

John Shoemaker interview at his home in Moore, August 23, 2022

Interviewed by Judy Allen, recorded on iPhone – written notes taken, signed release form. His daughter, Johnette McKay was present. Photos were taken of John and his DD214.

John Shoemaker, Korean War Veteran, served the United States military 22 years, six months. "I Served in 179th Infantry 45th division in 1947-48. Spent two summer encampments at Ft. Sill Army installation at Lawton, Oklahoma. This is prior to my enlistment to United States Air Force, August 16, 1950. I retired from active service on Oct. 1 1970." John said, "My basic training was at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas for 9 weeks. After graduation from basic training, I chose Radio Operator as my career," he said.

Ft. Gordon was the Army base in Georgia where John was sent for technical training in 31 weeks as a High-Speed International Morse Code operator. He was then assigned to Kelly AFB (Texas), as a ground radio operator. "Intensive training began in a live radio operation network. The network encompassed with other Air Bases in the continental US and communications with the Airborne operators. I was assigned to an experience to a higher rank individual trainer of duties involved. I received Special Orders for re-assignment to March AFB (Riverside, California)," said John. His long career in the Air Force included a series of assignments across the globe-

John was 20 when he joined the Air Force. "I was working at a sheet metal shop and two friends working there were having a discussion about going into military service. We decided to meet Monday morning at the recruiter's office and enlist. The two friends decided not to sign up, but I did."

John said he never regretted the decision. He became a Morse Code Radio Operator. He gave over two decades to the armed services, evolving from a radio operator to more progressive communications as technology developed.

"I had been recruited by the National Guard at Ardmore AFB in 1947-48. The unit I was assigned was the 179th Infantry group, Ardmore, Oklahoma." He enlisted in the United States Air Force with active service from October 16, 1950 to October 1, 1970.

"I made friends at all the different bases I was assigned.

"I received my first overseas assignment to Korea in 1952, then to Carswell AFB in Fort Worth, Texas, then Vance AFB in Enid, Oklahoma. Then to Korea in 1955 – my second time there."

John said, "Upon arrival, to my communication unit, I was requested not to unpack my things and await further assignment to another location. I was assigned to a remote communication site off the mainland of Korea on a small 3x5 mile island northerly direction of North Korea as a replacement to Officer in Charge of the Communication Relay Operation as Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) of the operation. The communication site was at the top of the Mountain, and the living compound area was at the bottom edge of the mountain. We basically had 13 personnel to man the communication facility – radio operators and radio maintenance repair personnel, a power unit engineer to handle our generator units supplying the electric source to our site, one cook and one air police with a K-9. We had dome-shape Quonset hut as live quarters, and pre-fab building for our dining hall and supply storage space. We had no entertainment facility, but we had outdoor weight lifting equipment. On the opposite side of the building was the ammunition supply and a .50-caliber machine weapon.

About 75 yards from our compound area we stored about 60 barrels of fuel to operate our generators.”

Life on the small island was further described by John, “We hired some Korean refugees from the village to support little jobs like barbers, workers in the kitchen, outdoor maintenance around the compound, etc. We had periodic air drops for perishable food supplies. We had monthly supplies delivered by U-boat. These included petroleum supplies, mail delivery, personal supplies ordered from Base Exchange on the mainland like toilet articles and postage stamps. They would deliver six movie films to watch with our 16mm movie projector. We normally showed the film in our dining hall area in the evenings. Needless to say, the movies were played repeatedly to help break the boredom of no other activities. We played pinnacle card games practically around the clock in the living quarters. I wrote letters daily to my wife and sent out 30 letters every month when the monthly deliveries were made by the U-boat.”

John said, “Near the village there was an orphanage home established by the Presbyterian missionary some years before. I got acquainted with the orphanage one Sunday morning strolling down to the village. I could hear the children singing Christian songs. I invited myself in and listened – the children’s voices sounded beautiful. I became acquainted with the caretakers of the orphanage and the children. We used gestures to communicate, as I didn’t understand Korean, and they not English. On a cold winter evening on Christmas Eve, the caretaker brought the children to our compound and shared Christmas songs. It was terribly cold so I invited them into our dining hall, and had my cook prepare some hot chocolate. It was a delight to have them entertain – truly that was God’s blessing.”

He continued, “Besides our presence on the island there were Korean military forces assigned to the opposite side of the island. In certain areas of the island they posted guards. We knew about their presence but we never went to their area. One of their officers visited our compound and requested permission to allow their officers to watch our films. I granted permission, as long as enlisted personnel were also allowed.”

Following the second Korean tour, John was sent to Ardmore, Oklahoma Air Force Base in 1957. “This was my home town. While assigned here, the base began to be shut down in 1959. Communication personnel were deployed to other bases, and I was left in charge as the non-commissioned officer over Communications Center with minimum personnel to operate the Communications Center.”

John said the Ardmore base commander called one day and instructed, “Shut down the switchboard, lock up, and report to Shaw AFB, South Carolina.” The next assignment was Dreux Air Force in France for three years. “My favorite assignment in my Air Force career was at Dreux AFB in France. My family was with me. The assignment was a special disbursement operating station. All key personnel were being sent to other air bases in Europe. These personnel could choose where to be sent. I had asked to be sent to Germany, but they decided to retain me as a non-commissioned officer in charge of the Communications Center. I had minimum personnel to oversee before being sent back to the United States. My family and I had opportunities to travel and see many places in France. We also traveled to Germany, Scotland, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, and the Netherlands. We were able to see all the major cities in these countries,” said John.

“We had a Volkswagon I had won from a raffle put on by the 7117 Tactical Wing of the National Guard. I competed in Archery, and was away at a competition when the phone call

came that I had won the little red Volkswagon bug. Our family traveled to many places in that car!”

His wife was Peggy Daney Shoemaker. “I met her and her brother at Falls Creek, a religious camp for youth. I didn’t really officially meet her but I knew who she was. Our church groups were in the same area. We never got in a conversation. Then a few months later, our church contacted her father who was a southern Baptist minister to come to our church to hold a revival and she came along to the revival and we officially met. This revival lasted one week so we had a chance to know one another. She lived near Ada, Oklahoma. We talked about her school and my school and got more acquainted. A few months later, our church called Vin Daney – her father - to be the pastor of our church. He brought his family to the church home building where their place would be (parsonage to live). My church was McAlester Missionary Baptist Church,” said Shoemaker. He and Peggy were married 49 years and six months before she passed in 2002. That had a daughter, Johnette (McKay) and two sons, Bruce and Mark.

The Shoemaker family returned to Oklahoma in 1963 when John was assigned to Tinker AFB to a Headquarter level as Radio Operation Technician. He moved into a new field of Computer Operation, updating computer program library tapes and running computer programs at a large main frame operation.

John was sent back overseas to RAF Chicksands in England in 1966 for three years, then Kelly AFB in San Antonio, where he submitted his paperwork for retirement.

John had another thirty years in the workforce – a fifteen-year career with Fidelity Bank in Data Processing and fifteen more years of computer services with Electronic Data System Corporation.

John was active in several sports. He played baseball and softball, and continued to compete in archery until he was in his 80’s. He bowled and played basketball for many years. “I normally represented the Air Base where I was assigned when I played basketball. In France, their country’s Olympic team was preparing for the ‘60’s Olympics and they wanted to compete with an American team, so different teams were selected from air bases nearby and I was selected for a team to give the France Olympic team an opportunity to compete against a US basketball team. We played a fairly decent game against them.”

John said he played all team sports until he was 36. “In the 1970’s I played my last basketball game and decided to go to individual sport and competed in Archery, until I was in my 80’s. I have been very active.

“I have been doing my workouts at gymnasiums (three days a week). I initially began with robotic exercise and weightlifting, which I still do. Maybe that has kept me healthy. While I am at the gymnasium, the younger men give me inspiration. I see them working so hard and I try to work out just as hard as them. They motivate me.” He said that even though he does all his workouts, strength-wise, he is not the same.

When asked what John thinks is the greatest invention of mankind that has made the greatest impact, he replied, “Computers. When I was assigned to Tinker, the military was in process of going into computerized operation. At the time, I was still in the communication center and when I heard people were being chosen to get training for computer in software, I immediately asked to be given consideration in the new computerized field that is being developed. It was completely different than the work I was doing. That was the beginning of my new career in

computer systems. Back then you had to learn all the configurations of the numbers. It was based on decimal, binary and octal. And our computer operations on the mainframe in order to execute any software, you used a switch your computer is set up on decimal, binary and octal.

"I was sent to Ohio to learn computer systems. Later in time they had a data processing center at Tinker. It was a multiple network system (many bases). My responsibility was to test programs sent to me and I would make sure they would operate as they should," said John.

"That is how my new job for the last two years of my military career was," he said.

John and his wife felt it was important to be examples of Christian values. It was important that their children share those Christian values and strong faith in God. In addition to living those values with a purpose, John worked to help establish the First Indian Baptist Church of Moore in Sept 7, 1986.

He still attends church there. John Shoemaker received the United Nations Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Korean Service Medal Go 523 Hq FFAF, ; good conduct medal, Par 1 SO 68 Hq 824th ABGRU

He was discharged from the 824th Opns Sq on Aug 15, 1954.

\

Because of the way I had to take care of myself the only experience in that situation, when I got married, that is when I wanted my children never to experience and I provided everything for them. Anything they needed we gave guidance to our three children. Because I missed out a lot by not having anything to help me, I turned that situation around to not letting that happen to my children.

I had to do everything even as a teenager learning through my own efforts. I had no one to help me during school assignments and I think that is something that is something you would normally receive from parents so that is how I came independent taking care of my self.

What is your advice for young people today?

To choose a career and prepare yourself of attending a college or university and choose a career you will enjoy. What I have seen. You have a lot of college graduates nowadays who have a field they have decided

.....

Word count

Cut line:

At a 2022 Choctaw Nation Memorial Day event, Staff Sgt. John Shoemaker, (retired) impressive in his uniform, accepted a Korean War Medal from Korean Ambassador ____.