I went to the arena that Sunday afternoon and I accepted the Lord as my savior that day. I prayed real simple, I prayed "Lord Jesus come into my heart and be my Savior" and he did. It's been real from that time, of course when I went away to college at Columbia they weren't to sympathetic. The professors were not real earnest Christian men. In the Humanities class the professor told us to toss away the faith of our fathers; we're gonna read through all the great philosophers of history and pick out your own philosophy of life. I accepted

the Lord when I was 15 and got a scholarship to Columbia at 16, but I knew my faith was real, so I had to really synthesize all the stuff that went by me. When I got to New York, one of the first things I did was buy a paper and find a church to go to, and the First Baptist Church in New York City had a prayer meeting on Friday nights so I knew if there was a prayer meeting it would probably be a sound church, that the pastor was a man of God. He preached from the Bible and I would go so much. We had a youth fellowship. Of course New York during the war was full of service people; a lot of Navy people.

Interviewer: How old were you at this time?

Mr. Currie: I was 16 and 17. Then 18 when I got drafted.

Interviewer: Were you going to school on a music scholarship?

Mr. Currie: No I got an honors scholarship. Something else that was significant about that time; all the teachers knew that when you turned 18 you were gonna get drafted, so they tried to expedite us through high school if they could, and I was able to get through in 3 years. I had taken extra credit World History and Band and Orchestra. So I had enough credits to graduate.

Interviewer: They did this for all the...?

Mr. Currie: They did it as much as they could so we could get some college before we got drafted.

Interviewer: You were talking about the ROTC. Did you try to get into that? Was that something you were interested in?

Mr. Currie: I tried when I was at Columbia, they had a Navy program. These poor guys that were scarfed up during the Battle of the Bulge and sent overseas; that was suicide.

Interviewer: Did you personally know any of those people?

Mr. Currie: Yes the paper boy, one of my buddies' friends, two of the smartest guys in our school went to Harvard and they were in the officer's program there and they were drafted. There were six of us all in the neighborhood that were drafted. It was tragic.

Interviewer: So they didn't get sent to basic training?

Mr. Currie: No, they went straight into combat.

Interviewer: So they thought that they training in the college was enough?

Mr. Currie: Well, they were so hard up for people that they didn't worry too much about that. If you were available you just got sent in.

Interviewer: So it was sort of a blessing that you weren't in that program or else you would have...?

Mr. Currie: Yes! At Columbia in our Chemistry class they had 250 guys in it and a number of them were V12s with the Navy, and I think 75 of them flunked out so they were sent to Sampson, which was a naval base at that time, and they were sent off to sea.

Interviewer: So how many years were you at Colombia?

Mr. Currie: I was there for three and a half years all together. Another thing they had was tri-semester during the war so you had a week between semesters and a week at Christmas off, so 16 week semesters. I went three, then I was out one, then I went back another one; so by the time I was drafted I had two years of college. Then while I was in the service they had a program where you could do college through correspondence and I took two courses of Psychology and I got 12 credits for that. Then when I returned back to college they gave every man that had been in the service ten points of college credits for military service.

Interviewer: So that's 22 extra you had?

Mr. Currie: Yes so I had enough to graduate in three and a half years.

Interviewer: Graduate with a degree?

Mr. Currie: Yes with a degree. The degrees at Columbia were in Latin and one of the Valedictorians gave the Valedictorian address in Latin. I'll get the diploma.

Interviewer: What was the moral of your unit when you went to basic training?

Mr. Currie: Well the draft boards dredged up men to fill their quotas. I was in the Army with one guy that was a bouncer in Illinois, another man that had been in the reserves and had some training. There was one guy at the squad bay that had no conscience and I would have been afraid to be with him anywhere. One pay day; we had to dress up, and he started unlimbering his dice along this bunk just to entice guys to play craps for pay. One of the guys in our squad had been a police cadet and he went over and started comparing the dice and one of the dice had the same face on two of the sides, so he exposed the dishonesty of this fella. Another guy in the bunk across from us; we had an acting corporal who was a pure sadist, and one of the guys had too much beer in him and he punched the corporal and ended up in the stockade, but he had the arms of every man in the platoon behind him, theoretically. Then they had in the next platoon a man that had been a revenueur; he had the option of going to the Atlanta penitentiary or coming to the Army and he came to the Army. He would be marching down the road and it was like his equipment would be stringing along behind him; that was the kind of soldier he was.

Interviewer: These were the guys you were drafted with? So there were a lot of misfits?

Mr. Currie: Yes. Here's a picture from Vietnam. I was a chaplain in Vietnam.

Interviewer: When were you sent to Vietnam?

Mr. Currie: 1969 to '70; I was a chaplain of the engineer battalion.

Interviewer: So you were out during the Korean War?

Mr. Currie: Yes I went to seminary in '50 and came out in '55 and went to active duty as a chaplain. I made a picture like that for each of my children.

Interviewer: So you were with those guys during the infantry...

Mr. Currie: Just during the training. They disperse everybody after basic. And I ended up with the 18 year olds

Interviewer: Was Rucker where you did your band training?

Mr. Currie: No, I was a musician in high school and it just so happened when I got overseas; you go all over as basic rifleman then they farm you out based on their needs.

Interviewer: So when you got overseas were they asking who plays an instrument?

Mr. Currie: It so happened that they did! They needed musicians so I volunteered. The war officer of the division band came up and interviewed me and I got in to the band.

Interviewer: What was your interview?

Mr. Currie: I had to play a little so they knew I could read music. Had it been combat we would have dug graves, that's what the band did. But I was glad when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki because the 77th infantry division I was assigned to would have gone in on the second wave and hit the beaches.

Interviewer: Did you know that was where you were going to be assigned?

Mr. Currie: No. We went over to Camp Stoneman California and got our equipment, new rifles and we got on a troop ship that went directly from the United States to Japan. They took all of the stuff out of the school buildings and made it into barracks, and then they would farm us out. This was in Yokohama.

Interviewer: So you were expecting to be in a rifle unit?

Mr. Currie: Well you just go over. You don't know what is going to happen. Going overseas on a troop ship is a horrible experience. You're bunked three to five guys;

stacked in. It was like being in a bunk in a concentration camp. We were right in the bow of the ship three holds down. The ship made a complete circle; it had a five inch gun on the back of the ship, but it was a false alarm, so they turned back around. Going into Japan, I remember there was some sort of pier as you entered the Tokyo bay and it said "Kilroy was here" painted on the sign. After we got sent to Hokkaido, we went by train in Yokohama through Tokyo; took us about 18 hours, and the whole distance it was nothing but ashes and rusted tin, just ground from the war. In Sapporo where we took jump training; after we got assigned to the 11th infantry we went through and it had been carpet bombed; it would be like if you went through Nashville and about half of the city was just level ground, that's what a carpet bombing is like. In Aomori where we got on the ship to go to Hokkaido there was no town there, the only thing left was the docks. But you just can't believe what the devastation of war is like.

Interviewer: So the whole time you were in basic training, you were leading up to going into Japan?

Mr. Currie: Well I didn't know that. When you went through basic training, the only thing you know is you gotta get up in the morning and you don't know what you're gonna be doing the next day. We had two sets of fatigues and the sergeant said you will have a clean set of fatigues every day, so we had to wash a set of fatigues every day. Those sergeants leave deep impressions on you that last a life time. You are very susceptible to life changing impressions.

Interviewer: So you think that one guy that chose the Army over prison wishes he would have chosen prison?

Mr. Currie: I don't know. He was a wild Tennessee mountaineer, but he wasn't a soldier. But they probably tried to make him one. The worst part of basic training was at the end of basic training they had an artillery curtain in front of you and that was frightening. We had to go down a valley and up a hill and as you started down the valley they made us put our gas masks on and so climbing up the hill with the gas masks on was like being strangled. When we got up the hill it was so exhausting, the lieutenant at the top of the hill was putting guys around to prevent a counter attack, he saw us coming up the hill and gave us a place to go.

Interviewer: But you survived!

Mr. Currie: Yes. As a matter of fact, I would recommend a universal military training. The classic expression was I'm glad I had it but I would never want to go through it again. The discipline is great and it teaches you to respond to obedience to the proper authority, teaches you respect for your superiors and when you go through that you become part of the country. When we finished they had the GI bill and for every month of service you were in you got a month of credit toward college and if you had an honorable discharge you got the equivalent of a college education. I had 36 months of entitlement; that paid for my last years of college, a summer of summer school and about two years of seminary.

Interviewer: So the military was paying for school after?

Mr. Currie: Yes and I think that's the best investment the government has ever made, cause all the guys that got out of the military and were able to get the GI bill, it enabled them to get somewhere in life, to get to college and get a profession or quality professional credentials. That's the best investment the US has made in its history, I think.

Interviewer: The guys, when you went over to Japan, they had been there for 40 months.

Mr. Currie: Yes 42 and 43 months; the guy that led us to our building that night, he was about half drunk, and there were these crates in the villa with bottles in them. Those barracks were like a block long made of wood and they put about seven or eight guys in each one.

Interviewer: So you're saying they needed to go back home, the guys that had been there for forty plus months?

Mr. Currie: Yea they did. I'll never forget that first impression those guys made on me. The 77th division, when they were invading Guam, a kamikaze pilot hit the bridge where the division command was and wiped out half the staff. They went into Guam and they were in Okinawa.

Interviewer: So did they tell you stories when you got there?

Mr. Currie: Yea a little bit. In the 11th airborne band there was another trombonist; Frank Brown was his name; he died about a year ago, but we were together with the 11th airborne band in 1946 and when I came here he was a bandsman in the 101st. It was very strange that our paths crossed again after all those years.

Interviewer: When Korea happened, were you glad to be out?

Mr. Currie: My discharge from the enlisted reserve corp. came a month before the war started, or otherwise I would have been sent into the service. The Lord had called me into the ministry by then and I went to seminary in September of '50. I went to years in Los Angeles and two in Dallas and graduated from Dallas seminary in '55. Then I went from there back into the Army in '56.

Interviewer: Now you were young then, so you remember how the whole country banded together for World War II?

Mr. Currie: Yea pretty much. Of course they had laws of sedition in those days. If you were drafted you didn't have any choice. If you didn't go in to the draft you went to prison. Some ended up as medics; one by the name of Doss got the Congressional Medal

of Honor for heroism in the Pacific in the 77th division. Well I hope I haven't worn you out with all of these tales!

Interviewer: No, when I listen to you I get a sense that God had his hand in your military career, because if you didn't go into the 11th airborne it would have been really tough for you to get in as a chaplain. Now, looking back, how much did you realize...?

Mr. Currie: Well, just like that, the Lord put my whole life together. When it came time to go into the seminary, I was working for a power company in Cleveland. I'd lost a job because I refused to join the union. The Lord gave me another job and when it was time for the seminary to start the other job I got was a physical tester for a chemical plant, but at that time we made a chemical for plastic. We were shut down because we couldn't get materials because the place that gave us chemicals was on strike. When it was time to go to seminary we didn't have any money, and we had the twins, but my wife was ready to go. My faith at that point was minimal but hers was not. Two days after the seminary started in Los Angeles, we sold our dilapidated house trailer and that provided us with enough money to pay off our bills and go to Los Angeles. I got there ten days late, but I didn't have any trouble getting in.

Interviewer: Then the GI bill kicked in and ...

Mr. Currie: Yea I had that, and everything worked out good.

Interviewer: What about Vietnam? You were in during '67?

Mr. Currie: '69 and '70.

Interviewer: This is an awesome picture.

Mr. Currie: Yea that's a very precious picture to me. I always made the guys bring their weapons and I always tried to get them in a protected place where we had our services.

Interviewer: Where were you?

Mr. Currie: It was about a half hour's drive out of Saigon. We were at a helicopter base just beyond a big base in Zion. I was with the 34th engineers. We did the fourth year of a five-year national road-building program in Vietnam and we built the road from where we were to Futvin. As a matter of fact, the guy that runs the Pack Rat store and I met in Futvin, he was a captain at that time. The first Sunday the troops started building, I held seven services in one day and I couldn't speak for the next day. So after that I went out each day to each unit and had a service at lunch time.

Interviewer: They had to take their weapons still?

Mr. Currie: Oh yea, you couldn't see it but I had a pistol under my shirt. The chaplains were allowed to have one to fight off wolves and marauders. We had to go a long way to get out to where the troops were. We built 25 miles of road.

Interviewer: Were you walking from one group to the next?

Mr. Currie: No I had a truck.

Interviewer: Did you have a driver?

Mr. Currie: Yes I had a driver. We had sand bags all piled up in there in case we got blown up by a mine or something.

Interviewer: So your driver was the chaplain's assistant?

Mr. Currie: Yes. He had a weapon and when we held serviced I would put him out for surveillance. We held a service one day by a Michelin rubber plantation, and the next day that unit was ambushed and one guy was killed. That was the closet call that I had. We had one of our big scoop loaders that went over a mine and blew the scoop off. We had another three-quarter ton truck go over a mine and the mine made a hole about six feet deep and it knocked a wheel off. We had a roller get hit by a B40 round.

Interviewer: You came home in '70 and...?

Mr. Currie: I went to Fort Knox and retired from there.

Interviewer: And that brought you back here?

Mr. Currie: Yes. See in those days when you got orders overseas, you had to move your dependents off post in 30 days. We didn't have any place to go so my wife went snooping and found a housing development in Royalty Acres, so we were the first in the Acres there. We had a home leased out for about 10 years there. When I went to Korea the girls moved there and they were in Fort Campbell High School and finished a year there then went to Clarksville High School, then they came to Germany. Once I got my orders for Vietnam they came back here and when I got out I thought I'd get a terminal assignment here but I ended up in Fort Knox instead. Well, that's a long story.

Interviewer: Thank you so much.

Mr. Currie: No problem.

