

Interview conducted Oct. 23, 2022 by Judy Allen at the home of George Goodner

George David Goodner, veteran of the Korean War, said that fifty years after the war, he had the opportunity to travel back to the country with a group of other veterans for a ceremonial trip. "They took a bunch of the veterans back to Korea fifty years after the war," he said. George's wife, JoAnn, joined him for the trip. "We stayed over a month and toured the continent with friends."

George was drafted to the Army, serving from 1951 – 1952 in Korea. "During the midpoint of the war, Truman lengthened our stay in the Army." George remained in the Army until 1953. "I had been in the National Guard at Idabel. When I went away to college, I couldn't go to the National Guard meetings, so I got an honorable discharge.

"When I was drafted, because I had been in the National Guard, they put me in charge of the guys from National Guard coming to Oklahoma City from Idabel. We got there and took a lot of tests. I took the test for Officers Candidate School (OCS). I had gone to leadership school. After leadership school, I was kind of in limbo. They made me Cadre to the guys in Artillery. I taught in Artillery and Artillery Survey until the next year. I never heard a word about OCS. Then, one day, a new lieutenant from the military academy (West Point) was cleaning up the house and they found 13 of our applications for OCS behind a cabinet. The next morning, I had orders for Korea. I was told I qualified for OCA and was told I could get on a plane and go to OCS. I had just under a year left, and decided I really didn't want to be a career officer.

I was assigned to the 955th Field Artillery as an artillery surveyor. We did observation from the front line and we also took our instruments and had guys on two hills (mountains) and shot lines from two angles and could determine the location of our enemy. We were in direct fire while we were there."

George said, "We took shifts and would go up on the mountain, which was the front line. We would run surveys, pinpoint targets. That is mainly what I did while I was there.

"One of the most impressive times (for me) included when we were stationed Chorwan – that was a supply point). I don't know how many there were of Turkish fighters – this had a lot to do with creating an atmosphere where you learned about all those people. Another group was Haile Selassie's (former Emperor of Ethiopia) personal guard. Of the fighters from Ethiopia – the smallest man was 6'2". They were quite a group of fighters.

I have fond memories of one night when they sent people all over the mountain and they went out and scoured the woods. Some guys from Turkey brought back a barrel full of snails. We boiled snails and had beer and snails.

On the same night one guy had been sharpening his knife. He was suddenly gone and I asked his officer in charge, 'Where did he go?' and was told he would be back in a minute. The Turk came back and had another ear on a wire on his belt. He kept an ear for each person he killed. The Koreans had shelled the town of Chorwan until there was nothing left but the bank vault. Mostly using our weapons. They ambushed the Marines up in North Korea and got all their munitions their Howitzers, and were using our own weapons to shoot at us.

When asked if there were any animals, either for work or pets, around the area he served, George said, "It was rare to have a dog because the Koreans ate them. We had a dog. He went everywhere we went. If we went up the mountain, the dog went up the mountain. If he found

trip wires or anything like that he would bark until we came and looked at it. He got blown up by one of them. We picked him up and ran him back down the mountains fast as we could to the doctor. He operated on the dog and he lived.”

George said, “He was a big dog, red hair, and a black tongue. He was protective of us. Every time we went to Seoul, we had to leave someone in the jeep to protect the dog, because people would steal him to eat, if we didn’t watch him. They had shops with the meats out and dogs were one of the meats. It was a whole different culture.”

He said the whole peninsula they were on was covered with pheasant.

George also described the local people, “The farmers in Korea refused to move. Most people migrated to the South and went down near Puson, but farmers stayed and farmed their land. They would be right in the middle of the war and be out there working. We had young kids who took jobs like manservants who took care of a lot of things in our outfit.”

George’s work time in the Army surveying for artillery was spent on the high points of the mountain to pinpoint the best place to fire upon the enemy. “On top of a mountain, we would find the best mountain we could find and we would build an igloo-type place of dirt and place our instruments and watch and see if the enemy was moving or coming our way and report back. And then we would send back the target information we wanted them to shoot.”

George said in addition to playing poker, pinocle and chess, the soldiers loved to watch movies. “I was the one who ran the projector. They delivered the films on trucks. We watched John Wayne and a lot of comedies.” George even built a theater out of pine trees and large shell casings. “After I became the projectionist, I asked our leader if I could build a theater by cutting down pine trees and using artillery shell casing for seats around side of hill. I took two pine trees and tied the screen up to them.”

George said, “They moved us around. I wound up way up in North Korea just before the end of the war. They had a major mountain they were trying to take called White Horse Mountain. The North Koreans and Chinese were trying the best they could to get more area. And we were pretty far up in North Korea.

“Our crew had eight people. We had our own special tent. We were sent out to form a place for the army to retreat in case we needed to. We went down and it was like a big picnic. The guys took their battery driven radios, we got there for a couple of days, formed up places to put howitzers, then got an urgent call, a guy came screaming up in a jeep and they wanted us back up at the encampment because they were having shelling from the Chinese. The enemy had dug tunnels in that mountain, all through it. We started a war with artillery. We shot all the munitions we had up there. We sent troops back to Chorwan in South Korea. We used everything, even our jeep, to take munitions back up the mountain, to keep firing. We would take White Horse Mountain, then the Chinese and North Koreans would take it back. After we got back, we took every vehicle we had in the unit to Chorwan, loaded up with munitions – after we occupied the mountain that time, we filled the tunnels with dynamite, let the enemy come into the tunnels, then exploded the dynamite. The mountain looked like it lifted up about ten or twelve feet, then fell. In my opinion, that was the straw that broke the camel’s back.”

George said, “Shortly after we took White Horse, I came home.

“The guy who wrote the book ‘The Coldest War’ was absolutely on point! Korea was the coldest place I have ever lived. We had snow on the mountain that was 6 or 8 feet deep. I was

getting shot at one place and fell down in the snow and lay there until I sank down through the snow and decided I wasn't getting shot at anymore and got up and left. It was a strange place.

"Serving in the military was for me, quite an adventure. The only place I had ever been outside of Idabel was San Diego. I worked there right out of High School. I worked there all summer. I attended a Baptist church in San Diego. About eight guys there about my age asked, 'What are you going to do when it is time to leave?' I said, 'I am going back to Oklahoma,' and they said, 'So are we.' We all went to Oklahoma State University (OSU). I made enough to try it at OSU. I didn't do so well, so I worked as a lineman for Rural Electric Association (REA), and I did survey work for REA.

George was raised by his grandmother in Idabel. His wife, JoAnn, is also from Idabel. "We lived about eight blocks apart, but we didn't meet until we were at Stillwater at OSU" said George.

When he came back from Korea, he wasn't sure what to do. George's Uncle Bob, a father figure to him, outfitted him in some new suits and gave him some career advice. George moved to Utah and worked at Intermountain School, a boarding school for Navajo. He had worked there a while prior to going to Korea. When back in Oklahoma, George worked surveying for a pipeline north of Broken Bow.

George said basic training and leadership training both required a lot of physical buildup. "When I went into the Army, I weighed about 120 pounds. When I got out, I weighed 175 and it was all muscle. I stayed about that weight until about two years ago." George said after having a stroke, he lost weight.

George said some difficult times while in the service stood out for him. "In leadership school, mostly Corporals and some Sergeants who were in charge of us did their best to rub our nose in the dirt. Their purpose was to run people out and keep only the ones who would stay with it. I had a buddy from Maine and he was one of the ones who stayed with it. We encouraged each other. He would come in and say 'I think I will tell them to stick it and I will go back to the barracks.' I would talk him out of it and the next day he would talk me out of it. That (the Corporals and Sergeants trying to run us out) was one of the worst parts.

"Another bad part – we would go on 20 and 25-mile hikes. We would go through exercises - camouflage ourselves so couldn't be seen. Leadership school was a good education for me. I felt pretty confident after that. I didn't worry about being beat by any Chinaman or Korean.

George and JoAnn have two daughters, Darla and Vicki. He said that the best advice he could give young people is to marry someone you love and stay with them. He also says, "Stay in school until you graduate. And travel." He and JoAnn made a pact when they married that they would travel. They have been to all 50 states and 166 countries.

Medals and citations received by Goodner include the Korean Service Medal with 2 Bronze Stars and a United Nations Service Medal. He received a Korean War Medal in 2022 presented by Korean Ambassador Ahn Myung-soo.

Asked what he thought the greatest invention of mankind that has made the greatest impact, George said, "Maybe the electric lights!"