

For the camera could you go ahead and tell us your name and where you were born?

Mr. Patch: My name is Elwyn Patch and I was born January 19, 1929, right here in this house.

What were your parent's names and what did they do?

Mr. Patch: My father's name was William Green Patch and he was in the tobacco business here. My mother's name was Margaret Ellen Patch and she was a housewife.

Do you have any recollections of the Great Depression?

Mr. Patch: Oh yeah, a lot of recollections of it. I lived right in the middle of it. It got started in 1929 and it wasn't really over until the 2nd World War in 1941. My growing up years was during the depression. I remember that we never were hungry and never were worried about where I was going to get the next meal. We just didn't have any money. Back in those days a movie was .11 cents, a Hersey bar was a dime or a nickel, a hamburger was .10 cents but even then you didn't have the ten cents. I remember one time one of my friends that we played with a lot named Lawrence Pettigo; his father gave him a .50 cent piece for his birthday. We thought we had more money than the law allowed. We headed out downtown to spend it, got down there and spent about a quarter of it. We had all the candy and stuff we could eat. Money was scarce and toys were, you know, real almost non-existent. You made your own toys. You made bow and arrows out of just cutting limbs off of trees. You made slingshots out of part of the shoe leather; the tongue of the shoe leather is what you made the whole bullet of a rock in. It was a different time but as I say it wasn't really about, didn't really go through any hardships in the depression. I remember a lot of people did, there were a lot of people out of work and a lot of people would go downtown and would be walking the streets looking for work. On Saturday morning all the farmers came into Clarksville. The rest of the week a lot of people out of work just stayed around the courthouse and farmers and construction people that needed labor would just go down to the courthouse in a truck and they would pile in the back of it and work that day and get paid; the next day the same thing.

Did you have any family members that served during World War II?

Mr. Patch: No. My father served in World War I in Kelly Field in Texas but he got in during the last of it and didn't serve any overseas capacity. At that time he was Air Force and nowadays it's Army or Air Force, but in 1916 or so it was just Air Force; a separate branch of service from the Army.

So was he support personnel or did he fly?

Mr. Patch: No, he was support personnel; he didn't fly.

How about rationing? Do you have any particular memories of that during World War II and how it affected your family?

Mr. Patch: I have a good memory of rationing. We had stamps. Just about everybody got what they called an A stamp which was the minimum as far as gasoline and things. A B stamp was for the next step up for businesses and all. A C stamp was ones that was essential to the war effort and people like farmers who were growing food and all got a C-ration stamp. That gave them a considerate more gasoline and considerably more things. Tires were really rationed and the ones you got weren't any good. My grandfather had a farm in Springfield and I used to carry some of the workers up there to cut tobacco and on those old tires we would never make it to Springfield and back without having one or two blow out and flats. On several occasions we would use both; most of the time we carried two spare tires with us and several times I would have to find a telephone to call in and tell them we blew both of them out.

They were terrible. They were made of synthetic rubber but they didn't have them down at all. You couldn't get a good tire. Things like coffee was scarce, sugar was scarce. As I say we never went hungry on the account of it. It was just an inconvenience.

So when you went into the military were you drafted or did you enlist?

Mr. Patch: No, I went in. I went to the University of Tennessee for school in 1946. You were required at that time to take ROTC for two years and the last two years they would pay you a small amount if you stayed in ROTC. At that time there wasn't any war and I could use the money so I stayed in for the other two years and when I got out I was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. I had to go to summer school. I took Civil Engineering and in order to graduate I didn't have enough credits when June commencement came around so I had to go to summer school in the summer of 1950. The Korean War started I believe in August of 1950. At that time none of us knew whether we were going to be called immediately in the Army or whether it was going to be any time so I really was worried to death that I wasn't going to get to graduate before I had to go in the Army. Of course engineering which has so much math and physics all in it, if I would have had to of say take a two year leave of absence, I don't think I would have ever graduated because when I came back all of that stuff would have been so cold to me. I would have almost had to start a year or two over. As it happened they didn't call me in until, I believe I went in in September of 1951 and went to Camp Polk, Louisiana, and trained down there. About April of 1952 I went to Fort Belvoir to engineering school and then from there I went to Korea.

So what type of training did you receive at Fort Polk?

Mr. Patch: At Fort Polk we were just building target ranges out in the boondocks behind Fort Polk. We were living in tents. I was in the 61st Engineers. We had bulldozers and razors and were building roads around the area back there in the back; clearing land. We cleared a lot of timber land making target ranges and all. Of course at Fort Belvoir we just went to what they called engineering school which was more to do with paperwork and studying. It was just going to class most every day. You didn't have any field training.

So during that time did you expect that you were going to be sent to Korea?

Mr. Patch: Oh yeah, I practically knew it. There was a few of them, a few people that graduated with me that went to Europe. I would say that 95% of us went to Korea.

When did you arrive in Korea and what was going on at the time? Was it after In Chan?

Mr. Patch: Yeah, it was after In Chan. I arrived in Korea on June 1952 and I was stationed at In Chan. We could see the effects of battle at In Chan. There were a lot of damaged Army vehicles, trucks and things and you could see the foxholes along the road going from In Chan to Seoul that the North Koreans had dug foxholes and maintained a line to try to stop the American troops from moving inland. That invasion went so fast that the North Koreans didn't have a chance. They were overwhelmed right at the start. In Chan has got the second highest tide of anywhere in the world. They are ____ up here around New Foundland, they got the highest tide and In Chan is the second. I believe the tide is about 21 feet. When the tide is out at In Chan you can stand on the docks and can't even see the ocean. It is so far out there. It is miles out there. It is all just mud flats. So ships and all had to make all new arrangements just to come in to the port based on the tide.

Did you ever see any get stuck?

Mr. Patch: No, I never did. I'm sure they did. All they would have had to do is just wait. Once the tide was in it was pretty deep water pulling them. It was probably 18 to 20 feet of water once the tide came in.

You were with an engineering unit. What were ya'll doing when you got to Korea?

Mr. Patch: At In Chan we built a lot of support facilities. We built a lot of small bridges. The Korean road system had a real pull bridges; they wouldn't hold up to the heavy trucks of the Army. They were alright for the little carts that the Koreans used so we replaced a good many bridges. We built a lot of outhouses for the troops around there that came in. We put together a lot of tent frames. The tent frames would come in a lot of pre-fabricated packages and you would put them together and it would make the tents come up over them. That is where a good percentage of the troops that lived over there lived in tent frames. They made a right good house. You had a stove in there and it was right cozy. We had two hospital ships out at bay in In Chan. They would carry the wounded people from the front. You would see the helicopters come over with the stretchers thrown on them. They came pretty regular. We could hear the gun fire from along that _____ parallel. During the time that I was there they had stabilized the line and there wasn't any moving back and forth.

Was that through the Chinese intervention and all of that?

Mr. Patch: Right. It was a right interesting experience. I wouldn't want to do it again. I was mighty fortunate that I wasn't on the front lines. About the only action we saw at all, they had a big fuel depot there at In Chan where they brought in the fuel to all the American vehicles and every now and then the North Koreans would fly over with one of these little putt-putt, it sounded like a piper cub, and drop hand grenades down on it trying to set it on fire. Luckily it never did because there could have been a terrible blaze if that thing had ever gone up. The worst danger we were in, they had the troops that were protecting In Chan from _____ had 50 caliber machine guns in placements around the city. A lot of those machines in placements were more or less operated by _____. They would press it and they would start shooting at a plane up here and they wouldn't be able to stop it and sometimes it would go all the way down onto the ground. I never heard of anybody getting killed by that but they sprayed a lot of ground. That happened during the early part of my career. By the time I left there they had pretty well gotten the North Koreans didn't even harass us any. They used to fly over with their planes and drop safe conduct passes out. I've got some, if I can find them I will gather them up.

Safe conduct passes; what are those?

Mr. Patch: Yeah, so that if the American soldier would gather one of those and go to the Koreans they would give them safe conduct. They just flooded the air with those things. I wished I could put my hands on some of them but I brought seven or eight of them home that I picked up off the ground.

So what was your opinion on MacArthur?

Mr. Patch: Oh I was on Truman's side. I thought MacArthur was a great General at the time but I think he stayed too long. He was a _____ strategist and the In Chan invasion was really a work of art because they had forced the American troops into a small perimeter right down there in Pusan and was just about getting ready to run them completely into the ocean when MacArthur pulled off at In Chan invasion, and they caught the North Koreans so much by surprise that it was just chaos. I mean they didn't know what to do. That part of him was fine but of course after that he was after being told definitely not to go into China; whatever Truman told him he didn't pay any attention to him. I was all on Truman's side. Truman did the right thing. I think MacArthur's ego had probably gotten a little bit too strong for him.

What about Ridgeway?

Mr. Patch: Ridgeway; I didn't know much about Ridgeway. I think the troops respected him. I never heard anything bad about him. I think he was an on the ground type of General. I think he was right there with them. I never did hear anybody complain about him.

How would you describe the quality of military preparedness on Korea and the quality of military training in troops?

Mr. Patch: The quality at the time of Korea and now?

However you want to answer.

Mr. Patch: I think we were probably completely unprepared for Korea because when the North Koreans came across into South Korea, the South Korean Army just almost folded up. There was a ____ and we tried to get our troops there and we didn't have any real combat teams that we could send over there. They picked up a clerk typist and everybody that was stationed in Japan living a life of ____ in Japan; they picked them up and sent them to Korea just immediately. I think it was a real, for several months until we could get ourselves together we were in a real precarious position over there. I think they kicked that war machine in gear mighty quick and got us on our even footing. I think today we are much better prepared for that type of action and I think we got a lot of mobile teams that they could send anywhere in the world now that are fully combat trained. At that time we didn't have hardly any real what you called combat trained mobile teams that they could just pick up the phone and say, "Hey I want 50,000 men to head to Korea."

What was your opinion of the South Korean people and what was their opinion of the American troops there?

Mr. Patch: I had mixed feelings about the South Korean people. We were never in any danger in South Korea; at least I didn't know it. Of course you couldn't tell a South Korean from a North Korean; they all looked alike. We never had anybody hurt or shot at or by gorillas or anything like that. It was perfectly safe to go down to any of the towns and wonder around and nobody; very little physical crimes went on. Now they would steal your wallet if you didn't have _____ but doing you bodily harm they didn't. The South Koreans who we dealt with in the engineers they had what they called the KSC's which were the Korean Service Corp and that was sort of civilians that weren't in the Army but they were aides still able to do work. They used them more or less just as general labors and building stuff. We would be more of the supervisors and the KSC's would be out there mixing the concrete and doing physical labor. They were pretty, I would say, on the lazy side. They weren't getting paid practically nothing so they had no real incentive to work very hard. Every now and then you would find one that was right talented and would be willing to work, but a lot of them you just really got very little use out of them. The Army paid them and one of my jobs was to be pay master for them. On every Friday we would dough out a bunch of military script to them. They liked a lot of first class service. The Korean people themselves, I think they accepted the Americans pretty well. I don't think it was anything like it is over there in Baghdad and Afghanistan either one. We never had anybody do any kind of terrorist acts or they steal gas out of your truck. You had to keep guards on your equipment or else they would steal anything they could get their hands on. They didn't have anything so you can't hardly blame them for if a person is hungry and all or if you've got gas where they can get to it they are going to take it.

What were your living conditions like there?

Mr. Patch: Our living conditions were right good. Being engineers we were able to get our hands on building materials. We lived in tents and tent frames. They were good. I didn't have any problems. The food was alright. You had powdered eggs and you had powdered potatoes and that kind of thing but still I

didn't lose any weight over that. When I got home I was mighty glad to eat a fresh egg and fresh potatoes. Really, since we were behind the lines we fed mighty well.

Did you experience any of the winter's there?

Mr. Patch: Any what?

Winters?

Mr. Patch: Winters, yeah, I went through one winter; it was cold. It wasn't as cold as the winter that they had up there at the Chosin Reservoir. It wasn't a lot colder than it was here in the winter time. It was down in the 20s with a little bit of snow but not a lot of snow. The troops on the front line had what they called a Mickey Mouse boot which was an insulated rubber boot. It was a little high quality and a little warmer than what we had; we had what they called sheep bags which was a half soul rubber and had some felt lining in it. It would sweat your feet and your feet would get cold but I never saw anybody get frostbite back where we were. We had good clothes. We had fur-lined parkas and real good vest lining and down sleeping bags; we had good equipment.

Do you have any particularly interesting experiences or stories?

Mr. Patch: I can't think of too many. The Korean people used human waste for fertilizer. The toilets would have what they called the honey buckets. They would put the honey buckets under there and when it got full they would have a honey wagon and it would come by and they would pour all that waste into this honey wagon. They would take it out to the fields and have a long dipper thing and they would pour that on their vegetables. Those honey wagons smelled to high heaven. When you would go by one of them you would just have to hold your breath because it was just terrible. They grew tremendous vegetables there. The carrots were like that and the turnips and radishes; they just really made our vegetables look mighty pitiful. I wouldn't eat one of them for the world because of what they had to use to fertilize them. Around the coast they would hang their fish up on lines just to dry out I guess. That was a terrible smelling place. You would go by there and there would be a whole line of fish rotting on the lines. They used, on one of their stables, was what they called Kimchi which was just a cabbage with a whole lot of hot sauce and all on it. They would eat that and you could tell it on their breath when they would go around. Their breath smelt terrible from eating Kimchi. We had R&R one time while I was over there. I think every man that was in Korea they gave a week of what they called R&R, rest and recreation. They flew us to Japan. The way I went was Kyoto which used to be the old capital of Japan and it had a lot of temples and all kinds of interesting historical things of Japan. I stayed in a real nice hotel. That is the first time we got anything good like eggs and steak; good food and a lot of good women. That was nice. When I got ready to come home my tour of duty when I signed up from ROTC tour of duty was two years. My tour of duty ran out in September 1953. They started cutting our orders to come home sometimes in August and I know when I got my orders is when they signed armistice with the Korean people. At that time I was at Kusong, Korea, which we were building some warehouses there and at the time they signed armistice the Korean people were against it and they think we ought not to have quit. They were hoping we would have stayed there until we won. They had some mass demonstrations. We were on the outskirts of Kusong and we were a detached company there with just maybe 200 of us in that detached company. They marched out there around our company and were carrying candles and things and chanting and all, not knowing what their intentions were. Some of the men got pretty nervous that they were going to get robbed or something but they didn't. It was a peaceful demonstration but I take it that happened all over Korea but what I just saw was right there in Kusong. As I say I came home on the General Walker and that was the ship that carried the first batch of prisoners that the Koreans had released to America. I would say probably half of that ship was comprised of prisoners-of-war and the other half was just troops rotating home. They did have to keep the prisoners separated because some of the

prisoners that collaborated with the Koreans were hated by the other prisoners and if they had been together there would have been some real scuffles involved.

I think you mentioned it earlier, but what unit did you say you were with?

Mr. Patch: What?

What unit did you say you were with? I think you mentioned it earlier but I want to make sure that I have it in there. I can't remember.

Mr. Patch: I still didn't catch that.

What unit?

Mr. Patch: Oh, I was in the 453rd, the engineer construction battalion.

One other thing about; did um, the Koreans weren't happy with the peace but what about the soldiers? I have heard.....

Mr. Patch: We were happy. I was coming home anyway whether they had a war or not so it didn't affect me as much. Really where we were, the soldiers really weren't in any danger and it didn't affect their tour of duty. They didn't get to come home any faster than they would ordinarily have come home if they hadn't been at peace. It wasn't as traumatic an occasion as it would have been if the people up there on the front lines were getting shot at. Although, by the time they signed the peace treaty the casualty rate had gone way down. They were sending out as many patrols out or feeling out what the enemy was doing. They more or less got into a static position and every now and then somebody would get shot by somebody from across the way. There weren't near the number of casualties but I'm sure that those on the front lines were mighty happy that the peace was there.

What did you do after the war?

Mr. Patch: I came back and went to work for my uncle at a Clarksville construction company. They had a job at Cape Canaveral, Florida, where the missile base and the shuttles are. They just started it down there and it was nothing but palmettos and sand and all on Cocoa Beach. I went down there and worked a year and then I came back and worked in construction here with him for about ten years and then went in business for myself. I was in the construction business here for about 40 years by myself. Finally when I got to be 70 years old I retired.

Is there anything that you would like to add?

Mr. Patch: I guess not. I've enjoyed all of it. I had a good life and enjoyed everything I did. I learned a lot in the Army. As I say I wouldn't want to do it particularly everyday but it was a good experience. I was lucky and blessed not to have been involved in any real action because a lot of people over there were killed or maimed or crippled up for life. I didn't have any of that and I don't think as far as I know that I was ever in any danger over there. If I was I didn't feel like I was. I enjoyed construction work. I think it was just right fulfilling because you can see what you done and you know it's if you just say keeping books or something then one day looks like the other. In construction you can see a structure from the ground to finish. When it's over a year or two later you can ride by there and think, "Well I built that." It's a good feel. The Army gave me some good experience in construction. That is what we did, we built things. We build a lot of warehouses over there. The way the government stored rice about the time I got home some of the men in the company wrote me and told me they tore them all down. They changed the

program and they wasn't giving the Koreans rice anymore so they didn't need the warehouses to store them in. I guess that's about it.

Well, thank you.