



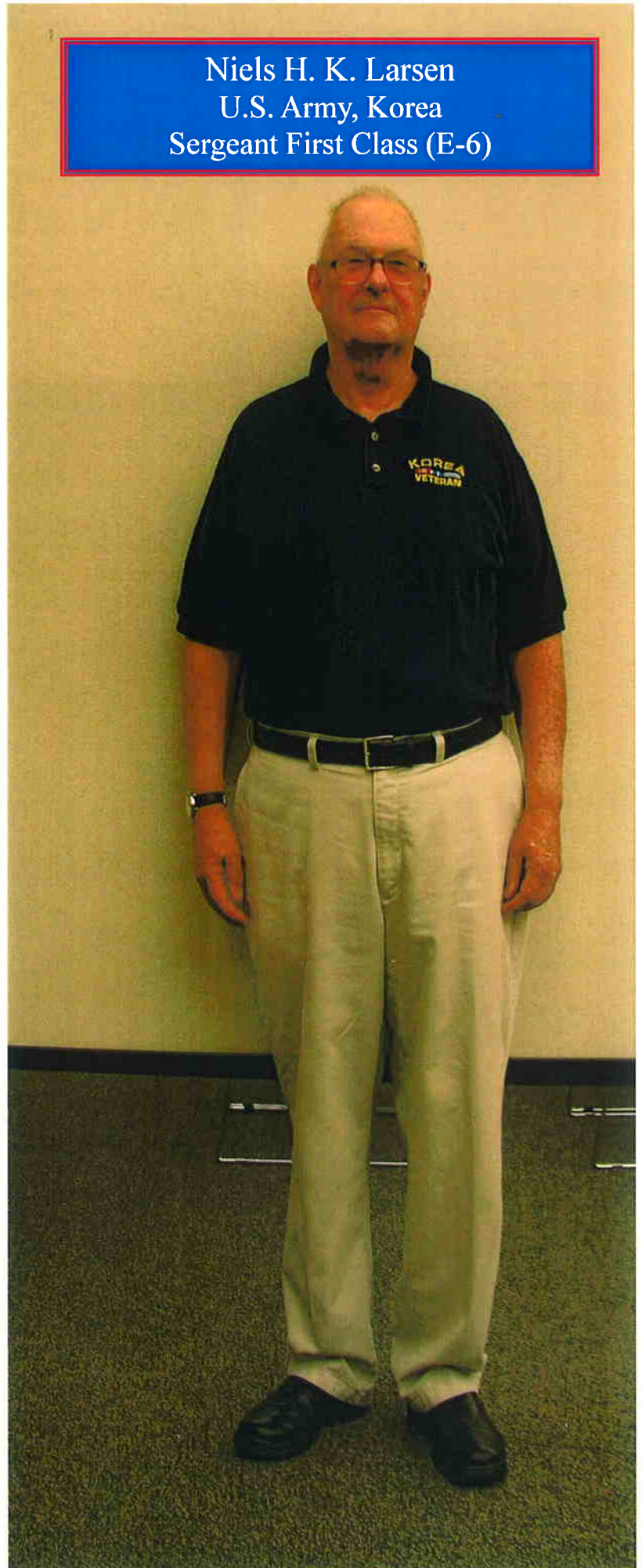
Niels H. K. Larsen  
U.S. Army, Korea  
Sergeant First Class (E-6)

**Niels H. K. Larsen**

Veterans  
History  
Project  
Transcript

Interview conducted  
May 31, 2005

Niles Public Library  
Niles Public Library District  
Niles, Illinois



Niles Public Library District  
Veteran's History Project Transcript

**Veteran:** Niels H. K. Larsen

**Rank:** Sergeant, First Class (E-6)

**Branch of Service:** U.S. Army

**Theater:** Korean War

**Interview Date:** 5/31/2005, 1:30-3 p.m.  
Updated: 9/6/2005 2-3 p.m.

**Place:** Large Meeting Room B

**Equipment:** Panasonic Standard Cassette Transcriber **Interviewer/Transcriber:** Neil O'Shea

*This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005, somewhat appropriately the day after Memorial Day, here in the large meeting room of the Niles Public Library in Niles, Illinois. My name is Neil O'Shea and I'm speaking with Niels--Niels H.K. Larsen (first name pronounced like "kneels.") Mr. Larsen was born on October the 9<sup>th</sup>, 1931, and he has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. (Interviewer's words)*

*Niels is wearing a very interesting shirt today. It's a Korean veteran's shirt, and he's also the commander of the Korean War Veterans Association, Greater Chicago Chapter, so Mr. Larsen is a perfect first interviewee from America's veterans who served with distinction in the Korean War. So, Mr. Larsen, when did you enter the service?*

**Tape Counter Mark 12 - Joining the Army Reserves**

I joined the Army Reserves in October, 1949, just after I turned eighteen. I was a student at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, and in the Army ROTC. I was also a member of the rifle team. The Army Reserve Unit in Lafayette recruited a number of us from the ROTC. We became members of the 393rd Field Artillery Battalion (155 self-propelled howitzers).

A number of us joined the Reserves because; it would be interesting, and a chance to make a little extra money. Also things were sort of quiet in the world at that time. And, so, we would meet in a building in Lafayette every two weeks for our training. It worked out very well.

As a Freshman at Purdue, I was studying Forestry. In the Summer of 1950, I worked for the Forest Service in Coeur d'Alene National Forest in Idaho. Our job was to pull weeds that were affecting and killing a lot of trees. We lived in tents and maybe once a week we would get into Coeur d'Alene. There were other teams of workers who were farther into the woods and only got into town about once a month. Occasionally, we'd get together and have a beer party out in the woods.

**38 - Hitchhiking home from Idaho at war's outbreak**

Then on Sunday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1950, I will always remember we were taking it easy, and sitting in a tent, and then they announced on the radio that South Korea had been invaded by

North Korea. Most of us, we didn't know where that was located. I had a hunch, I don't know why, that our unit was going to be activated. I talked to my boss who had been in the Second World War, and told him of my hunch. He said, "Well, if you feel that way, go, because I did the same thing in the Second World War." I then decided to hitchhike home to Chicago.

*How long did that take?*

I think it took about four days. I did in like thirteen rides. I got the first ride out of Coeur d'Alene with a couple of kids. They had a big keg of beer on the back seat of the car, and I thought, Uh! Oh! I rode with them for awhile and then said "Just let me off here." I didn't want to go with them. I got to the west entrance of Yellowstone National Park. You are not supposed to hitchhike there. However, a man and his son stopped and said they lived in Billings, Montana and were spending the day in the Park.

They said, "If you'd like to come with us you can." So, I said, "Fine." They were very nice. They offered to put me up for the night, but when we got to Billings. I told them I wanted to keep going.

I was standing by the highway thumbing a ride when a police car came by. He came by again, stopped and asked me for my identification. I had all my clothing, logging boots, and such in my duffel bag.

*You weren't wearing a uniform?*

No, just Levi's, and such. I told him where I had been working and that I felt that I would be called for active duty and was heading home. I had the money and could have taken a bus, but I wanted to try and hitchhike home. He said, "Well, you won't get a ride here." He said, "Get in the car." I did, and he took me to a gas station where the truckers often stop. He went into the station there and told the attendant "Get this guy a ride." I did get a ride. The last ride I got was at a gas station by the Wisconsin Dells. The attendant there said, "I'll see if I can find someone going to Chicago," He did, and this trucker and his brother had a farm in Wisconsin. They would bring eggs to the market on Water Street in Chicago. The brother I rode with lived in Bensenville, IL. He said, "Well, I can give you a ride if you want to give me a hand loading eggs." "I have to stop in Bensenville and then I'll drop you off." I said, "That's fine." He dropped me off within a couple of blocks from my home. It was about six or seven in the morning, and my folks they were eating breakfast when I walked into the house. Later that day, they announced on the radio that our Reserve Unit and three other units were being called to active duty. We were supposed to go to Camp McCoy for two weeks in September, but I received a telegram stating that summer camp was cancelled and to report for active duty.

*Camp McCoy was located in?*

Near Tomah, Wisconsin.

We were activated in Lafayette, Indiana, September 11, 1950. We were the cadre and most of the fellows were World War II vets. We stayed in a hotel in Lafayette for about two weeks. Double

and triple-deck bunks were set up in the rooms. There were maybe four or five of these bunks in a room. At first the people were very happy for us, but then some of the fellows would get into trouble and people would ask, "When are you leaving?" If someone got into trouble, they would be restricted to the hotel. They weren't supposed to go out. It was funny! The Monon rail line ran right alongside the hotel, and we would hold our formations and drills on that street. We had to move when the train was coming through. We took a lot of razzing from students at Purdue.

### 98 – Camp Rucker and firecrackers

But, then, finally, we took a train to Camp Rucker, Alabama. The Army Camp had been closed since 1945, and, together with other units we reopened the Camp. When we arrived, we found snakes and all sorts of things in the building when we were getting set up. We did not have our weapons at the time for proper training. We would go into town and purchase lots of firecrackers for simulation when holding our field exercises.

The Minnesota National Guard, the 40<sup>th</sup> Division, arrived at the camp, as well as many draftees. Units were being brought up to strength. Equipment began arriving and training progressed.

*Would anybody drafted during this time in Chicago possibly end up at Camp Rucker?*

Possibly. A lot of them went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. A number of draftees filled up our Units to bring us up to full strength. It took us some time to get the personnel uniformed and equipped.

*Did you have a boot camp or a basic training experience in Camp Rucker?*

I didn't have a lot, because I had some training already. We had to help with the new draftees with their training, and this is how I also received more training...

*So, at Camp Rucker, you had the draftees and the Reservists and the National Guard all coming together*

That's correct.

Early in January of 1951, I was sent to supply school, for about two weeks at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. During that time, our Battalion moved from Camp Rucker, Alabama to Camp Polk, Louisiana. Other activated units arrived at Fort Polk, among them the Oklahoma National Guard 45<sup>th</sup> Division.

### 135- transfer to the Korea-bound 424<sup>th</sup>

The 424<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 8-inch Howitzers (tractor drawn), was across the road from 393<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, which was my Unit. They were an Indianapolis, Indiana Reserve Unit, which had been activated in September, 1950. They received their orders for Korea and needed fillers to complete their table of organization. I believe about seventy of us were transferred to the 424<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. During this time in Korea, individuals with

certain specialties in Artillery, and so forth, were needed quickly and individuals were pulled from various Units and flown to Korea, where they might go right into combat.

147- "one in a million" anecdote

One experience I would like to relate is about a fellow Purdue student and Reservist. He was pulled from our Unit and shipped to Korea. We didn't know what happened to him. My old Unit, the 393<sup>rd</sup>, received orders for Germany a week after we had been transferred to the 424<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. When I was in Korea, I heard from one of the fellows that our buddy had been wounded the first day in Korea and was sent back to the States, where he was discharged and returned as a student to Purdue University. When the army moves you individually anywhere, you carry your personal record, 201 File with you. When my friend landed in Pusan, everything was in turmoil and he was told "Go in that tent over there and find a bunk." It so happened that the tent was full of wounded. The next day someone came into the tent and said, "Alright, come on now. We're going now." They took all the wounded out, and my friend followed right along. They boarded a ship, which took them to Hawaii. The hula girls welcomed them when they arrived in Pearl Harbor. He just followed along and ended back in Camp Stoneman, California, being processed for release from active service. The last person to review his file was a Major who said, "We can keep you in for another year!" since he hadn't completed two years of service. My friend said, "Please don't." The Major said, "If you made this far, I am not going to stop you." So he was released from active duty. That was a one-in-a-million occurrence!

*Yeah. That wasn't your experience.*

No. No. No.

*So you saw-- I don't know how much you had traveled before you went to Purdue in this country, but you'd been out in Idaho*

Yes.

*And now then you're in the Army and you're down in Alabama and Louisiana and South Carolina*

Yes

*And you're learning a lot*

Yes, and seeing a lot of the country

Our Battallion went by troop train from Camp Polk, Louisiana to Camp Stoneman, California, where we spent about two weeks being processed for shipment overseas. We received all of our shots, and went to the theatre just about every day to see combat films from Korea and received lectures of what to expect. We did have some leave time.

208 – working with howitzer

*Speaking of the guns, the eight- inch howitzer - a piece of field artillery?*

Yes, in artillery, you have guns and howitzers. Guns fire a flat trajectory, and the howitzer fires usually a lofted trajectory. The 8-inch howitzer shell weighs about 200 pounds and stands almost to your waist. The weapon has a range of about seventeen plus miles. There is a loading tray to carry the shell, which has had the fuse put on it, to the breech, where it is pushed into the barrel. Increments of powder charges, depending on the range to the target, are placed in the barrel and breech is then closed and ready to fire...

*Do you cover your ears when you fire it or anything?*

Yes. You would put your hands over your ears. Many fellows lost part of their hearing, and some lost most of their hearing.

*No special equipment, no plugs, or anything at all.*

No, no, there was nothing like that.

*So this is 1951-1952, you're heading overseas, and World War II was still on people's minds. They'd remember a great war and the great victory. Now, all of sudden, the troops are saddling up and riding off, as it were. What was the mood of the other soldiers or did you get a sense--*

Some of us looked upon it as an adventure. Some, who had fought in WWII, and knew what war is, weren't too happy, but they didn't hesitate to go. There were also those individuals who had been caught up in the peace time draft at the end of WWII who ended up serving. At the end of WWII, our military was cut to the bone, so when the Korean War began, it meant having to quickly rebuild. The troops who had fought in the Pacific and were in Japan when the war ended were rotated back to the States. Their replacements were mostly inexperienced troops who led a comfortable life on occupation duty in Japan. These were the men who were first sent to Korea to hold back the overwhelming enemy forces until sufficient help could arrive. Many Reservists from the various branches of service were activated and often sent very quickly into combat.

*So, you departed from California, Camp Stoneman, and for Korea.*

Yes.

*On a ship or a plane?*

252 – Pusan, Korea via Japan

On November 6, 1951 we boarded the troop ship U.S.S. General Mann bound for Korea. All our equipment and guns were on board. We arrived in Yokohama, Japan on November 18<sup>th</sup> and boarded a troop train to Sasebo, Japan. Arriving in Sasebo, on November 20<sup>th</sup>, we boarded a Japanese ship, which took us to Pusan, Korea, where we arrived on November 21<sup>st</sup>. The Japanese

ship had mats on the floor, which we slept on. The weather was cold and dreary and it was very depressing to see the Koreans living in buildings that had been damaged and open to the elements. Children ran about with no shoes, scrounging for whatever they could find. We were placed in tents. A few days after our arrival, the ammunition dump blew up during the night. I don't know if it was an accident or guerillas were responsible. It blew many of us out of our bunks.

*I bet!*

It scared the hell out of us. Everybody was running around to get ammunition for our weapons as only the guards had loaded weapons. The explosions went on through the night. That was really something to see!

281- by train to Chunchon

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, our Battalion left Pusan by train to Chunchon. The cars we rode in were shot full of holes and were very uncomfortable as the sleeping cars were made for the shorter people. It was very cold and we used heat tables to warm our C rations.

*That must have been overnight or a couple of days?*

We arrived in Chunchon during the night of December 2<sup>nd</sup>. That same night we boarded trucks loaded with our equipment and headed in convoy to the front lines. A river runs through the mountains by Chunchon and the road is along side of it.

305 – truck crash

I was assigned to ride shotgun to the driver. We had on our parkas and steel helmets. I had my carbine. Our truck carried our Battery's small arms ammunition plus a number of duffel bags belonging to individuals.

Three of the fellows rode in the back of the truck, and they crawled between the duffel bags for warmth. Trucks drove with blackout lights on because of the danger of guerilla attacks. As we came to a turn in the road, Carrol, the driver said, "The brakes don't work. I can't do anything." By then we were over the embankment and the truck rolled over two and one half times before resting on its side not far from the river. I heard a crack and thought I broke my neck. All I could I think of was that I wouldn't see my parents again. Fortunately, I believe having my parka on saved me. I ended up sitting outside the truck. My GI glasses were broken, and I had slivers of glass in my forehead. To this day, I don't know if I was thrown across the driver and out that window or how I landed outside. My carbine was broke.

*Wow!*

Carrol, the driver was still in the cab of the truck, and it looked like he had blood all over him. I said "Come on. Can you get out?" And he said, "Well, my foot is stuck." I said, "Where are you hurt?" And he said he was o.k. and that it was oil that was all over him.

*Ahhh.*

So, I got him out. Then we worried about the guys in the back of the truck. Their crawling between the duffel bags saved them from serious injury. One of the fellows did suffer a broken wrist.

*So how many of you were on the truck?*

There were five of us.

*Five of you. Nobody-- everybody walked away.*

Yes, we all got out. The worst thing was the fellow with the broken wrist. It was the middle of the night, we didn't know where we were. We picked up a couple of carbines and ammunition and headed up the embankment to the road. Just as we got to the road a jeep with a couple of MPs drove past. We hollered at them and swore at them, and they finally stopped and came back. They said, "We didn't know who you were as there are guerillas in the area." They took us to a MASH unit, where they fixed me up and sent the fellow with the broken wrist to Japan. The four of us received a ride up to our Battery's position. Traveling on those mountain roads was scary after our accident. We found out that our Captain's jeep has gone off the road, and he and his driver were banged up.

*You were knocked around before you got to the front lines!*

Yes, that was the worst that happened to me.

371 – artillery position in Iron Triangle

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, our Battery arrived at its position. We were in the Iron Triangle (Kumwha, Chorwon and Pyongang) area. We provided supporting artillery fire. The weather in Korea constantly changed in the mountains and made it difficult to use the metro messages relating weather conditions, temperature, wind velocity and such. This information came from Japan. We used the information to help fire our missions. Ground and Air observers would find the targets and provide us with the coordinates, which we would plot and set up the fire mission. We would determine if some or all four of the guns in our Battery would be used; also, the range, powder charges, and types of fuses to be used.

Earlier in the war, the Marines pulled a ploy on the enemy, making them think they were pulling back. The enemy was drawn into the trap and suffered heavy casualties. I believe it was in February of 1952 that the Eighth Army decided to try the same tactic across the entire front. The enemy was made to think everyone was falling back. No one was to return fire for almost a week. Enemy patrols were allowed to penetrate the lines and return. If they encountered our troops, they were killed or captured. The idea was to draw larger and larger enemy units into the trap. I think they knew what we were doing the whole time.



*Oh, they did?*

405 - Papasan Barrage

Yes, about the fourth day, I was at our Observation Post, which was across the valley from the Papasan, 1062 meters high and an enemy strong point. Papasan was riddled with tunnels. They would tunnel thorough the mountain and place their artillery. Our planes would hit the mountain almost daily with bombs and napalm. There were a number of unsuccessful attempts to take the mountain

*Was that by air they tried to take it?*

No. By the infantry.

*Oh, the infantry.*

The day I was at the O.P. we received word to be ready to observe fire. Through the binoculars, we could see the enemy soldiers sitting outside of their bunkers and holes. They didn't seem worried about a thing! When the first few rounds came near them they didn't pay much attention. But then all of a sudden the barrage came like rain. From one end of the horizon to the other, all you could see were explosions. I think the firing was constant for almost twenty-four hours. That was quite an experience, and one that I will always remember.

*And did they -- did that barrage succeed in knocking out that mountain?*

No.

Our equipment was mostly World War II vintage. Artillery weapons barrels were often worn out and sometimes would explode. The age of the ammunition often resulted in there being duds. One of our Batteries had fired on an enemy bunker. The round went in the door but didn't explode. It was a dud. They saw a couple of enemy soldiers pushing the shell down the hill.

*Yeah. And, so, it was mostly Chinese soldiers or North Korean soldiers?*

There were both.

*Yeah.*

Both I thought there were

*So you were on the front line for about a year then.*

I arrived in early December, 1951 and left the Battalion in June, 1952.

At one time, a decision was made to take our 8-inch howitzers up on the front lines for direct fire to knock out enemy bunkers. We would fire open sights at the bunkers to blow them up. The gun crew could look directly at the bunker. It worked out well, and from then on, we would take one or two of the howitzers up to the front lines in the area for direct fire. At times we would receive

counter battery fire. The tanks would also pull up to the front lines to provide direct fire at the enemy. The infantry weren't always too happy with us, or the tankers, because when we left, they were still subject to the enemy's counter battery fire.

#### 477 – types of fuses

Various types of fuses could be put on the shell. There was fuse quick, delay and velocity timed (VT). Fuse quick would explode upon impact with the ground. With fuse delay, the shell would go into the ground and then explode. The VT or velocity timed shell would explode in the air. Each gun might vary with the type of fuse used to create maximum devastation among the enemy.

*You mentioned that your job was to plot targets and run fire missions?*

Yes. I was in the Battery Fire Detection Center. We had maps of the area and upon receiving a fire mission and given the coordinates of the target by Headquarters or by air or ground observers, the target would be plotted and the range determined. The information as to range, wind velocity, type of fuse and number of powder increments to be used would be relayed to the gun crews.

*So you were more like in the organizing post or the officer -- did you actually have to stand there and cover your eardrums?*

Yes, you would have to cover your ears to protect your eardrums. It wasn't always possible to do so.

*And, so, at this time, are you a sergeant?*

Yes, I went overseas as a corporal and made sergeant and later sergeant first class. I stayed in the Army Reserves when I came home. I served three enlistments totaling nine years.

#### 545 - R. and R. in Osaka

*You mentioned that you got five days R. and R.*

Yes. You could go to a few places such as Tokyo, Osaka or a couple of other places for five days. In February, my buddy Joe Scherz and I went by plane to Osaka, Japan. When you arrive, you get rid of your dirty uniform and receive a Class A dress uniform. Then you are taken to the mess hall where you can have all the food you can eat and milk you can drink. Steaks are done however you want them done. We missed the milk in Korea. The two best meals I had in the service was the one on R & R and then when I returned to Camp Stoneman, California. It was about one or two in the morning when we arrived in Camp Stoneman from Korea and were taken directly to the mess hall. We sat in the mess hall for hours eating and drinking milk. I think I drank a gallon of milk.

R. and R. was nice. But it was tough when you come back, you know what I mean. But it was tough to head back to Korea. When we flew back to Korea, we were supposed to land in Chunchon, but the weather was bad and we ended up landing at Kimpo Airfield near Seoul. The plane wasn't pressurized and we bounced all over the place. A truck took us back to our Battery, where we found they had been flooded out. We had to move everything. Heavy rains and melting snow coming down the mountains sometimes caused flash flooding.

*I think we'll change the tape at this point.*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Side

*You mentioned going by truck to Inchon, South Korea.*

### 10 – “Pusan ...could have been a Dunkirk”

Yes, that was when I was going home. On June 21, 1952, I received orders to rotate back to the U.S. (Big “R”) and went by truck to Inchon. In September of '50, the Pusan Perimeter could have been a Dunkirk. MacArthur wasn't going to let that happen. And, so, they kept pouring troops into the Pusan Perimeter. MacArthur came up with the idea of coming up around to Inchon, which is not too far from Seoul, and landing in there and then cutting off the enemy that way or forcing them to pull back. And then our troops would start pushing out from the Pusan Perimeter. It was just remarkable that it worked out because the tides there are so high. Then it goes down to mud flats when the tide is out, so you're stuck and you got to watch it.

### 23 – Going home from Inchon

Upon arriving in Inchon everyone had to line up in a building and then put all their possessions on the floor. It was funny, because you saw all sorts of items put down. There were Chinese burp guns, grenades and such. I don't know how they figured to take it home with them.

On June 26<sup>th</sup>, we boarded the U.S.S. General Pope which took us to Camp Mower, Sasebo, Japan, where we arrived two days later. We were pretty much on our own while there. The Red Cross took good care of us. There was a big beer hall there that was visited by all the United Nation troops.

### 43 – Beer in Pearl Harbor

*And everybody was in a good mood*

Even though we couldn't always understand each other, we managed to communicate and have a lot of fun, since we were all heading home.

On July 6<sup>th</sup>, we boarded the Liberty Ship U.S.N.S. Sgt. Howard E. Woodford. There also were about 300 Columbian troops on board heading home. On July 16<sup>th</sup>, we arrived in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. It must have been after midnight. They had buses to take us to some of the beer halls. Some of us weren't old enough to drink legally. The bar we went to, there were a number of Columbian soldiers. They looked to be about fourteen years old, and the bartenders didn't want

to serve them. Everyone said, "Hey, where we've been, we want to be served." They then served everyone.

We arrived back at Camp Stoneman, California on July 23<sup>rd</sup> and had medical check ups and processing. The next day we boarded a train for Camp Carson, Colorado, where we arrived on July 26<sup>th</sup>. We spent three days there being processed and released from active duty.

#### 56 - Coming home to Chicago

On July 29<sup>th</sup>, about twenty of us, who lived in the Midwest, boarded the train bound for Chicago. That was fun. Everybody was in a good mood. All the passengers and porters were nice to us. The porters would tell us when we were coming to a dry state and load us up with beer. I arrived in downtown Chicago early in the morning of July 30<sup>th</sup> and took a cab to my home.

We lived on the northwest side in the Portage Park area. I saw my mother and found out that my father, who was a painting contractor, was painting a house on the next block. I walked over there and saw he was on the ladder up on the roof and I didn't want to frighten him. I waited until he came down to talk to him. It was great being home. I weighed about 140 pounds at the time. The first month home I put on about 30 pounds as my mother fixed everything I liked to eat.

It was funny, too, when I would go and see acquaintances and others and some would say, "Well, where have you been?" or "I haven't seen you for a while." Sometimes I would just reply "I've been away."

My father had given me an Argus C3 camera when I was going overseas. It was a new camera at the time. I carried it with me the whole time over there. There were times when I was running to get into a hole that I threw the camera in ahead of me. Back home, I took the camera to a camera shop to be cleaned. The normally hard casing for the camera was soft. The store owner looked at it and said, "What did you do with this? Throw it under a truck or what?" I said, "No it's been over in Korea."

So, it was an experience. I wouldn't have wanted to miss it. I always felt proud that I could do it and fortunately I didn't go through the hell that many others did. I remember how cold it got over there. I think that's a memory shared by most Korean War veterans.

#### 90 - Chorwon incident

There were good times and bad times. Also, some funny incidents. I remember once we were at a forward position along a railroad embankment near Chorwon, we had one gun there. It was summer and the weather was terrible that day so we could not fire any missions. There was a creek there and so we were horsing around throwing helmets full of water at each other. We had two fellows who were new to the Battery and were sent up to our position. On the other side of the embankment was a mine field. One of the new fellows ran into it, not knowing what it was. Upon seeing him standing there, I was scared and told him, "We quit. No more playing. Come back just the way you went out there." Fortunately he made it back. Then I told him where he had been. That scared him.

*I would imagine!*

It scared us all.

105 - finding a career

*Yeah! So, did you ever did you go back to forestry at Purdue?*

No. When I got back home, I didn't know what I wanted to do. Some of my buddies went back to Purdue, and then they said, "Well, come on back again for awhile." So, I did that Fall of '52. My friend got me into the house where he was living with about ten other fellows. All but one were Veterans. There was a great American Legion Post in Lafayette. It was a big frame building. The Post was open every day from mid-morning until after midnight. You could go there at any time and everything was handled on the honor system. Sometimes we spent most of the day there and when we would leave, we could tell them how many drinks we had and how much food we ate. Nobody cheated. There were times that we skipped classes.

*I bet*

I reached the point where I didn't know what I wanted to do and felt it was a waste of time and money staying at Purdue. I came back home to Chicago worked for my dad as a painter for a while. Then I worked for Pinkerton Detective Agency for some months. Then attended Business College for two years and obtained a degree. I attended school in the morning and worked for my dad in the afternoons. It was then that I decided to find a job, which would provide security. A friend of our family had worked for an insurance company during the depression. He didn't make much money but he had steady work.

*Yeah.*

132 - passing the insurance test

I went to Aetna Insurance Company located in Park Ridge at the time and applied for the job of automobile underwriter. I remember that the Personnel Manager's name was Mr. Ward. He was very nice and had been with them for many years. He said, "You will have to take a test." He gave me the test to complete and left me alone. There were many questions that I couldn't answer since it had been so long since I was in school. The secretary came in and said, "How are you are doing?" I replied, "I don't remember a lot of these things as it has been so long ago." She would come into the room periodically and look at the test and say, "Why don't you mark that one?" This happened a couple of times. After I finished, she left with the test. Then Mr. Ward came in wearing a big smile and said, "Did you get through it all?" I said, "Yes." He then said, "Well, you are hired."

My career stayed in insurance. After leaving Aetna, I worked for Occidental Life, then George F. Brown & Sons, then Bankers Life & Casualty Company and finally CNA, from where I retired after twenty-five and one-half years.

On September 24, 1960, I married. My wife, Mary K and I, have one daughter, Mary Bridget, born October 21, 1961.

*If I could make a comment, the two previous veterans that I interviewed, they also went into insurance.*

Is that right?

*Yeah. It must have --the army service must have given them a certain authority or trustworthiness or*

I don't know.

*In a situation or something but*

Maybe they figured for security too.

#### 156 – reenlisting in the Reserves

*Yeah. So you reenlisted in the Reserves then also after the War.*

Yes. My enlistments were for three-year periods and then I had a little break. After I was home for a short time, I decided to join an Army Artillery Reserve Unit, which met at the Armory, located at Kedzie and Devon. For many years now it has been a Marine Reserve Training Center. I would have stayed in the Reserves, but when we went to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin for our two weeks training we found out that our Unit was being turned over to the National Guard. High ranking officers had to be active in order to retain their rank. Our Major put his career on the line to save our Unit but was unsuccessful.

*So, when did you become active in the Korean War Veterans' groups or associations?*

#### 175 – joining the VFW

I had tried to find a Korean War Veterans group over the years, but had no luck. Then, about the early nineties, my wife and I stopped at Super Cup restaurant at Central and Lawrence Avenue for breakfast. I was wearing a Korean War Veteran's cap. There were five fellows by a car, all Korean War Veterans. We got talking and they invited me to come to their meeting at the Montclare Leyden VFW Post at 6940 West Diversey Ave. That's how I came to join the Greater Chicago Chapter Korean War Veterans Association. I have been active in the Chapter, having been Commander for the past five years and recently elected Commander for another two years.

*Congratulations.*

Thank you. Nobody wants the job. That's the trouble. Like most organizations, it is difficult to find individuals willing to do things.

*So, Niels, you didn't come-- in addition to coming with your war record and willingness to share it, you also came today with brochures and pamphlets which you're committing to the national project. So, this book here that you're giving us, the "Fiftieth Anniversary of the Korean War."*

Yes, this was put together by the South Koreans. It's a nice booklet commemorating the War and the participation of the United Nations. Also shows a number of attractions in South Korea. The history of the War from June 25, 1950 to July 27, 1953 is covered, as well as the various phases of the War and units involved. The other little booklet there, "A Brief Account of the Korean War," was obtained from a fellow in Tennessee where the book is printed. It is a fine, concise summary of the War.

**221** – working with Chicago's Korean and Turkish communities

We have a very close relationship with the Korean community and the Korean Consul-General. The older Korean people have never forgotten us. They are good to us in so many ways. Contact is maintained with Korean Army and Marine Veterans.

Also two years ago, the First Annual Turkish Festival was held in the Daley Plaza. At that time, the Turkish Consulate invited the Korean War veterans to participate since the Turkish troops also fought in Korea. A booth was set up for us and we honored the Turkish troops as well as our own. We participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Festival and will also participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Festival in Daley Plaza on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. We have a nice relationship with the Turkish Consulate. Consul General Naci Koru, obtained a Turkish Colonel's uniform as well as a CD of photographs of Turkish soldiers in Korea during the War. These items we have placed in the Korean War Veterans National Museum and Library in Rantoul, IL.

*So you-- how is the museum coming down in Rantoul?*

**252** – Korean War Veterans Museum, Rantoul

This is the site of the former Chanute Field, an Air Force base. The Museum and Library is located in one half of a large building which the other half is an Aerospace museum. The city of Rantoul has been very generous in providing room and also land on which a permanent Museum and Library will be built. The intent is to build three circular buildings, which will honor all participants in the Korean War and provide a history of Korea before, during and after the War. Once completed, the Museum and Library will serve as a research facility for those interested in studying that period of history.

A ground-breaking ceremony was held on August 27, 2005. Construction is expected to begin on the first building before the end of this year. The Museum and Library has the support of Buzz Aldrin and James Garner, both Korean War Veterans. Also, the Medal of Honor Association.

*Are there other Korean War museums in the United States?*

Yes. But ours is the National Museum and Library.

*So you will have a library there?*

285 – a library, too

Oh, yeah. That's a big part.

*Oh. Good.*

The intent is to have a library and research center to enable anyone to study the Korean War and that period in history. I believe the University of Illinois is working together with the Museum and Library and will be very helpful when building is completed. Initially the site for the museum and Library was in Tuscola, Illinois. However, over the years, the project did not move forward. The city of Rantoul offered temporary quarters for the Museum and Library and the land on which to build. The individuals directing the project now are doing a tremendous job. Everyone realizes that we are getting older and if it isn't built soon, it won't be. Financial support is being sought from Korean War Veterans, the Korean community, South Korea and other nations that participated in the conflict and also, the support of individuals and corporations. I hope that I will be around to see it finished.

320 - Remembering our comrades

*Well, it's wonderful that you're, in a sense, your service to the Korean War continues, you know.*

Yes, and remembering our comrades and what it all meant. We have a "Tell America" program where we visit schools and groups to explain the Korean War, the times and our individual experiences. Most school textbooks contain very little or nothing about the Korean War. Teachers and students are mostly unaware of what happened unless they had a relative who served at that time. Korea was one of our bloodiest wars, we lost about 36,000 people during the three years. That's 900 each month - probably close to two million people lost their lives overall. The Vietnam War cost us 54,000 lives over ten years.

Korea should not be considered the forgotten war. It was a very important part of the Cold War, as it was the first time that the communist aggression was stopped. When the war started, no one knew if it was a feint by the Russians to enable them to move westward in Europe. Fortunately, that wasn't the case. However, North Korea did not think we would come to the aid of South Korea, since our policy at that time was that South Korea was outside our sphere of influence. It was a good thing that action was quickly taken.

*That was technically a United Nations?*

349 – a United Nations action, including the French

Yes, that was a true United Nations effort. Twenty-two nations were represented. The United States, India, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Australia, Great Britain, Philippines, Turkey, Sweden, Canada, South Africa, Thailand, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, Ethiopia, Norway, Greece, New Zealand, Columbia and South Korea.



I remember one time we were on the road, and a French convoy was passing us in the other direction. Their vehicles were shot full of holes. They were Legionnaires of the French Foreign Legion and had been fighting in Indo China. The enlistment in the Foreign Legion was for five years. It was my understanding that if they volunteered to serve in Korea, one year was dropped from their enlistment. The French Battalion were tough soldiers. They later returned to Indo China and were either killed or captured when Dien Bien Phu fell in 1954.

*So, thank you for sharing your history with us.*

Thank you very much for having me.

*You have nine awards there?*

I received the Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, and the Korea Service Medal with two bronze stars, and the United Nations Service Medal, the Republic of Korea Service Medal, and our outfit got the Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon. I also have an Expert Badge with Machine Gun Bar, and a Sharpshooter Badge with the Carbine Badge. I later received a Cold War Certificate.

*Mr. Larsen, thank you very much.*

Thank you.

### **Note to Reader:**

Please continue on to the Appendix which contains helpful material provided by Mr. Larsen: a chronology summarizing Mr. Larsen's military service: a Korean War map, battlefield photographs, and pictures of the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

Mr. Larsen also donated to the Niles Library Veterans History Collection copies of A Brief Account of the Korean War - published by the Korean War Association, The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Korean War - published by the 21C Military Tactical Research Agency, and The Flag, a compact disc - narrated by Dennis Farrell and published by the Korean War Veterans National Museum and Library.

## APPENDIX

- **Military Service Chronology of Niels H. K. Larsen, provided by Mr. Larsen, 3 pages.**
- **Korean War Map, provided by Mr. Larsen, indicating “Iron Triangle” Area marked by Kumwha, Chorwon, and Pyonggang where his 424<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion was active.**
- **Eight photographs of artillery positions near Kumwha, May, 1952.**
- **Three photographs of Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., taken by Mr. Larsen in September, 1995.**

Niels H. K. Larsen  
Military Service – U.S. Army Enlisted Reserves  
Serial Number

- October 10, 1949, the day after I turned 18, I joined the Army Reserves in Lafayette, IN – 393<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion (155 Self-Propelled Howitzers). (I was a freshman studying Forestry at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN and also in Army ROTC and on the Rifle Team at the time).
- June 25, 1950, Korean War began, I was called to active duty with the 393<sup>rd</sup> FA Bn on September 11, 1950. On the Sunday that the war began, I was working for the Forest Service (Summer job) in the Couer d'Alene National Forest in Idaho. Heard the news on the radio and had a hunch we would be called to active duty. I hitchhiked to my home in Chicago, IL. The day I arrived at home, it was announced on the radio that our Unit was being called to active duty. Within the next day or so, I received a telegram stating that our training in September at Camp McCoy was cancelled and I was to report for active duty.
- At the end of September 1950, the Battalion, together with other units, opened up Camp Rucker, AL, which had been closed since the end of WWII.
- January 1951, I went to Supply School for a couple of weeks at Ft. Jackson, SC.
- January 1951, the Battalion moved to Camp Polk, LA.
- September 1951, about 70 of us from the 393<sup>rd</sup> FA Bn were transferred to the 424<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion (8 inch Howitzers, tractor drawn). I was in "C" Battery. The 424<sup>th</sup> FA Bn was an Army Reserve Unit from Indianapolis, IN, which had also been activated in September 1950. The 424<sup>th</sup> FA Bn had received orders to be shipped to Korea and they needed fillers to complete their table of organization. About one week after being transferred to the 424<sup>th</sup> FA Bn, the 393<sup>rd</sup> FA Bn received orders to be shipped to Germany.
- October 20, 1951, the 424<sup>th</sup> FA Bn went by troop train to Camp Stoneman, CA, where we were prepared to be sent to Korea. We attended many lectures and films about what to expect in Korea. Also received all our shots.
- November 6, 1951, the 424<sup>th</sup> FA Bn boarded the troop ship U.S.S. General Mann bound for Korea.
- November 18, 1951, the 424<sup>th</sup> FA Bn arrived in Yokohama, Japan and boarded a troop train to Sasebo, Japan.
- November 20, 1951, the 424<sup>th</sup> FA Bn arrived in Sasebo, Japan and boarded a Japanese ship to take us to Pusan, South Korea. The Battalion arrived in Pusan on

November 21, 1950. During are stay in Pusan, the ammunition dump blew up, which was quite an experience.

- December 1, 1951, the Battalion left Pusan by train bound for Chunchon, South Korea. The train ride was very cold and uncomfortable as the cars were shot full of holes.
- December 2, 1951, the Battalion arrived in Chunchon during the night. All personnel and equipment were unloaded and we boarded trucks to go to the front lines. We arrived at our position on December 3, 1951 and prepared our position.
- The Battalion was in the Iron Triangle (Kumwha, Chorwon and Pyongang) area. Provided supporting artillery fire in the area. Often one or more gun sections would move about at the front lines to provide direct fire on the enemy. My job in the "C" Btry Fire Direction Center (FDC) was to plot targets and run fire missions.
- February 1952, I flew to Osaka, Japan for five days R & R and then flew back to Korea.
- June 21, 1952, I received orders to rotate back to the U.S. (Big "R"). Went by truck to Inchon, South Korea.
- June 26, 1952, boarded the U.S.S. General Pope and went to Camp Mower, Sasebo, Japan and arrived there on June 28, 1952.
- July 6, 1952, boarded the Liberty Ship U.S.N.S. Sgt Howard E. Woodford. There were also about 300 Columbian troops on the ship.
- July 16, 1952, we arrived in about 1:00 a.m. in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Ship had to resupply. Ship left for California on July 17, 1952.
- July 23, 1952, arrived at Camp Stoneman, CA. Received physicals and various processing.
- July 24, 1952, boarded train for Camp Carson, CO.
- July 26, 1952, arrived at Camp Carson, CO. More processing and released from active duty.
- July 29, 1952, a number of us boarded train bound for Chicago, IL.
- July 30, 1952, arrived in Chicago, IL and home.

Served three enlistments in the Army Reserve:

October 10, 1949 to January 1, 1953 Sergeant.

January 2, 1953 to February 23, 1956 Sergeant First Class.

May 8, 1956 to May 18, 1959 Sergeant First Class (E6)

Medals/Awards:

Good Conduct Medal

National Defense Service Medal

Korean Service Medal w/ 2 bronze stars

United Nations Service Medal

Republic of Korea Service Medal

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon

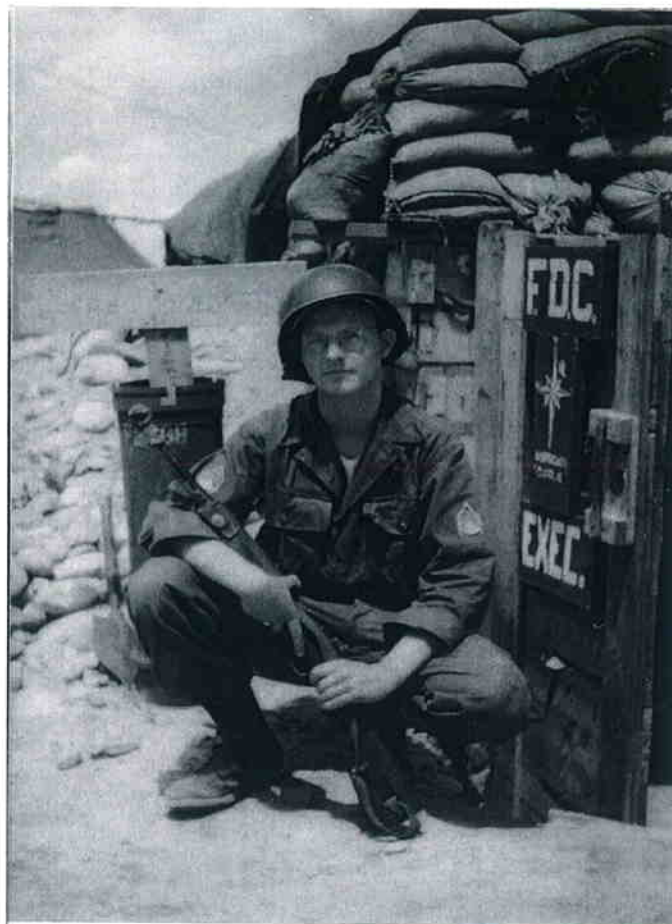
Expert Badge w/Machine Gun Bar

Sharpshooter Badge w/Carbine Bar

Cold War Certificate



Powder cannister, visible over Niels's right shoulder, held seven charges and could also serve when buried as an unofficial beer cooler. "F.D.C." indicates the Fire Direction Center for directing artillery firing.



#2 howitzer gun on fire mission at Kumwha

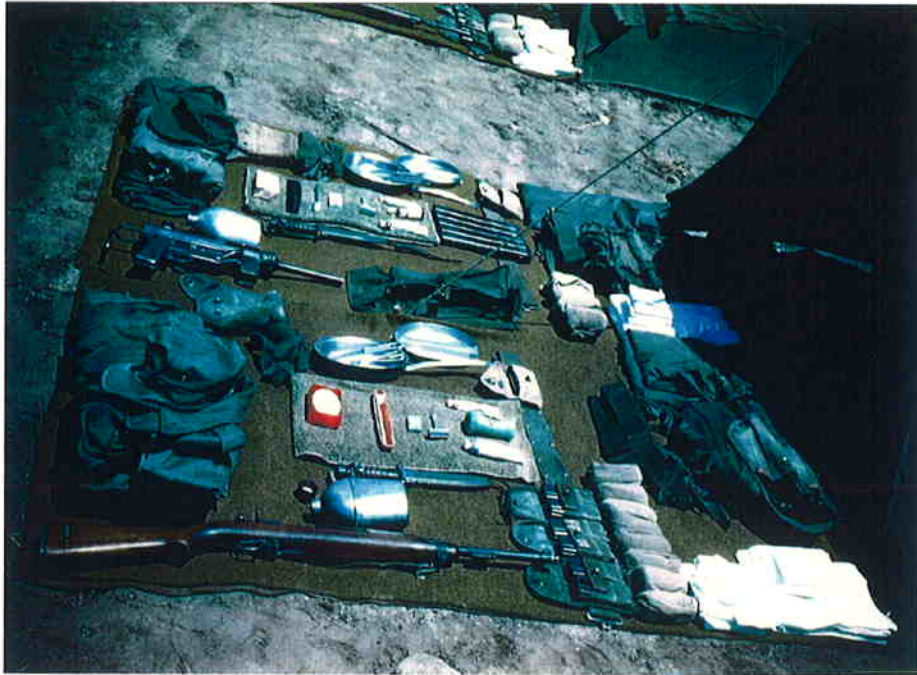


Gun #2 "Ready To Fire"  
Haksu, Korea



"On the Way"  
Battery Position, Korea





Individuals' personal equipment laid out for battalion inspection by IX Corps.



Battery Sign at our Haksa Position

May, 1952

Machine Gun Bunker  
Battery Area, Haksa, Korea, May 1952



Battalion Inspection by IX<sup>th</sup> Corps Brigadier General Coburn, Commanding General. General inspected 12 eight- inch howitzers, Table of Organization, Equipment and Personnel, May 1952



**Korean War Veterans Memorial**  
Washington, DC

Photographs taken by  
Niels Larsen, September, 1995



The Memorial cost just over \$18 million. The bulk of it was raised from small donations by veterans. The sale of a congressionally authorized one-dollar commemorative coin and corporate contributions, most notably from Hyundai Motor America, Samsung Information Systems and other Korean firms with operations in America.

Figures are 7 ft. tall of unpolished stainless steel to give the figures detail, definition and a raw, virile quality reminiscent of the black-and-white photos of the conflict.

