

Interviewer: This is Mr. William Fitzgerald Korean era veteran. Sir would you please state your full name, when and where you were born and your branch of service?

Fitzgerald: William Arthur Fitzgerald and I was born in Murray County Tennessee in a small community called Bigville it's about 7 miles south of Columbia and I was in the Army drafted in the Army. Served in the 19th infantry regiment 24th division.

Interviewer: Sir what were your parents names and what were their occupations?

Fitzgerald: My dad was Lyndo Allen Fitzgerald he was a farmer all of his life and of course my mom was a home maker. They came up through the depression or we came up through the depression they lived through the depression after they married and all. And unfortunately they my dad lost just about everything he had during the depression and started over in about 1928 when he really got out of debt and started over. Raised 5 kids, did very well.

Interviewer: What were your recollections from the depression?

Fitzgerald: Well I didn't know about it I was young too young to really know too much about it I just thought everybody lived like that we didn't have a lot but everybody around us we lived as well as anybody around us in the neighborhood so everybody was about the same.

Interviewer: What kind of crops did your dad farm?

Fitzgerald: After let's see 1927 or 8 he got a job with a man that owned about 5 or 6 farms and he was kind of overseer. They raised corn, wheat, live stock and my dad was overseer of all five of those farms actually and we lived on one of them.

Interviewer: And they all were in Murray County?

Fitzgerald: All but one, one was in Williamson County and the rest of them were in Murray County around Columbia.

Interviewer: What kind of chores did your father have you do and your brothers and sisters while you were running the farm?

Fitzgerald: Cut wood and be sure there was plenty of wood in the house my mom cooked on a wood stove we burned wood in the fireplace my grandmother lived with us and we cut wood for her stove. We cut wood for a stove that we called the living room where my sister courted on the weekend you know. We had about five different sizes of wood to cut and be sure was in and also we had two or three milk cow we had to the boys had to see that the milking was done and feeding and other chores livestock.

Interviewer: Was it good recollections

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh

Interviewer: These chores

Fitzgerald: Loved it loved all every minute of it didn't then but as I look back I wouldn't take anything for it. It was great great time we were a very close knit family and had a lot of fun together even though there was quite a bit of difference in our age. I was the youngest of course and but we were very close.

Interviewer: Now you said you have brothers and sisters how many brothers and sisters?

Fitzgerald: Have three brothers and one sister.

Interviewer: And you said your brothers were all older.

Fitzgerald: Yes all of them were older. My sister was the oldest and one brother 12 years older than I one 10 years older and one 6 years older. Up until just a few years ago until my oldest brother died we'd always get together several times a year you know just have a big party. We still do that the ones of us that's left.

Interviewer: So do you have a large family still today compared to then?

Fitzgerald: Well my sister has died and my oldest brother died and my other brother's in the nursing home so it's just one brother and I we still try to get together a lot but.

Interviewer: When Pearl Harbor happened did you have a recollection of that?

Fitzgerald: Yes I was 10 years old I remember the Sunday afternoon where I was and what was happening. I remember President Roosevelt's speech.

Interviewer: Where were you?

Fitzgerald: It was on Sunday afternoon and my uncle's family was visiting with us he had several kids our age and we were in the bedroom actually where we had the fireplace and gathered around the fire when the news came over the radio. I remember that very vividly.

Interviewer: Do you compare that to like September 11th the same feeling?

Fitzgerald: Somewhat of course the age difference makes a lot of difference there but I knew enough to know it was a serious business and the reaction of my folks. As a matter of fact that was on Sunday and one of my brothers volunteered for the service the next day.

Interviewer: That was my next question. What was it like having all three of your brothers' serve and you being home?

Fitzgerald: It was tough on my mother and dad more than anything else. And of course they didn't all go immediately one brother left soon like the next week and the other older brother was drafted but he had already married and left home so he was drafted a few months later. And then my next brother wasn't quite old enough he was about 17 and wanted to go and couldn't and finally he got to be 18 and talked my mom and dad into signing for him so he volunteered too. And after that I was left home by I was the only one left home. And a lot of those chores that we talked about all fell to me then and that was a little different from what it had been. But it was tougher on my mom and dad.

Interviewer: Do you recall any of their letters back home? Now all three of them survived the war?

Fitzgerald: Yes they did and they were all in service at the same time for a period of time. And I do remember a lot of their letters I remember my mom meeting the mailman everyday. And especially I remember letters from my brother that was in the Pacific more than the others because the other two guys the other two brothers were married when they were in the service and they probably wrote to their wives more than they did to my mother and dad although they wrote every week or two. But I don't remember their letters as much as the one that was in the Pacific.

Interviewer: Now the one in the Pacific was he the oldest of the three?

Fitzgerald: No

Interviewer: The youngest?

Fitzgerald: No he was the middle the second oldest brother. He was over there almost 3 years.

Interviewer: After the war you were 15, 16 somewhere in there right? 45 you would have been 14?

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: Your brothers came home what was life like after that?

Fitzgerald: Changed we had moved from one of the farms I was telling you about to another and when my first brother came home and the day before he came home the brother next to me left and went to Germany. So they missed each other by about 12 hours. And of course my that brother and the oldest brother never did live at home anymore they were already married when they came back home they set up housekeeping and were gone. My sister was already married so it was just one brother and I home for awhile but he still stayed in the Army for awhile I don't know maybe maybe a year I've forgotten how long. And then when he was discharged he lived at home and you know it was good times. The war was over and everybody was almost everybody was home and it was good times. You could see the relief on my mom and dad's face.

Interviewer: In 1950 when the Korean War started what was your family's reaction?

Fitzgerald: 1950 when the Korean War started I was in high school, I graduated in 1950. We had moved again two more times we had left the farm that was owned by the other fellow and my dad and my brother owned a little farm together for awhile and then my brother decided he was going into the carpentry business and my dad started renting the farm. So he was renting the farm and we were living at another place in 1950 when I was a junior and senior. And really in 1950 I didn't think a whole lot about the Korean War to tell you the truth. I knew it was going on and I knew it wasn't good and it was possibility I might have to go but I didn't think about it too much.

Interviewer: Now this war was obviously different then WWII and it wasn't total war.

Fitzgerald: Right I wouldn't call it a war anyway.

Interviewer: The let me back up a little bit and what do you remember about rationing and things of that nature.

Fitzgerald: Yeh I remember a lot about it. We had ration books for gas, sugar and coffee several other food items and I know that and tires and we had to be careful about how we managed the food so we wouldn't run out you know before your ration stamps did. And I remember going to the grocery with my mom and buying things and putting the ration stamps out there on the counter for the guy to count. And gas was a problem of course my dad didn't own a car but my two older brothers did have cars when they left and they left those two cars at our house and my next brother he had two cars and two ration you know two gas rationing books. So we had pretty much all the gas we needed he did. And when he'd run out of gas he and one of his friends would mix a little tractor fuel with gas and burn it in their car. SO yeh I remember that.

Interviewer: Did it tare up their cars that tractor fuel?

Fitzgerald: Well the one it was 1940 Plymouth that belong to the friend of my brother that they that they used the tractor fuel in it smoked a lot but I don't know what damage if it did any or not I expect it did.

Interviewer: What other things do you remember about that period from 41 to 45 where now people at home are stressed for several reasons? Family gone rationing the war what was it like do you remember people in your neighborhood dying?

Fitzgerald: Dying?

Interviewer: Yeh like that lived in your neighborhood or around neighboring farms that didn't come home?

Fitzgerald: Not too much then my grandmother lived with us and she dies during that period of time and that's actually the first experience that I had with close relative death. There were some other relatives' maybe and some people in the neighborhood but I don't remember a whole lot about that because for some reason I wasn't expected to go to the funerals and so forth except when my grandmother died. And of course I did that was the first funeral I ever attended and she lived with us the entire time that I was in the world she lived with us when I was born up until she dies in 1945. And so she was just another member of the family to me.

Interviewer: When did you get drafted?

Fitzgerald: December 1951.

Interviewer: And where did they tell you to go where was your first

Fitzgerald: Of course I had to report to the draft board I believe it was in Columbia. And they told us well I think as I remember I don't remember exactly all that took place there. There was quite a few guys I knew my age you know drafted at the same time. And I remember we road a bus to Nashville and took

our physical in Nashville and was inducted in Nashville sworn in in Nashville. And that was on January 29, 1952.

Interviewer: Where did you go to basic training?

Fitzgerald: Fort Jackson South Carolina.

Interviewer: What was that like?

Fitzgerald: It was a new experience for me.

Interviewer: Wasn't like cutting wood was it?

Fitzgerald: No but all of that hard work helped I'll tell you that farming farm work helped you through some of those hard time because you know I had been there before some where. But anyway basic training was a new experience you were away from home you were in with a bunch of guys you didn't know and from all over you know from all over the country. And they kept you busy you didn't have time to think too much and it was in the winter time of course we had quite a few people who dropped out because of sickness didn't make it through basic training some of them had to start over. I was lucky enough to make it all the way through 8 weeks basic training it only took 8 weeks instead of 16 weeks.

Interviewer: Now I have a this is strange question but maybe it's relevant. The Korean War was the first war that they integrated blacks and whites. At your basic training was it integrated?

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: What was that like?

Fitzgerald: It was different something I had not been used to.

Interviewer: The whole nation hadn't been used to really.

Fitzgerald: Yeh and something you had to learn to except and make the best of and that's what I tried to do.

Interviewer: Did you come to find any good friends that were black or did they still kind of segregate in all of this or was it did the drill Sargents treat everybody the same or how did that?

Fitzgerald: I think the best I could tell most everybody was treated the same. I didn't have any close friends that were black there in later years I did have some friends that were black. But in basic training I just tried to get through that thing and do the best I could not cause any problems and had a few friends you know a few good close friends. You had to have somebody you buddied with and I had two or three or four guys that I buddied with but they were not they were white boys so from all over all over the country.

Interviewer: What was what kind of things did you do in basic training that were made exceptionally hard or exceptionally stressful that you remember?

Fitzgerald: I suppose what did they call that thing where you crawled under the barbed wire and the machine guns firing over you?

Interviewer: Like an assault course or something like that?

Fitzgerald: That's not exactly what they call it and I forgot what they call it. But I'd say that was probably one of the most stressful things you know the marching and the firing and the weapons and going to class that was no big problem. But when we went out on biff whack living in pup tents that was a little different but I guess that's about it.

Interviewer: Was the physical fitness like the I guess the PT physical training was it you mentioned all that farm work and the extra that was loaded on to you when your brothers left and you said that helped. So you were extremely physically fit for your class?

Fitzgerald: I think so I think I was in pretty good physical condition even in high school I didn't play football my folks wouldn't let any of us play football but I could tangle the best in Phys Ed you know I didn't have any problems with that.

Interviewer: So the physical aspect of basic training other than the mundane

Fitzgerald: No I'd say no it didn't we'd have some test you know where they'd run you through see how much you could endure how many push ups how many pull ups and all this you could do. And of course that would push you to the limit but I didn't feel like that was too bad cause I could hold my own.

Interviewer: What do you remember about the gear you used in basic training did you particularly like it or?

Fitzgerald: I didn't particularly like wearing that full field pack of course your riffle was part of you they taught you that. It was your best buddy and you something you wasn't used to carrying around all of the time but you did there. And I pretty much expected it too because you know I had heard my brothers talk and I knew what they had gone through I tried not to let that bother me.

Interviewer: The M1 you used the M1 did you like that weapon?

Fitzgerald: Yeh I did.

Interviewer: What about the steel pot?

Fitzgerald: Steel pot?

Interviewer: Yes sir.

Fitzgerald: I didn't particularly like it but it was a friend when you needed it.

Interviewer: Was there any other gear you didn't particularly what about the rations how were both in basic training and after you got out?

Fitzgerald: You know we complained about it but all in all it wasn't that bad.

Interviewer: You were getting fed?

Fitzgerald: Getting fed and it was good food and I didn't have a big problem with it sometimes I griped about it but.

Interviewer: After well let me back up a little bit did you use you didn't just use the M1 big string did you do any like machine gun training or grenade training?

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: What do you remember about that?

Fitzgerald: Some of that was short abbreviated training cause I was on an 8 week cycle instead of a 16 week cycle. And I did train with a 30 caliber machine gun and with bazooka and let's see what else I think I remember firing an O3 riffle as well as a M1. And I didn't fire a pistol until after I was over in Japan didn't do that in basic training I don't think I don't remember firing a pistol. I did fire a carbeam I loved the carbeam I thought that was the best weapon they had.

Interviewer: Lighter. After basic training did you get selected did your basic training go to any advanced training? You mentioned being shortened up.

Fitzgerald: Yeh I was selected before basic training along with a lot of other guys. They did the testing and evidently they were in need of certain what do they call it MOS?

Interviewer: Yes sir.

Fitzgerald: And that was we were selected to do that training before basic training so that's the reason we were in the 8 week cycle. After basic training I went to 12 weeks of radio operating school.

Interviewer: Where was that?

Fitzgerald: Where?

Interviewer: Yes sir.

Fitzgerald: Fort Jackson about a half a mile from where basic training was.

Interviewer: And what was like that what kind of radio did you use?

Fitzgerald: We learned international Morris Code and in order to graduate from this school you had to be able to well you didn't have to I don't think but they expected you to be able to send and receive 18 words a minute by hand in that Morris Code. And most of that radio school was every day going to that classroom with the earphones listening to Morris Code and writing. And we also had some other

classroom work on learning about radios and the proper procedure for voice radio so we were voice operators as well as CW what they call continuous working and then Morris Code.

Interviewer: So your job was primarily to receive and give reports on a land line or over a

Fitzgerald: Radio

Interviewer: An antenna a radio?

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: How was it all hooked up how did it work?

Fitzgerald: Well that was just training of course there we did a little bit with actual radios. A lot of our training was with portable radios we carried on our back voice contact cause that's what we did when we got overseas a lot. And then a lot of it was with stationary base station and what they call and angry 9 a n g r c 9 radio that was not too big but you couldn't carry it on your back very well. And the most experience I had that in training in the school was the top four guys in the class you know they had a class ever so many weeks I forgot how many weeks but 12 weeks I guess. But anyway the top four guys in every class I think it was a class graduated every two weeks, got to go to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. And operate a radio for a week there and back to Fort Jackson so I was lucky enough to get in on that deal.

Interviewer: Really

Fitzgerald: So spent a week over at Myrtle Beach.

Interviewer: Did you have evenings off at Myrtle Beach.

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh we split the duty up so the each one of us would have four hours on and maybe 8 or 12 hours off or something like that.

Interviewer: That's really nice did you have a good time in Myrtle Beach?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh had a great time. One of the guys got to sun burned we had to fill in for him because it made him sick but we had a good time good time.

Interviewer: So after were you number one or do you remember which number you were?

Fitzgerald: No I think I was maybe somewhere 2 or 3.

Interviewer: So you were a natural at this basically?

Fitzgerald: Well I had a they told me see I wanted to be a clerk typist or something and I couldn't type but they told me I was adapted to radio and because of some of the test they had given us so that's where I wound up.

Interviewer: So 8 weeks of basic training 12 weeks of radio school RTO School and then a week at Myrtle Beach?

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: And then what did you do after that?

Fitzgerald: A week at home then Far East command. Went to Seattle, Washington and then on a troop ship 13 days over to Japan. Arrived in Japan in the summer of 52, late summer I guess it was, at Camp Drake near Tokyo or Yohoma somewhere along there. At a time when about 90 percent of the guys that were going through there were going to Korea. And a small percentage were staying in Japan and I was lucky enough to be in that small percentage. And traveled from Camp Drake up to Camp Hoggan which is on the northern end of Ponchu the main Island of Japan. And that's where I was assigned to the 19th infantry regiment. Headquarters and headquarters Company 1st Battalion.

Interviewer: What was I'm going to back up a little bit what was that ship like going

Fitzgerald: Terrible it had I think now I'm not real sure but it seemed like it was around 3,000 GIs on that ship. And we spent I think we had two meals a day and we spent most of our time in the chow line what time you weren't sick hanging over the side. But not the greatest experience.

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of the ship?

Fitzgerald: The General R.L Howzie I think that's the way you pronounce it Hozie or something like that I've got a postcard around here somewhere got a picture on it.

Interviewer: Did you share bunks was it like a hot bunk type thing?

Fitzgerald: Bunks were from floor to ceiling I think it was six bunks high and I did have presents of mind left to get on the top bunk. Because you had to share your bunk with your field pack your duffle bag and your riffle and your helmet.

Interviewer: Lord so there wasn't much space to sleep really?

Fitzgerald: You didn't stay in the bunk much I didn't I stayed up on the deck all I could. Just stay in that hole it was down in a hole. Got sea sick about the third day out got over that well it was about the second day out got over that in about two days and the rest of the time okay.

Interviewer: Any storms or anything like that going across?

Fitzgerald: Not going over coming back yes.

Interviewer: When you landed in Japan you said you landed at Camp Drake what was it like there?

Fitzgerald: A lot of guys going and coming.

Interviewer: All different units?

Fitzgerald: Yeh different just you know it was just a lot there was nothing organized as far as I was concerned I was just one of the number. But everybody had a big tag on them and I think they were color coated. When they wanted they wanted a certain group they'd call for everyone that had a red tag or yellow tag then they'd read these orders. And one of the things I remember there was the huge mess hall had two I believe I think they had two but they were huge and they could run a lot of GIs through for a meal in a short time. It was one of the things I remember but I didn't stay there but a couple of days.

Interviewer: Then you went up to Camp Hoggin? And what was that like how was that was that more organized?

Fitzgerald: Very nice place Camp Hoggin was a pilot training camp for Japanese pilots during WWII. They had nice two story barracks good facilities you know everything showers it was very nice.

Interviewer: Now is this where you mentioned this where you were assigned first to the 19th was the 24th infantry division at this camp?

Fitzgerald: Just one regiment.

Interviewer: Just one regiment.

Fitzgerald: The 19th infantry regiment was there. Down a few miles South at Sendi the 21st regiment was located and the 34th I don't remember exactly where the 34th regiment was. But the reason I was with the 21st regiment down it was probably 50, 60 miles down south maybe more I don't know exactly how far it was but I spent two weeks TDY there one time operating a radio for a Major who was a umpire I believe they called him during maneuvers. So then I was familiar with that.

Interviewer: How did it take you to get settled in get all of your gear get your room?

Fitzgerald: At Camp Hoggin?

Interviewer: Yes sir.

Fitzgerald: One day two days at the most.

Interviewer: Did you start to develop friends there quickly?

Fitzgerald: Yeh as a matter of fact one of the guys there that came about two weeks after I did I didn't know him well but I knew him at Fort Jackson and then I made some other friends. And the friends seemed to be the guys that radio operators in my squad you know we were a squad of radio operators we were a communications platoon. And we were together all the time we shared an area of the barracks together our bunks were you know in one corner together so we just naturally became friends.

Interviewer: Now how would they use you as a platoon would they slip ya'll up and send you to different line units?

Fitzgerald: No not the line units not to other companies. But we operated the radios for the battalion officers.

Interviewer: I see

Fitzgerald: We had a Colonel full Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel and a Major and two or three other lesser officers but who were battalion officers. And we were in Headquarters Company so we operated radios for battalion headquarters. And I operated for the Colonel a lot.

Interviewer: So you were assigned a duty for like a specific time periods?

Fitzgerald: Yeh whenever they needed radio operator we were assigned to that person for that time you weren't always assigned to the same one you know it may change at different times. But all the time we were in Japan we were training and much of the time we were in the field doing some kind of training. And they would need radio operators that's when we would strap the radio on our back and go with him wherever he went we went with him.

Interviewer: Now did this Colonel do you recall his name by chance?

Fitzgerald: Drew Colonel Drew.

Interviewer: Did he walk a lot up the field?

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: He did so he didn't have like a jeep that he got.

Fitzgerald: He had a jeep and we rode in the back of the jeep when he rode and we walked when he walked.

Interviewer: So there was perks there was some good perks to being a radio operator?

Fitzgerald: I'd say so especially in training now I understand that in combat it wasn't quite so

Interviewer: Right cause their going to try to take you out first. What was your training like what kind of stuff were ya'll doing?

Fitzgerald: Well soon after I joined the company the regimen we started amphibious training where we climbed these rope ladders up these we first trained out in a field where they just had a big tall wall. It was about 20 to 30 feet wall had these ropes go over it rope ladder and we'd climb over the ladder and down the other side with field pack, radio, riffle, helmet and all of that.

Interviewer: Everything

Fitzgerald: And then after that we started training with ships landing craft infantry the little small LCI that drops the gate you know. And we did that for a month or two I guess we'd go out every day seemed like everyday anyway go out and get on those landing craft climb up on the ship I think we spend the

night a time or two on the ship then the next day we'd debark down the ladder with all of the gear on the landing craft then go hit the beach. Then we did maneuvers like that and the maneuver we did was at Mount Fuji down below Tokyo. And that was along in October, November 52 and you know we assaulted the beach took the mountain and then stayed there for awhile in tents.

Interviewer: Now do you recall the Inchon landing?

Fitzgerald: Not when it happened I don't. I read about it and I know a little bit about it by reading about it.

Interviewer: So that wasn't like a big ordeal you remember then you were there things of that nature?

Fitzgerald: No because I was busy doing my own things I didn't remember much about it.

Interviewer: What when did your you said to me earlier before we started the tape that you had already been over there once to Korea fought a year or so.

Fitzgerald: Right 24th division 19th regimen had just returned to Japan just a couple of months before I joined. And those guys were leaving coming home a lot of them and we were replacements.

Interviewer: No did any of the combat veterans that came back from Korea stay with your unit?

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: What was it like?

Fitzgerald: Some of them went back with me when I went back.

Interviewer: What was it like with those guys were they generally good guys or were they kind of harder than you?

Fitzgerald: Yeh they were good guys most of them as a matter of fact the guy that says I was his replacement I still get a Christmas card from him every year. I have ever since 1954. He's a good guy some of the career guys you know some of the guys who were in for 20 years they stayed around and went back when we went back in 53.

Interviewer: What was your training very amphibious landing specific or did they ever really train for it on a mission?

Fitzgerald: Well we did other training too before the amphibious training was over or after it was over and we were still camped on the side of Mount Fuji and by the way I got a weekend in Tokyo out of that. But we got back from our weekend in Tokyo and one day they called about three 3 or 4 of us in the company and said okay guys we've got another deal for you and they told us that we were going to ski school. And we were supposed to learn how to cross country ski and then come back to our outfit and teach the rest of the guys cross country skiing. And I remember I told the guy I said I believe you've made a mistake I'm from Tennessee and we don't have much snow and I've never seen a pair of skis. And he said that's alright we'll teach you all you need to know so in just a week or two those of us that

were selected they put us on a train and sent us up to the very northern tip of Honchu the big island. It was in November and there was supposed to be snow already but it was just a little snow not much and we stayed till Christmas and learned cross country skiing and winter survival. Then went back later at the same place and had maneuvers and it was about four feet of snow.

Interviewer: They sent you to the right place.

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: Was it fun to come back and teach your unit how to do those things?

Fitzgerald: It was somewhat fun learning to ski especially a guy that had never had a pair of skies on didn't even know what they were. But at the we made it fun we had to learn to use snow shoes and had to pull sleds and you know all of that stuff and we made it fun. And even on the weekend we'd get out and ski on our own and part of the training was movement of troops by skies and I don't know if you know what a Wesel is or not but it's kind of like a jeep with tracks. And we'd tie nylon rope on the back of those Wesels one on each side about and tie a loop in it about every 12 feet just so your skies wouldn't get tangled up with the guy in front of you. You could move about 20 guys behind one of those Wesels and that was fun cause we'd do that on weekends. It was kind of like water skiing but you get one or two guys on there it was a lot of fun.

Interviewer: How long after that did you go to Korea?

Fitzgerald: That was in we had the maneuvers in January I believe it was

Interviewer: Of 52 or 3?

Fitzgerald: 53

Interviewer: Okay

Fitzgerald: We had the winter survival maneuvers in January 53 and then we went back to Camp Hoggin didn't do a whole lot of special training at least until about May I think it was early May. Again they came around and pulled out two or three of us out and said okay guys it was one night get your duffle bags told us what gear to take and what gear to leave and put it in a footlocker in the supply room and don't tell anybody where you're going. So the next morning at 8 o'clock we winded up on a C47 and was advanced party over Korea and that was in lat May of 53.

Interviewer: How did you feel going to Korea while the war was still going on?

Fitzgerald: No more than I expected I had been lucky enough to go before and you mentioned some of the guys that had been in Korea and this was their second trip, one of the most pitiful sights I saw I think was a Master Sargent who was making a career of the Army and he was not what I would call a well educated fellow but he was an okay guy he had a little problem. And I think he was one of the most frightened person I had ever seen in my life he was really pathetic and but other wise you know that was just part of the job we had to do because they trained ups to do it.

Interviewer: In reference to that Master Sargent what do you think about the phrase I'm sure you've heard it you can lead a man into combat once but real leadership is leading a man into combat twice. Do you think he was experiencing some of that? Not him experiencing the leading but him experiencing the fear of knowing?

Fitzgerald: I really don't know other than I just know he was a very frightened person very shook up. And he was not the only one in that situation there was others who had been before a couple of noncommissioned officers and all of our company officer had as a matter of fact had received battle field commissions. Our company commander was a Master Sargent he was an NOC and had received battle field commission and by this time when we went back was a Major so he had climbed on up and he was a very nice guy.

Interviewer: Now seeing these guys especially that master Sargent frightened obviously that didn't help anybody's confidence.

Fitzgerald: It didn't help but I think it made you reach down and get all you had to buck up you know this is something you've got to do. I had settled that score on the ship going over. I said whatever's out there for me I don't know what it is but I'm going to leave it up to the Lord and he'll take care of it.

Interviewer: When you arrived in Korea what was the first thing you remember about it?

Fitzgerald: The runway we landed in Pusan it was on of those metal runways and part of the runway was missing pretty rough landing that was the first thing I remember. And of course it was mountains on ever side too that kind of strange. We went out to some little ole place where they had some tents you know this advanced party it wasn't over 30 or 40 of us. And set up camp and waited for the rest of our crew to come that's all and a matter of fact we were there a week or two maybe three weeks when Sigmund Reed the President of South Korea released all of the prisoners. We were in sight of one of the prison camps and saw the prisoners come out.

Interviewer: Really what I want to ask one question about when you were in Japan real quick and then we'll go back to the prisoners.

Fitzgerald: Okay

Interviewer: The question is did you hear being a radio operator did you hear any actual combat over the radio going on while you're in

Fitzgerald: No

Interviewer: Your mainly focused on your battalion your training the combo for that.

Fitzgerald: Now we did have several alerts there because we were only 20 I've forgotten how many miles but it was like 2 or 3 minutes from Russia. And you know right across the Sea of Japan not very far and several times we had alerts and we would have to get out of our barracks and get in an area that what did we call that area we had fox holes and trenches and so forth.

Interviewer: Now when you first landed you said you were around a POW camp.

Fitzgerald: Yeh

Interviewer: What was that like?

Fitzgerald: We could just see it at a distance at that point and time (he has to get up and turn of the phone).

Interviewer: We were talking about the POW camp. You said you could see it at a distance?

Fitzgerald: Yeh you know it was just a that particular one where we saw the prisoners from they were close enough that we really didn't know much about it but they were all about the same. They had 3 barbed wire fences around them big tall about 10 foot barbed wire fences. And inside the compound they'd have either quanza huts or some kind of little hut with metal roof and you could see those guys milling around in there. That particular one I wasn't close to others later I was closer to.

Interviewer: Now you said you watched them run they were afraid they were gonna

Fitzgerald: Well you know I thought at the time that when Sigmund Reed had pulled his guards off that they were escaping. But I also remember that a lot of them loaded on trucks and since then I've read some history about the war and the South Korean Army actually helped some of these guys some of these POWs hide and stay with South Koreans. But a lot of the prisoners didn't want to go back to North Korea and I think it was 27,000 that ran or they let loose on that particular day that was on the 18th of June.

Interviewer: It would be interesting to see how many of those guys defected from the North Korean Army.

Fitzgerald: Well now I've got a book that indicated that there was a large number of them and this was one of the problems with North Korea and communist they didn't want to admit that a lot of other guys didn't want to come back to communism that was one of the big deals in the peace talks.

Interviewer: Speaking of peace talks what do you remember of that? Did you when you landed in Korea did you know they were going on?

Fitzgerald: Oh yeh I knew they were going on.

Interviewer: I'm sure a lot of guys were hoping they would work out.

Fitzgerald: Yeh we were all the time.

Interviewer: What was your reaction when you actually well what did you do up to the armorist and what was your reaction after the armorist?

Fitzgerald: Like I said we were there a couple of weeks or three weeks before the rest of the outfit came and joined us and when they came and joined us in Pusan we loaded on trucks and convoyed up to a city

called Tagoo. And started guarding prisoners in a small a very small prison camp and we were only there like maybe three weeks and then we loaded those guys up and sent them on up to Tajohn which is another city 50 miles or so further north. And we followed them we went up there and it was very large the POW camp there they had a large number of POWs and this was like in July and hot very thing hot. But the prisoners I remember the first night that we were there the prisoners kind of agitated us or what they would do was get up in the middle of the night beat on pans beat on the side of the quanza huts you know just make a lot of noise. And when they'd do that well they'd call of us out and we'd form a circle a perimeter around the POW camp with riffles ready for anything that took place. And they'd do that for several nights.

Interviewer: Trying to ware you out?

Fitzgerald: Yeh harassments what it was and for a while we slept in uniform with boots on because of that just so we could get up on a moments notice. This compound was much larger place before they turned a bunch loose and they had concentrated it all into one side of it and my particular group our headquarters company was probably three quarters of a mile from the main compound so we had to jump up get on a truck and ride up to the compound to walk the perimeter.

Interviewer: How long did you do this duty?

Fitzgerald: I didn't actually go up to the compound but three or four maybe a week or so and then I another fellow and I one of my friends and I operated the radio 24 hours a day for the rest of the time that's all we did he and I.

Interviewer: What kind of radio transmissions were you doing? What kind of transmissions what kind of radio stuff we you doing?

Fitzgerald: Well everything was coded so the messages that we sent we didn't know what they were and what we received they were encrypted. And so we didn't have voice contact it was strictly CW Morris Code and you know we didn't know any of the messages what the content was.

Interviewer: Did you hear any maybe artillery rounds hitting at night?

Fitzgerald: You could hear I don't know if it was artillery or if it was bombs but you could occasionally hear them yeh.

Interviewer: But where you were at was fairly secure?

Fitzgerald: Yeh we were we were 50 miles from any combat and we were close we were near an airbase in the Loches line over we could see and hear them often.

Interviewer: Your unit was going to stay there and we'll say the war didn't end, move to where? Do you know?

Fitzgerald: I think our unit was on the way to the front line when the prisoner thing took place and they just plugged us in to guard prisoners that's my idea. I don't know that but that's what I've always

thought and when the peace treaty was signed our outfit shipped these prisoners north by rail by train. And we hung around there for a couple of weeks after that loaded up on LSTs back then Kogel Island and this was in the fall of 53 and when we got to Kogel a week or two after that one of my friends and I had enough points that we could go to R&R in Tokyo. So we started off we loaded up on this ferry to Pusan got over there to go to Tokyo to have a fun week in Tokyo and while we were there one of these planes ferrying these guys back and forth across crashed and killed a bunch of them so they canceled all R&R so we turned around and went back on the ferry over to Kogel. And about two weeks after that I got orders to come home.

Interviewer: How did you feel coming home?

Fitzgerald: Oh man that was great. But I had to go back to Japan and take care of the things I had stored at Camp Hoggins. And that took about a month this was about November took about a month to go up to Camp Hoggins by train and take care of that business come back down to Tokyo get ready at Camp Drake again get ready to come home and it was right before Christmas it was like the 18th or 15th somewhere in December. And they were putting guys on everything that was coming towards the states and so there was an aircraft carrier coming and they said they had room for 324 guys on it and I think I was 319.

Interviewer: Skin of your teeth huh?

Fitzgerald: But anyway that was a rough trip home.

Interviewer: Now you talked about you kind of mention earlier about a storm on the way home.

Fitzgerald: This aircraft carrier was loaded with planes that had been shot up and use up in Korea jets and prop landing both and it was a small carrier. Anyway Christmas Eve night we hit a typhoon in the it was raking on water in the back and the front and some of the old sailors had been in for 20 years were sick as dogs you know and all of us GIs we sick it was bad news. But anyway we survived.

Interviewer: The sailors that had been in 20 years they were scared?

Fitzgerald: Yeh they were sick.

Interviewer: Wow

Fitzgerald: It was bad bad storm.

Interviewer: So you got home where did you land?

Fitzgerald: San Francisco

Interviewer: Did you get a rail back to Tennessee?

Fitzgerald: No flew in an old converted DC6 I think they call them. I don't even think the thing was pressurized they issued us about four blankets each when we got in it there was no heat on it I know and we flew back to Camp Chappy, Arkansas. That's where I was discharged.

Interviewer: So the moment you got back to the states essentially you were discharged. Not that moment but you didn't have any state side duty after?

Fitzgerald: Just a few days a few days well let's see I'll tell you how fast it was we landed on December 30 and I was discharged at Camp Chappy on January the 9th.

Interviewer: That is quick.

Fitzgerald: When you got home were your parents happy to see you?

Interviewer: Oh yeh

Fitzgerald: They had gone through this three times before.

Interviewer: Right and boy they were lucky parents you know. I guess my last question well its' not really a question cause we are about an hour now and we can go longer but I want to open up kind of cover the whole spectrum you did and if there's anything you kind of feel like we missed you know you can touch on now or anything you want to say.

Fitzgerald: I think we pretty well covered it I don't know anything I particularly want to say about although I will say this having had three brothers who went through WWII all of them came home safely. There were some thoughts that went through my mind whether we could make it four or not when I was on the plane going out to Seattle Washington but like I said I settled that score on the ship going over and I didn't worry about that anymore. Whatever came came.

Interviewer: You think all soldiers go through that all men that go to combat go through a time that they reconcile?

Fitzgerald: I don't know I don't know

Interviewer: Did that help you do your duty?

Fitzgerald: Sure

Interviewer: You didn't concern yourself with your self but your job.

Fitzgerald: Not anymore I basically said to myself you know if my three brothers can do it I can do it with the Lords help.

Interviewer: Well thank you Mr. Fitzgerald and your service is not forgotten. I Told my grandfather this is the forgotten war they call it to me I haven't forgot.

Fitzgerald: I appreciate it.

Interviewer: You're welcome.