

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

OTTO C. JUNKERMANN

Hospital Corpsman, Navy, post World War II;
Corpsman, Marine Corps, Korean War.

1997

OH
622

OH
622

Junkermann, Otto C., (1929-). Oral History Interview, 1997.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Otto C. Junkermann, a Milwaukee native, discusses his service as a corpsman in the Navy after World War II and in the Marine Corps during the Korean War. Junkermann talks about the immigration of his parents from Germany, leaving high school to join the Navy in 1946, and boot camp at in San Diego. He tells of being separated from his class after contracting pneumonia and assignment to the Hospital Corps School in San Diego. Junkermann discusses his assignment to Corona Naval Hospital (California) and, later, to the San Diego Naval Training Center, including duty as an attendant nurse escorting veterans across the country. While escorting tuberculosis patients to Chicago by train, he tells of bringing them to the dining car after their food was repeatedly late and then successfully defending his actions at a resulting court martial. After being discharged, he explains his use of the GI Bill to study industrial design at the Layton School of Art (Milwaukee). Junkermann cites his reasons for reentering the Navy in 1951: the Navy's need of corpsmen and his own feelings of guilt at using veterans' benefits without having served in a war. Sent to Portsmouth (Virginia), he recalls frustration at the lack of meaningful activity, writing complaints to the Bureau of Naval Personnel, and reassignment to Marine combat training in preparation of going to Korea with the 1st Marine Division. Assigned to Item Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, Junkermann touches on duty as a corpsman for the machine gun platoon. He describes caring for wounded during combat, the trauma of losing patients, and the change in how he experienced fear and anxiety. Reassigned to Howe Company, he tells of the high number of casualties he dealt with after the company was surrounded for three days. Junkermann comments on medical evacuations, the vulnerability of battalion aid stations to enemy attack, and the effectiveness of helicopters at saving the lives of the seriously wounded. After a year and a half on the line, he mentions moving to a rear area MASH unit. He reflects on being sent into combat armed and unmarked due to the enemy's targeting of corpsmen. Junkermann speaks of stopping in Japan on the way back to the States and being able to communicate with civilians using German. He addresses the relationship between Marines and their Navy corpsmen and tells of enlisting in the Marine Corps with the intent of making it a career. After being twice passed over for commission, Junkermann explains the lack of promotional opportunities changed his mind about pursuing a military career. Assigned to the 7th Engineer Company, a Marine Corps Reserve unit in Green Bay (Wisconsin), he discusses his relationship with his commanding officer and writing most of the officer's reports. Junkermann speaks of leaving the Marines and beginning his career in media by working for WFRV-TV (Channel 5) in Green Bay. He touches on using the GI Bill for a home loan and his involvement with the local VFW post.

Biographical Sketch:

Junkermann (b.1929) served in the Navy from 1946 to 1948 and in the Marine Corps from 1951 to 1956. In 1987, he was elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly as a Republican Representative of the 6th Assembly District.

Interviewed by Michael Telzrow, 1997
Transcribed by Noreen Warren, 2011
Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview [phone interview]:

- Otto: Hello.
- Mike: Yes, can I speak with Mr. Otto Junkermann, please?
- Otto: Speaking.
- Mike: Yes, Mr. Junkermann, this is Mike Telzrow from the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.
- Otto: Oh, yes.
- Mike: I believe Mark Van Ells had scheduled an interview with you this afternoon.
- Otto: Um-hmm.
- Mike: I'll be doing that for him. He had to leave the office for an emergency; he had to take care of his young girl. Would you have some time right now to do that?
- Otto: Sure.
- Mike: Sure, great. I just had a—very briefly I had a chance to look over some of the notes here, so I guess we can proceed now. Let me do a slight introduction here. This is an oral history interview with Otto C. Junkermann. The date is April 1, 1997 and the interviewer is Mike Telzrow. Okay. Well, let me start with a few basic questions then. I noticed that you're a first generation German.
- Otto: Yes.
- Mike: And when did your parents come over from Germany?
- Otto: My parents came over—my father came over just prior to World War I, and my mother came after that; I'm not exactly sure of the dates.
- Mike: I see.
- Otto: They both, incidentally, settled in Milwaukee.
- Mike: Oh, okay. And what type of work did your father do?
- Otto: My father was a—he was a trained decorator, artist in the old country, and of course in this country with the language barrier and totally

different techniques, it didn't go too well. So he did everything under the sun that he could do to survive, and then finally became a painting contractor in the city of Milwaukee.

- Mike: I see. And they lived there until recently, or—they lived the rest of their time in Milwaukee? They didn't travel around Wisconsin at all?
- Otto: No, they lived their entire lives in the city of Milwaukee and both passed away there. My mother passed away when I was very young of influenza, which at that time was a very deadly disease.
- Mike: Oh, I see. And you were educated in Milwaukee, correct?
- Otto: Yes, uh-huh.
- Mike: Went to high school in Milwaukee?
- Otto: I went to Milwaukee Washington.
- Mike: Okay. And you entered the Navy in 1946, is that correct?
- Otto: That's correct, as a hospital corpsman.
- Mike: As a hospital corpsman. The war had ended and what—I'm sorta interested in what your motivations were for volunteering for the Navy in 1946.
- Otto: [laugh] It's hard to say. I think it was probably the discontent with life as it was and a desire to be part of our military and in some way be associated with winning a war or whatever it might have been, that probably is what prompted us.
- Mike: I see. So you attribute that to the war's over and there's still some feelings of patriotism and perhaps wanting to be a part of what was going on at that time?
- Otto: Yes. Um-hmm.
- Mike: And you had been out of high school for how long when you—
- Otto: Well, I left high school to join the Navy.
- Mike: Oh, I see.

- Otto: I had a senior year to go, and a friend of mine and I both entered together. We were both going to Washington at that time and had lengthy debates and decided this was the thing to do.
- Mike: I see.
- Otto: And ironically, we intended to enlist in the Marine Corps.
- Mike: Oh.
- Otto: But the Marine recruiting sergeant with the Marine Corps' philosophy of—[laughs] or the way they recruited said, "What makes you think you're good enough to be Marines?" And we said, "Well, okay." And we crossed the street and enlisted in the Navy—or crossed the hall. [laughs]
- Mike: They gladly took you in the Navy?
- Otto: Yes.
- Mike: So the first choice was the Marine Corps, but you decided on the Navy after you talked to the recruiting sergeant.
- Otto: And they were both—the recruiting offices were all in the old post office on Wisconsin Avenue at that time, so they were right, right adjacent to each other.
- Mike: So you entered with another friend. Were there—did you know of other fellows who were joining the service at the time?
- Otto: Yeah, there were—oh gosh, I think probably a dozen from Wisconsin that all got together and left at the same time.
- Mike: Oh, I see.
- Otto: We were the only two from Milwaukee in that group on that particular day.
- Mike: Okay. So you joined the Navy and you went to boot camp, presumably at Great Lakes?
- Otto: No, San Diego.
- Mike: San Diego—oh, you got lucky.

- Otto: Well, the Navy in its wisdom, you know, if you live in California you take boot in Great Lakes and *vice versa*.
- Mike: [laughs] I forgot; I did eight years in the service and I forgot how those things work. So you went to San Diego and you went through boot camp there. How long was boot camp? Was it several weeks?
- Otto: Boot camp at that time was eight weeks.
- Mike: Eight weeks. Would you consider it—was it difficult?
- Otto: Ah, no, not really at that age. Yeah, it was a little different routine, but as opposed to the Marine Corps' boot camp, no, it wasn't that difficult.
- Mike: What are some of the things you remember about it? Noteworthy things.
- Otto: Probably the thing I remember most about it, which I hated, was the calisthenics. And the drill field, which I never understood. I'm in the Navy, why am I marching in platoons, that type of thing. The close-order drills and things of that type, which of course, later you understand, but at that time you don't.
- Mike: Sure. At this point after graduation from boot camp, did you go straight to corpsman school or where did you learn—
- Otto: Yeah. No, I had a strange series of things happen to me. When I—just prior to completing boot camp I managed to contract pneumonia. So I went to the dispensary, of course, and then my class graduated without me. And after that I was put into a pool for assignment and I think I had five or six drafts in a row. One was Terminal C duty, I remember, at Aviation Ordinance School, which I thought would be great. Another one was general sea duty, Pearl Harbor. And whatever else the others were. And of course, I was still too sick and all these happened and went by and went by. And then finally, when I was well enough, the one that popped up was Hospital Corps School. So I had no choice; I became a corpsman rather than by volunteering to be one, but by no other choice.
- And of course, I was shipped again, in the Navy's wisdom, halfway across the country. I went to Balboa, which is right across the street from the San Diego Naval Training Center, practically. So that was my first movement in the Navy from boot camp to Hospital Corps School in San Diego.
- Mike: That's interesting that you didn't have a—didn't have much of a choice.
- Otto: No.

- Mike: It's certainly changed nowadays. And you went to corps school. How long did corpsman school last?
- Otto: I'm not sure of that. It might have been eight or ten weeks, something like that.
- Mike: And you learned basic—presumably basic first aid procedures.
- Otto: Well, yeah, that with some more advanced things. That would be, you know, things that you would have to do aboard a ship if there were no doctor present, things of that type.
- Mike: So upon graduation from corpsman school, you were assigned where?
- Otto: Then I made a great leap. I went from there sixty miles up the coast to Corona, California for the hospital there as general duty.
- Mike: For a young man from Milwaukee, that's not too bad.
- Otto: No, it wasn't too bad, but it was far from what I had expected, because I had visions of winding up in the Philippines or, you know, somewhere like that, rather than sixty miles up the coast of California.
- Mike: Were you somewhat disappointed?
- Otto: I was at first. And when I got to the hospital it was an old—it had been the Lake Norconian Country Club prior to the war and the Navy took it over, made some arrangements, and then built a hospital there. And once I got settled in there, of course, I enjoyed it. I had a good tour of duty there.
- Mike: And at that station you were working as a corpsman in a hospital and taking care of a local Navy—was there a Navy base there?
- Otto: Right. Most of the patients there, it was either tuberculosis and I don't recall what the other thing was, but half of the hospital was isolated with tuberculosis and the other half was something else, which now escapes me, and some general. But by and large there were veterans who had served in the Pacific who came back who were being taken care of there and not yet out of the service. Some of them were—there were a few veterans also taken care of there.
- Mike: I see. And how long did you stay there?

- Otto: Well, I stayed there, I believe, for about a year, and then I got another great transfer. I was transferred back to the Naval Training Center, in fact. [laughs]
- Mike: How long did you stay at the training center after that?
- Otto: Then I spent the remainder of my enlistment there.
- Mike: I see. So you spent your entire tour of duty in the Navy in California?
- Otto: Right. There's one interesting part there that I neglected to include. When I was at Corona Naval Hospital, they would transfer many of these returnees back to veterans' hospitals close to their homes. And I hadn't been there very long before I drew that assignment, which was great. I would get aboard a train with several patients, let's say, and we'd go to New York City for Saint Albans—that was the hospital out in New York. And I would be more or less the escort, the attendant nurse, what have you, for that tour.
- Mike: So you got to spend quite a bit of time traveling throughout the country?
- Otto: Yes. And I found that to be just a super type of way for a young guy to spend his life. My expenses were paid, you know. It was ideal. And I did that for—oh, I have no idea; for months on end, I know.
- And an incident happened that ended my career rather abruptly, and I had several patients that I felt were being mistreated on the train. Maybe you should put them in a compartment. And in this case the patients were tubercular patients and they had not gotten their meals on time, things like that, first day out. So—and of course, I didn't stay in the compartment; I had a Pullman. So I went back and I complained about it, and nothing happened about it, so I said, "Nuts to this." The meal came very late; after everyone else was done serving on the train, they brought 'em cold food. I said, "Tomorrow we're going to the diner." And so I took my patients into the diner, which created quite a storm. And of course, they didn't know what my patients had, and I didn't tell them.
- Mike: Good thing.
- Otto: But they did wire the base and found out about it. And the train was—as I understand it, the cars were detached and fumigated and everything else in Chicago. [laughs]
- But when I got back, of course, I was brought up before a Board, a Court Martial Board, on it and I just defended myself and nothing happened to

me. So I don't remember what the offshoot of it was, other than the fact that I took no more trips.

Mike: I see. It put an end to that.

Otto: Yes.

Mike: Okay, you leave the Navy in 1948, that's correct?

Otto: 1947. I got out convenience of the government after twenty-two months.

Mike: I see.

Otto: So I left in December of '47, I believe it would be. Yeah.

Mike: And you returned to Milwaukee?

Otto: Returned to Milwaukee and then began, under my GI Bill, Layton School of Art. I had gotten a GED high school diploma.

Mik: I see.

Otto: And then I studied industrial design at Layton School of Art—started studying that.

Mike: Were there others among your classmates who were taking advantage of the GI Bill?

Otto: Out of a class of somewhere around forty, thirty-eight of 'em were veterans.

Mike: Wow.

Otto: There was just an overload, totally.

Mike: That is a lot.

Otto: In fact, the only people in that class that weren't veterans were, as I recall, three girls; the rest of them were all men. And one was from Green Bay and unfortunately I wound up marrying her. [both laugh] And one from Milwaukee that I really wanted to marry, and then the third one, and I had no interest in her.

Mike: That's funny. And at Layton School of Design, industrial design, you were working—what was your curriculum based upon? Was it drafting or engineering?

- Otto: It was basically based on drawing and drafting and there was no engineering to speak of there. Much of the material that they taught there was rather routine, and two of the classes that I had, in fact, I did all the work the first week and I never had to go back to class because I already knew the subject. One was perspective, which I had mastered years ago in high school.
- Mike: Sure.
- Otto: And the other was lettering or typestyles, which I knew by heart. And so I got my credits for those two classes without ever going after the first week.
- Mike: I'm curious about some of the changes, if there were any changes, in Milwaukee between the beginning of the war and when you had returned after the Navy. What was Milwaukee like at that time in terms of opportunities for veterans and just the general nature of Milwaukee?
- Otto: Well, it's rather hard for me to form an opinion on that. I had no trouble finding work when I got back. A lot of people didn't—I'm talking about the first time when I was in the Navy. And at that time, of course, you know, we got a GI bill without really being GIs in that first period, or without being war veterans, I should say.
- Mike: Right.
- Otto: And there was also a program that was kept in place called a Fifty-two-Two Club I still remain—vaguely remember. So that if you couldn't find work you got twenty dollars a week from the government for fifty-two weeks. And a lot of the veterans took advantage of that without really looking for work.
- Mike: I see.
- Otto: I found work instantly and I had no trouble finding work. But at that age it's hard to give you a perception of how things might have differed from prior to that. I can tell you the difference between then and now, but not in that timeframe.
- Mike: I see. Okay. Now once you—you're back at school and you subsequently find work; what did you do for work after school?
- Otto: Well, that's interesting. I got a—I, of course, was entitled to a full GI Bill and that paid me a certain amount of money. But I also found work doing drafting in a small business which has been gone for—obviously

for many years. And I did that a few hours a day after school. And then during the summer months I started working at Schlitz Brewery.

Mike: Oh. And what did—as a brewer or—

Otto: No, on the bottling and canning lines. At that time, most of the students would try to get work like that because that was the—what would you call it?—the crush time, I guess, for brewing beer, so that they would need that help just at the time when the summer vacation started, and those of us that were not above that kind of work got pretty good checks, which at that time was, you know, equivalent to good factory pay. And so I had the three things going for me. I was doing a little bit of drafting and then I worked at Schlitz in the summer and then in the fall I kept working there, but I switched to the graveyard shift.

Mike: I see.

Otto: So at twelve o'clock I'd wind up in the brewery and then at seven o'clock or eight o'clock I'd get off and rush to school. And then after school I'd spend a couple hours doing my drafting, and then I'd sleep on the weekends. [laughs]

Mike: Very busy.

Otto: Oh yeah, yeah.

Mike: Was your wife working at this time?

Otto: No, my wife wasn't working. I had married her, you know, right into Layton and she wasn't working and finally she quit school, too, so I finished alone.

Mike: I see. Okay, well that brings us up to another time in your life, right around the Korean War. It says you—the information that I have says you enlisted in the Marine Corps in '51. Is that correct?

Otto: No, that's not quite correct. I—what happened was that when the war broke out there was a crying need for corpsmen. Corpsmen were dying like flies over there, because they became targets and whatever. And I had heard this and I had a guilty conscience. I had a GI Bill, I had all these benefits, and I'd really done nothing to earn them. So I left school and went back into the Navy.

Mike: I see.

- Otto: And I wound up first at Great Lakes and then after being processed there I went to Portsmouth, Virginia. And at Portsmouth, Virginia with a normal complement of about sixty, I think they had three-hundred corpsmen sitting around doing nothing, and I got a little upset about that. I thought, “God, I give up everything else to come here because of the need for corpsmen and we’re sitting here and my whole, absolute, complete duty was to check the Coke—the little room where the Coke machines were for empty bottles.”
- Mike: You’re kidding.
- Otto: I thought, “This is ridiculous.” So on the weekend I happened to be in Washington with a friend of mine and very enraged about this, and so we wound up at the USO and I wrote letters to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery and the Bureau of Naval Personnel telling the situation and also the fact I was going to write to my congressman, *et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*. And within the next week’s time there was quite a bit of action at Portsmouth, as you would might imagine.
- Mike: I bet.
- Otto: The Navy was sending a detail down there, *et cetera* and so forth. And in that letter I had also said I came back from civilian life, I wanted to serve my country. And I said, “I either want to go to Korea or be aboard the *USS Wisconsin*, whichever is your choice,” because the *Wisconsin* at that time was, I believe, docked in Norfolk or somewhere in the area. And of course, I got my marching orders to Korea. Which would be to go to Camp Pendleton or Camp Del Mar, I believe it was, one of the two camps. Report to the 1st Marine Division for combat training and then for transfer overseas with the 1st Marine Division. Which is what I wanted.
- Mike: Alright. So you—you’re sent out to California again—
- Otto: Yeah.
- Mike: —and you go through Marine combat training.
- Otto: Yeah. I took the Marine combat training and I believe that was either six or eight weeks, whatever it was, which was basically the same training the Marines got.
- Mike: Right. Was it common procedure to send Navy corpsmen to Marine Corps combat training?

- Otto: Oh yeah. Marines always have had Navy hospital corpsmen attached. They have no medical department of their own.
- Mike: I see.
- Otto: So what they did was they drew these people from the Navy and you'd have Navy hospital corpsmen assigned to every Marine infantry unit, every Marine function, and then of course, the MASH hospitals staffed by Navy doctors and Navy hospital corpsmen.
- Mike: Okay. So you're effectively on detachment with the Marine Corps at this point and you're sent to Korea?
- Otto: Yes.
- Mike: And what year was that—'51?
- Otto: That was 1951.
- Mike: Okay, so the war's still fairly new. Where did you end up in Korea?
- Otto: Well, I was assigned to the 1st Marine Division. In fact, Item Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines was my initial duty station there. And I was the corpsman for the machine gun platoon of that company.
- Mike: And how many men were in the machine gun platoon?
- Otto: That's a good question to ask me, because I couldn't remember how many people then, I can't remember now. There were—
- Mike: A small unit, though. Small unit?
- Otto: Yeah, well I would say twenty, twenty-five, thirty.
- Mike: Okay. And once you were assigned to them, where do you go from there?
- Otto: Well, I landed in—well of course, the ship first went to Japan and then from there we went to Korea and landed in—gawd, how could I have a mental block? The only harbor on the tip of—this is crazy, I've got a mental block, I can't—
- Mike: Oh that's okay. It's more important where you go from there, once you've landed.

- Otto: I landed—I know that we landed at the tip at the harbor there and then went to Kimpo Air Field, I believe it was. And we were flown immediately to the lines in old DC3s. And got off the plane, trucks picked us up and we immediately went up to the lines because there was a fierce battle going on at that time.
- Mike: Okay, so there was no interim period where you underwent any further training when you got to Korea?
- Otto: No.
- Mike: You were just sent right to the lines?
- Otto: No, we got off the ship and I think it was two days later we were attached to the units in combat.
- Mike: I see, and so you experienced battlefield conditions and battles almost immediately?
- Otto: Oh yes. Oh yeah.
- Mike: And how long were you in line of battle when you were in Korea? Did you—how long at each time—were you there continuously in battle, or did you go back and forth between the rear echelons?
- Otto: No. My unit was—I was in the rear for a brief time when I was evacuated, but otherwise my unit was a line company with the 7th Marines and they were not continually in battle because they would be pulled from one area and sent to another area wherever there—it was like a fire, fire company trying to fight brush fires.
- Mike: Wherever the problem popped up they were sent?
- Otto: Right, yeah.
- Mike: Can you tell me a little about what it was like in combat in Korea for a corpsman?
- Otto: Oh it's—for a corpsman it's perhaps a little bit different than an infantryman because your responsibility is to take care of the people that are wounded in the field of fire. So you consequently at times have to be moving when everyone else is dug in and protecting themselves, and you have to overcome that fear and do what you have to do.
- Ah, it's been a long time, you have to remember, since I've been there so I—and you tend to try to put that in the background of your mind. But

I do remember some traumatic things that happened to me that would not have happened to an infantryman.

My first casualty, for example, was one that I had pulled out of the field of fire and was trying to save, and who died as I was trying to do that. And that, of course, is unique to the hospital corpsman rather than to the combat soldier. My mission is to save lives; theirs is to take lives.

Mike: Right.

Otto: So it's a different thing and it's a traumatic thing.

Mike: Did you find yourself—you said you had to get over the fear of being exposed. Did you find that you were able to do that and that you put that behind—to do your job you felt that was a—

Otto: Yeah, you do that because you always—I think the majority of us always think it's somebody else that's going to get hit, not me. And then one day along the line you start thinking, “that could have been me” or whatever it is that changes you, and then you start worrying. Up until that point you really don't think about it; you've got a job to do and you do it. There's anxiety and sure there's fear of course, but not enough to stop you from doing what you have to do.

Mike: I see. Did your unit encounter particularly heavy casualties?

Otto: Yes, we did. I was with two companies. I was with Item Company, which was one of the most decorated companies over there in its course of combat. And also with Howe Company, H Company.

And H Company at one time was surrounded on a hill and we were surrounded for, I believe, three days when that relief column finally got through to us. I don't remember the numbers exactly anymore, but I think there were like fourteen people still who had not been either killed or wounded out of that company of two hundred and some. And I had wounded stashed everywhere so that you, you know—it was almost impossible to walk around the top of that hill without falling over someone that had been wounded.

Mike: So the corpsman is busy all the time?

Otto: Oh yeah.

Mike: Even when they're—when you're not actively engaged, you were probably busy attending to the needs of the wounded and—

- Otto: Well, it's only during the heat of combat, because those people once you take care of them are evacuated.
- Mike: I see. Helicopter evacuation or—
- Otto: Oh yeah. Helicopter, or in the case of on-line, the helicopters didn't come in there. The helicopters will come into the rear area battalion aid stations. But on the line itself, we had Korean Service Corps people, stretcher bearers who would come up and would take the stretchers back to the battalion aid station and then the serious ones are evacuated by air, the others were evacuated by truck or ambulance to what would be the equivalent of MASH hospitals far in the rear.
- Mike: So the time you were with the Marine Corps in Korea, most of it was spent in-line then, is that right?
- Otto: Yes.
- Mike: Okay. And was your unit—when you were finished—well, did you stay there for the entire war, I guess is the question?
- Otto: No, they had—at that time they had replacement drops going. I was one of the first ones, and then they would rotate people after a certain period of time. So then I was there, I believe, a year and a half and then finally at a point when your number is getting close, if you want to call it that, then you have the opportunity to go to the rear, and I went to a rear area MASH hospital at that time for duty.
- Mike: Tell me a little bit about that, what it was like to work in a MASH unit.
- Otto: Well, it's nothing like the movie of course. [laughs] The movie, or the series was kinda a cross between a battalion aid station and a MASH hospital. Because the MASH hospitals, and I'm using them—that Army term for our version of it—were so far to the rear that there was never any danger of—the only danger they had was from guerrillas, not from actual line combat. Where, on the other hand, the battalion aid stations were all slightly to the rear of the front lines, so they occasionally did take some fire. And so if you mix the two them, then you get the television version of MASH, I guess. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**
- Mike: So you're a little bit behind the front lines but you're still exposed to some fire and the possibility of attack by opposing forces?
- Otto: Sure, in the battalion aid stations.
- Mike: Right, yeah, Okay.

- Otto: In fact, I remember at one time—and I was very lucky because I'd been at the battalion aid station to pick up something for our lines—I don't remember what it was, that's a long time ago—and I'd gotten the material and I'd left the battalion aid station and was on my way back up the mountain to where we were stationed when I had heard the explosions and looked back and they had destroyed the battalion aid station with some artillery or mortars, whatever it was.
- Mike: So they were fair game then for the North Koreans and Chinese?
- Otto: Oh, sure.
- Mike: And they were aware of what they were, obviously?
- Otto: Sure. In the beginning, when the war started, the Geneva Convention from years ago had established that a hospital corpsman cannot be harmed, number one, and number two, must be designated with a bright red cross on a field of white.
- Mike: Right.
- Otto: So the helmet had this and an armband had it. Well it didn't take long for the North Korean to look at that and say "Look, if we manage to eliminate that corpsman, that also effectively is going to wipe out half of that platoon," by virtue of the fact that he can't patch 'em up and send 'em back, *et cetera*. So the hospital corpsman became a target. And that's how this whole demand started originally that I had heard about, because they were—actually the snipers were zeroing in on the hospital corpsman rather than on the Marines.
- Mike: When you were in-line did you consider taking off the *brassard* and perhaps painting the helmet or—
- Otto: When I got there we no longer had any of those things. And we were trained with carbines at Camp Pendleton. They were taken away from us until we were out at sea and they were re-issued to us, so we—we landed armed. I had a .45 and a carbine when I hit the shore.
- Mike: I see.
- Otto: So this whole thing had evolved at that time. And you blended in at that, of course, without these other things.
- Mike: So you're essentially a combat infantryman who can render first aid then?

- Otto: Right. And the only thing that made us stand out—and we soon learned to eliminate that, too—was that you carried a pack of medications, bandages and so on. And eventually what we managed to do was figure out how to stuff all these things into our combat gear and get rid of the pack, too.
- Mike: Yeah, sure. That makes sense.
- Otto: Sure.
- Mike: How would you characterize the care that was given the wounded in these rear hospital areas?
- Otto: I would say that it was exceptionally good care, under the circumstances. And what made it even better, of course, was having the helicopter. The helicopter itself probably played the largest role in saving lives in Korea, and that was the first time that it really did. And we had the ability there to, to take a serious case and—there were no hospitals nearby, but the—I believe the *USS Solace* was the hospital ship we had. There was *The Repose* and *The Solace* were two of the Navy hospital ships. One of ‘em was offshore so that we could take our wounded, put them on the helicopter, get ‘em to that hospital ship in, you know, practically no time whatsoever. And so the injuries that could be treated on the ground now were taken care of, and the ones that you could see were not going to be saved you kept. But the ones where there was a chance you could load ‘em aboard those helicopters and get ‘em to the *USS Repose* or *Solace* and get immediately top quality care.
- Mike: So the increased mobility in the Korean War was a huge difference between that and the, say the Second World War?
- Otto: Yes, yeah.
- Mike: Okay. Well, once you’re transferred, you transferred back to the United States, correct?
- Otto: Um-hmm.
- Mike: Okay, so you didn’t have any—you didn’t stop in Japan or have a chance to—
- Otto: No, I did. Yeah, the ship—for some reason the ships always stop at Japan. [both laugh] And I’m not sure, I believe—yeah, I think the ship stopped at Kobe, Japan on the way back and I had several days there. And then of course we came back to the States.

- Mike: Do you remember anything in particular noteworthy about your stop in Japan after or during—
- Otto: The only thing I remember is that I loved the country and I hated to leave, which might surprise some people, but I found Japan to be a beautiful country. And I also had a unique advantage over many of my fellow Marines, if I can call them that. I spoke German and the Japanese spoke German.
- Mike: That's right; they had a relationship before the World Wars with the Germans. So you were able to communicate, whereas some of your fellow Marines—
- Otto: Right. And that makes all the difference in the world. When you have the ability to communicate with people it opens doors that might never, ever be open to anyone.
- Mike: Sure.
- Otto: So I wound up being in homes as a guest in the brief time that I was there. And you know, it really got to the point where I didn't want to leave.
- Mike: Wow. That's great, it's a good story. Question concerning the Marines themselves: the Marines have a tendency to be very proud of the Marine Corps. How did they accept—I imagine at this point they'd accepted you as a Marine, or did they give you some—was there some good-natured ribbing going on between the Marines and the Navy?
- Otto: At that point. That always goes on until you get to the point of combat, when every Marine worships a hospital corpsman, because the realization is suddenly there that life or death depends not only on the enemy but also this guy next to me here.
- Mike: Sure.
- Otto: So then it changes things. Plus the fact that you're enduring the same things that they are, so there's no doubt about it; you're immediately accepted, you're considered a Marine. In fact, what happened, I was so much in love with the Marine Corps and what I had seen over there and with the people that I served with that when I came back I did enlist in the Marine Corps later.
- Mike: I see. So at the expiration of your enlistment in the Navy you joined up with the Marines?

- Otto: Right.
- Mike: And that was in—was the war over at that point or was the war still going on?
- Otto: No, at that time the Korean War was in that Armistice stage, which of course, you know—actually the war is still going on today.
- Mike: Still is. [laughs] Okay. So you re-enlisted in the Marine Corps as a sergeant, is that correct?
- Otto: That's correct.
- Mike: Did you envision perhaps making the Marine Corps a career?
- Otto: Yes.
- Mike: Okay.
- Otto: Definitely. Well, that was my intent. And unfortunately, I took the test for basic school for commissioned twice, had top score both times, and both times I was passed over by someone else. And to take it again would not have been possible; I would have been too old by that time to qualify for it.
- Mike: So effectively you are unable for some reason to get into Officer Candidate School or the equivalent of Officer Candidate School?
- Otto: That's correct. So then I got out. I had no desire to be a staff NCO. I was a staff NCO, but that ladder to me wasn't the ladder I wanted to climb. I wanted to be into the command structure and I couldn't achieve that.
- Mike: What do you attribute the failure for them to choose you? Perhaps due to the lack of a college education, or what do you think it was?
- Otto: I think that might have been part of it, even though I had the highest scores on the test that they gave me, which would have indicated, you know, the college degree was immaterial.
- Mike: Immaterial, right.
- Otto: But I have to think it was some higher being, because ironically, both of the people that did go wound up in Vietnam. One of 'em was killed there the day he landed.

- Mike: I see.
- Otto: And that was, I think his name was Friedenberg?? or something from Wausau, I don't recall the exact name. But he went in place of me, he got the commission. I had talked to him—because we were all friends, of course, we had all, had all, you know, served together. And they both wound up in Vietnam, I know that. I don't know what happened to the other one. Oh, the other one's name was Rhodie??; he was from Minnesota.
- Mike: So in retrospect it was probably a good thing?
- Otto: Yeah. In retrospect, yes. [laughs]
- Mike: At the time it probably didn't seem like it, but—Okay, so you decide to leave the Marine Corps after being passed over for selection. And you—the notes I have indicate you moved to Green Bay.
- Otto: Yeah, my—the girl I met, I told you was the only one from Green Bay, and I married her for better or worse, and it turned out to be worse, and I moved to Green Bay.
- Mike: You know, we both have something in common. I married a girl from Green Bay, too.
- Otto: It's gotta be the water.
- Mike: It's working out okay, so far.
- Otto: Oh, then it's good.
- Mike: I'm lucky. You go to Green Bay with your wife and you work for the television station.
- Otto: Yeah, I went to work here with Channel Five. Originally what I did, I was stationed here with the Marine Corps with the 7th Engineer Company, which was a Reserve training company here.
- Mike: Oh okay, in Green Bay.
- Otto: Yes. And I was an Inspector-Instructor with that company. And in effect, I became the Radar O'Reilly; maybe they wrote about me when they wrote Radar O'Reilly's part. Because the captain was a mustang—the commanding officer—a mustang; in other words, a man who had gotten a battlefield commission. And he and I shared—we were the only two that really shared combat experience. All the rest of the staff there

were people who had never been in combat. So we got very close due to the fact that after hours he'd come to my house like two buddies and he'd get drunk on martinis at my house, but the next day it was still the officer-enlisted man relationship. But I wrote all the reports, because he really didn't care about those things. He was out in town living it up and having a good time. A wonderful guy and a brilliant officer, but just not happy with what he was doing at the time.

Mike: He should have been elsewhere, yeah.

Otto: So I got to write everybody's fitness reports, including my own.

Mike: Really, that worked out well!

Otto: And they were very good ones, I'll not lie about that. And everything that came in, and I mean—he and I would get together, he'd call me in the office and I'd give him the papers and, "What's this?" "Just sign it." Just like the movie.

Mike: Just sign it, sir. [laughs]

Otto: But fortunately I was—I took it very seriously and I believe, I'd like to believe I did an honest job of it. And we got along very well, and so that was the career I had. Well, in the process of that I also had an interest in sports and I wound up moonlighting writing sports for one of the papers. And I also had the job of public information with this unit, which meant I went to radio stations, newspapers and so on. So all this fit together pretty well.

Mike: So that was your sort of introduction into the media then?

Otto: Yeah. And at that time I was six foot-four, about two hundred pounds, in good physical shape and fairly decent looking, so I was what you would call a picture Marine for the purpose of trying to promote an image.

Mike: Yeah.

Otto: And apparently I had a personality that went with it, because I did quite well at it.

Mike: Great.

Otto: So I wrote sports, and then in the process of all of these things, of course, I got to meet people in radio, television, newspapers and so on. And Channel Five at that time was a very small station in Neenah and it

was UHF so that the radius, effective radius was maybe three blocks, or something like that. [laughs]

And they applied for a license to move this thing to Green Bay and build a station here. And of course I was involved in the initial stages of all of this and dealing with it with the Marine Corps. And I got to know the people there, and there was an opening there and they said—I mentioned something about leaving the Marine Corps and they said, “Why don’t you come to work here?”

And I talked to the manager and he and I liked each other and so—I believe it was the twenty-sixth that I left the Marine Corps, twenty-seventh I started Channel Five. Something like that.

Mike: And how long did you—how long were you with Channel Five?

Otto: I was with Channel Five for seven years. And in that time I managed to do almost half of what people do in television stations. You know, at that time there was no schooling for it, it was a young medium. I was the Art Director, the Chief Photographer, I wrote sports—what else did I do? I was Promotion Manager, the Merchandising Manager, I became a department head and oversaw the Copy Department. Various things like that, through my career there.

Mike: So you did everything there, basically?

Otto: I did a little bit of everything except on-the-air. No, I had one on-the-air program, and that was almost the end of my career. I hosted a preliminary to the—oh, what was it—the opera series that was put on at that time, because I love good music. They had—one of the gas companies had sponsored—was it Texaco?—I can’t remember anymore—operas for years and years and we had a half-hour fill time prior to the opera, which was on Saturdays, and I hosted that half-hour. [laughs] So I got a little air exposure, too.

Mike: Oh, I see, that’s great. At this point it’s not—you’re probably thinking it’s not necessary—or did you use the GI Bill at any time up in Green Bay?

Otto: I used the GI Bill in Green Bay to buy a home.

Mike: Okay.

Otto: So I had already used it for my education and I didn’t complete that, of course, because I enlisted again to, to satisfy my conscience, as I told you.

- Mike: Right, right. So you used it to buy a home, a guaranteed loan on a VA home, correct?
- Otto: Yeah. It was some ridiculous mortgage, like four and a quarter percent, whatever it was.
- Mike: Payments were probably thirty dollars. [laugh]
- Otto: Something like that. Yeah.
- Mike: Okay. Well, let's see—and you've remained in Green Bay since then, correct?
- Otto: No, no. I stayed in Green Bay for that seven years that I mentioned, then for another year here, I got involved with a partner to start a new business and it was a gentleman's agreement, and I found out there is no such thing, afterwards.
- Mike: That's true.
- Otto: So after a year of that disaster, I had lost everything and friends of mine heard about it and they called me from Milwaukee that WISN—of course, at that time I also had developed color facilities and I was pretty knowledgeable in color photography, so WISN wound up being my next place of employment for about three years, and I developed their color photography and things like that.
- And I was commuting, because my wife did not want anything to do with Milwaukee—absolutely nothing. So I would commute every week, and that, of course, is not realistic.
- Mike: Right. So you're commuting on a daily basis and that's a little too much, obviously.
- Let me ask you a couple questions; we're getting close to wrapping this up. Did you have any associations with veterans' organizations after your service in the Marine Corps and Navy?
- Otto: My only association after I left was with the VFW. That's the only one I belong to; I still belong to that, that's the only one.
- Mike: I see. And what attracted you to the VFW?
- Otto: Well, I was invited to an American Legion thing after Korea. And I went to the Sullivan-Wallen Post here, which incidentally owns the Packers,

in theory. And I went to the meeting and I heard nothing but complaining and whining and crying about we need this and we need that and we need that. And I got upset about it. I don't remember what the one issue was, and I got the floor and I said, "I'm not a member of this post but I'm just curious why you're whining so much about that." And, of course, I was drummed out of there, more or less, so it's by mutual agreement. I said, "I don't need this." I said, "My theory in joining an organization like this is not to get more. I think I've gotten enough, and I still feel that today." The GI Bill was more than ample reward and I'm totally delighted that the government did that. And as far as the other things go, I didn't feel that that was right to be constantly whining about veterans should get all these things. So I left there and then finally decided that the only one that really has combat veterans in it—

Mike: VFW?

Otto: Yeah, so that's why I went to the VFW.

Mike: Now, you didn't encounter that sort of attitude at the VFW?

Otto: Well, the VFW has it to some degree, too, but it's not as—the thing that I found, I think, objectionable was that most of the people that were crying about the benefits were people who had never been anywhere.

Mike: I see.

Otto: In the American Legion, I'm talking about.

Mike: Right, right.

Otto: Whereas in the VFW you get some people, and right now we got an awful lot of Vietnam veterans who are constantly bewailing these things, of course. In their case I can somewhat agree with them.

Mike: Have you seen an increase in the membership of the VFW from the Vietnam era veterans?

Otto: Yeah, not a huge one, but, you know, a fair one. Our post right now though, is being disbanded and I have to move to a different post. I have to pick another one because of the decline in membership and the lack of Vietnam veterans coming to provide new blood for our particular post.

Mike: Is the VFW active in recruiting Vietnam veterans?

Otto: Yes, they are. They're very active in it, but they don't seem to—

- Mike: Seem to want to join?
- Otto: Yeah. And of course, there are requirements there, where the American Legion is, the requirement is to send the check.
- Mike: Yes. [laughs]
- Otto: You know.
- Mike: Yes, I know. And so you're fairly active in the VFW, even right now?
- Otto: Yeah. I had been the Vice Commander of the post, and then the last—in recent years I've kind of just backed away from it and just provided my dues.
- Mike: Okay. So it's safe to say that you view the GI Bill as a very important act and that it significantly influenced your life and perhaps gave you some opportunities that might not have been available prior to the War?
- Otto: Very true. I feel that probably of all the wrong programs the government established, this is one that was probably the finest program that was ever established because it provided so much—not only for the veterans but for the country in general, to provide the educations for these people who became really the cornerstone of our civilization.
- Mike: Exactly. I have to agree with you on that one. Well, it's been wonderful talking to you and I appreciate you taking the time to interview this afternoon. And I'd like to—on behalf of the Wisconsin Veterans Museum, I'd like to thank you.
- Otto: Well, I'd like to thank you, too. And I'd like to just close with one thing, too. You know, the time that I spent in combat, and I had mentioned that—you had wrote for the book, I understand, *The Faces of War*, that was published about Korea?
- Mike: That's correct.
- Otto: Yeah, and in that book I was interviewed for part of it and they left out the one thing that I thought was the most important thing. You know, I became a Marine—I was no hero over there. I did my duty and I think I did it well, but there were so many people that rose above and beyond what I thought a human being was capable of doing, to do what they had to do for this country. That's the greatest thing in the world. And the experience, the pleasure to have been with people like that—that's something I'll cherish the rest of my life.

Mike: Oh yes, I imagine. Well, once again, I'd like to thank you.

Otto: Well, thank you.

Mike: It's been a pleasure.

Otto: Thank you.

Mike: And this will—this interview will be on file in our archives here and it will be transcribed. And if you ever want to come down and listen to it or have access to it, just give us a call.

Otto: Okay, thank you. Maybe down the road my grandchildren will find out a little bit about life not being all that they think it is. [laughs]

Mike: That's why they're here.

Otto: Right.

Mike: Okay thank you, sir.

Otto: You're welcome.

Mike: Bye-bye

Otto: Bye.

[End of Interview]