

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
ROBERT W. SCHREIBER
Infantry, Marine Corps, Korean War
2016

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Schreiber, Robert W., (b.1929). Oral History Interview, 2016.

Approximate length: 21 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

Robert W. Schreiber, originally of Madison, Wisconsin, enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1946. He served briefly in the aftermath of World War II and, after joining the Reserves in 1948, he was called to active duty during the Korean War. Schreiber was involved in the Chosin Reservoir conflict but he was unwilling to talk about this experience during his interview. He spent his final days in service on guard duty at Subic Bay (Philippines) where he was sent after being discharged from the hospital where he had been treated for frostbite. The interview briefly touches on Mr. Schreiber's basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina and a short stint at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The interview contains brief mentions of the living conditions in the Philippines when the narrator was stationed there. The interview also goes into some detail about Schreiber's life after service and his thoughts on the state of the country at present. No details were provided about Mr. Schreiber's duties or assignments while deployed. He was generally reluctant to recount bad memories about his service, although he does allude to good times had while in the military.

Biographical Sketch:

Robert W. Schreiber (b.1929) enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1946. He served as an infantryman during the Korean War in the 1st Marine Division and was stationed at Subic Bay (Philippines). He was discharged in 1948.

Interview by Fay Tichy, 2016

Draft Transcript by Ellen Brooks, March 2016

Reviewed by Helen Gibb, 2016

Abstract written by Ellen Brooks, 2016

Interview Transcript:

[File 1]

Tichy: This is an interview with Robert W. Schreiber. Today is February 11, 2016. Robert served with the Marine Corps and he was in--the dates of his service were World War II, July 12, 1946 to March of 1948. He joined the Reserves and was called into the Korean War, was part of the Chosin Reservoir conflict. He's now at the Union Grove Veterans Home in Wisconsin and he is being interviewed at that location. The interview is by Fay E. Tichy. And it's being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program.

And Robert's nickname is Spanky. So we will be calling him Spanky in the interview. That's really how we've gotten to know him.

Schreiber: When I was a kid in Madison they called me 'Slug'[laughs].

Tichy: So you see he's had a few nicknames.

Schreiber: Yeah.

Tichy: Spanky, tell me when and where you were born.

Schreiber: I was born in Madison, Wisconsin, March 19, 1929.

Tichy: And can you tell me a little about your background, what was happening before you entered military service? What were you doing?

Schreiber: I was going to school, I was going to Madison Central [High School]. And I was working. Then I quit school and went in the Marine Corps. I went in for two years, went in in 1946, got out in '48 and I joined down in Great Lakes. I joined the Reserves—Marine Reserve. Then Madison formed a Reserve Unit up there so I joined that. We'd just gone and got together and the Korean War broke out. Then we got called back in. Went out to California and the guys who didn't go through boot camp—I can't remember just how many guys—they sent to boot camp, the other ones they sent us to first replacement draft—first and second replacement draft for Korea. So that's how I joined. I joined in Hwaseong, Korea—went in there and I joined the 7th Marines there. 1950. I can't remember just what the month was.

Tichy: That's okay.

Schreiber: And we went up to North Korea, was up around—I can't even remember the town anymore. Then the winter set in, the Chinese come in—well they were in it before

but we started fighting them and they surrounded us. And it was just [inaudible], as well, we got 'em right where we want them now, we got them all around us [laughs].

Tichy: Let me ask you something Spanky—what made you decide to join the Marine Corps?

Schreiber: I wanted to join Marine Corps 'cause I'd seen them in those khaki uniforms with those pith helmets [laughs]. And I said, "Oh boy, I wanna be one of those guys."

Tichy: Where was your basic training?

Schreiber: Parris Island, South Carolina.

Tichy: Can you tell me a little about that?

Schreiber: You ought to ask your husband, he'll tell you [laughs].

Tichy: Okay.

Ron Tichy: I went to [Marine Corps Recruit Depot San] Diego .

Schreiber: Oh, you went to Diego, oh!

Ron Tichy: I went to Hollywood—

Schreiber: Parris Island's one of the first Marine Corps boot camps there was. It was the first one.

Tichy: Oh, I didn't know that.

Schreiber: Oh, yeah. And before World War I, right around that, yeah. During the war most of them went to Parris Island. East of Mississippi went to Parris Island and west you went to San Diego. Well, a lotta guys went to San Diego. Most of them went to South Carolina.

Tichy: I'm gonna interject here. I am the interviewer, but I'm also here with Ron Tichy, my husband—he and Spanky are friends—and so Spanky was really hoping Ron would come today. So that's the other voice that you will hear. Right, Spanky?

Schreiber: Right.

Tichy: Okay [laughs]. What about boot camp? Can you share anything about that?

Schreiber: It was a little on the rough side—a lot different than it is now. They told you you needed to shut your mouth you better do it. And if you didn't they'd take care of

you. But now they get by with a lotta stuff that then you didn't get by with. We did what we're supposed to do and never said anything.

Tichy: How about your first assignment or duty station? Can you tell me about that?

Schreiber: Well, after I got out of boot camp I went to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. That was built during World War II, and this was 1946—it was a new base. It was beautiful. If you're ever at Parris Island, there they had these old barracks, and you go into Camp Lejeune and it's all new brick barracks. Oh it was wonderful. Where I was at that point, I was in the 8th Marines there, 2nd Marine Division, 1st Battalion. And then right there in '46 we were the best trained division in the United States. Very, very good. We had a lotta good training. Had a lotta my buddies from around Chicago, Pennsylvania and the East Coast—most of them. Nice bunch of people.

Tichy: What kept you going through everything in the military?

Schreiber: Well, after [Chosin] Reservoir I got—I was in the hospital for a while, and they wouldn't send me back to combat on account of I had this frostbite real bad. So they sent me down to the Philippine Islands—Subic Bay, Philippines. It's right off of Luzon. It was good duty station. Nice and warm [laughs]. I really liked it there. I really like the Filipinos, were very nice people. Mm-hm. Actually the town was right outside the base they called Olongapo and the Bataan Death March went through there. Now I've got a friend of mine in Janesville, his wife's dad was in the Bataan Death March—he works at the post office, in Janesville. And Pat Brown is his name. And his wife's last name was Bugs. And he was a kinda skinny guy. He was on the Bataan Death March. And I read a lot about it, but he told me a lot what his father-in-law would tell him 'cause his father-in-law didn't like to talk too much about it. He didn't like to talk about it. But he sometimes would tell him about some of the stuff they did. Yeah. Then while they was there in the Philippines, they 'em aboard prison ships, sent them to Japan to work in the coal mines or stuff. Well then, the American submarines were sinking the ships. They didn't sink his ship, so he made it. He made it out of there. Mm-hm.

Tichy: Now this was in Korea, and you'd had to go to Subic, did you say?

Ron Tichy: Subic Bay.

Schreiber: After I got out of the hospital, yeah.

Tichy: After the hospital, okay.

Schreiber: Yeah.

Tichy: Okay, and then what did you do there, what was your—

Schreiber: Guard duty all the time.

Tichy: Okay, all right. What was—

Schreiber: That was a Navy base. We had the jurisdiction of the town, the police and everything else. So the Marines, we took care of all that stuff.

Tichy: How were the facilities there?

Schreiber: Well, it's kind of primitive stuff, you know. But they were awful nice people.

Tichy: How about the food?

Schreiber: The food? The Filipino food? Oh, it's very good.

Tichy: You liked it?

Schreiber: Oh, yeah. We all liked it. The beer was actually good too [laughs].

Ron Tichy: San Miguel beer.

Schreiber: Yeah, they had jeepneys there—like jeeps, all decorated up, these things. That was something else. I got pictures of 'em, I'll show you some.

Ron Tichy: Jeepneys.

Schreiber: Yeah.

Tichy: What did you do when you were on leave? Or did you get leave there?

Schreiber: I didn't go on any leave there.

Tichy: You didn't get any leave?

Schreiber: No. No. When I got outta there I come back home, start working.

Tichy: Okay. Now, can we go back to—

Schreiber: Madison.

Tichy: World War II, when—before Korea, is there anything that stands out in your mind that you would wanna share? What—

Schreiber: Oh, I worked in a restaurant—up on the Square. Bill Smith's Homestyle lunch.

Tichy: In World War II?

Schreiber: Yeah.

Ron Tichy: Before he went in.

Tichy: Before you went in?

Schreiber: Before I went in the Marine Corps.

Tichy: Okay.

Schreiber: I was going to school. I washed dishes, peeled potatoes and I did short order cooking, and I ran the seating table. I made fifteen cents an hour.

Tichy: Big money.

Schreiber: Oh yeah, but I saved my money, enough I went up to JC Penny's, I bought myself some clothes. I bought a pair of shoes, a pair of gray gabardine trousers, a red—wait, no—a green corduroy sport coat for school. That's how I dressed. And all that stuff—you know what I paid for all that stuff? Eleven dollars, brand new. Cost you about three hundred dollars now.

Tichy: [laughs] Wow. Now I have another question. In the time you were in World War II—

Schreiber: I was right at the end, the war was over when I went in.

Tichy: Okay.

Schreiber: I went in in '46. The war was over in '45.

Tichy: Okay. So then that wasn't as tough a duty as Korea?

Schreiber: Oh, no.

Tichy: Korea was the tough duty.

Schreiber: That's when Truman—in fact, they couldn't get—they had a hard time when the Korean War broke out, the North Koreans, they were beating the living day lights out of the American troops over there. They were trying to get the Marines over there, they couldn't get enough. So they got enough—they had to only—they had to form a brigade, the 1st Marine Brigade was over there. And they put a stop to them. They couldn't. That's as far as they went after the brigade. The ran into the 1st Marine Brigade and they took care of them. Yeah.

Tichy: Is there any unusual, or funny or unusual story that you would think about to share for this interview? Any stories that stand out in your mind about—

Schreiber: I don't like to talk about it.

Tichy: Okay.

Schreiber: I'd rather not talk about it.

Tichy: Okay, that's okay. If we take you to the end of your military career, when you got out—

Schreiber: Yeah.

Tichy: —how did you feel? What did you think when you came back to civilian life?

Schreiber: Well, right when I first got back I didn't mind it one bit. Everything was going good, I got a job. But then this Vietnam War came on and those poor guys took a bunch bad stuff. They got that Agent Orange. And they weren't treated very good by the government. But they start marching in Chicago. You remember that. They put a stop to some of that stuff with the Army; they put a stop to some of that stuff. The politics were pretty bad here in this country. And it still is. But it's starting to shape up, it's gettin' a little religion in there to shape this country up a lot. And it's gonna get better.

Ron Tichy: Amen.

Schreiber: And you outta come over here, see some of these veterans here. I tell you, you start thinking about things. This country's a great country. And they're lettin' all this killing and stuff going on—it's gotta stop.

Tichy: You're right.

Schreiber: 'Cause these policemen are out there to protect you. And they take [inaudible]. The Chicago bunch—they pull a lotta stuff. But these other policeman are real good people. And you people—people gotta listen. It's not a police state, but you gotta act like a good American citizen.

Tichy: What did you do after you got out of service? Work or school or--

Schreiber: I worked at Gardner Bakery. I was gonna go to school but I got married. I worked at Gardner Bakery in Madison. It was not a union shop but I tell you, it was a good place to work. We had good wages. We had insurance. We had everything. He took good care of us. And we had a bunch of good workers. Never had no problem. But we worked. It ain't like it is now. Gotta have respect for older people.

Tichy: How long did you work there?

Schreiber: About three or four years, maybe five. About that, yeah.

Tichy: Okay.

Schreiber: Then I went to work at the post office. Worked there, then I went to Rockford, got a job and I worked at Crusher Corporation [??] in Belvedere. I lived in Beloit. Got married. I lived in Beloit. And I put twenty three years there—twenty three or twenty four. Retired. Then my wife passed away. I retired for ten years and she passed away.

Tichy: Did you keep any relationships and associations from when you were in service?

Schreiber: Well there's a couple guys in Rockford that I run into, that I knew.

Tichy: Okay.

Schreiber: But that's about it. And I met some real good friends of mine—we formed the Marine Corps League in Beloit, Wisconsin. Janesville and Beloit, we had the Marine Corps League. And we had a nice bunch, we had a nice league. But we had a couple guys in there that took some money out, and we run into bad times. I don't wanna talk about it.

Tichy: Okay. No problem.

Schreiber: But we gotta couple good friends, we all stick together in the end.

Tichy: You still see those friends, don't you?

Schreiber: Oh, they come over all the time. They take care of me.

Tichy: I think we met—

Schreiber: You know. The names, I get all [inaudible]. Pat Brown from Janesville, and Malcom Reed from Beloit. They're up here all the time taking care of my financial stuff, they're—

Tichy: Good friends.

Schreiber: Very good friends of mine. Then I met some good Marine friends, other friends at Sommers [??]—very nice bunch of people.

Tichy: A lot of heroes here.

Schreiber: You better b—a lotta good people, yeah.

Tichy: Including you.

Schreiber: Well, I don't know about that but—[laughter]. I know a lot of 'em are very good.

Ron Tichy: Aw, you're on the top of the list.

Schreiber: Well, thank you.

Tichy: Now, looking back on your military and war experiences, what has it meant to your life?

Schreiber: I think back on it, I always wondered what ever happened to all of them. I know I lost a lot of them. But I met some awful good people. But I'm not gonna tell you what we did though [laugh].

Ron Tichy: [laughs]

Tichy: Okay.

Ron Tichy: Yeah, put that in the interview.

Schreiber: But no, seriously, there are a lotta good memories.

Tichy: What would you tell someone that didn't know anything about war or combat or anything military?

Schreiber: Well, you know what, nobody likes war. But you gotta protect your country we're in. These other countries, they have all kinds of problems. We've got our problems here. But we're getting them straightened out. And it's getting better. And it's gonna get better. You gotta realize—you gotta [inaudible] and to have respect for people. And start going to church.

Tichy: Good advice. How do you feel that you're different now, as a result of your military background?

Schreiber: I've gotten older.

Tichy: Well that's true [laughter] But how do you feel--what do you think is different about you after--

Schreiber: I realize a lotta things now a lot better than I did before.

Tichy: Like what?

Schreiber: Oh like, you know, when you're younger you don't want to pay attention what people tell you—older people. You gotta do—you gotta listen to 'em. Especially your mom and dad. Now we had some little kids come up before Christmas, in November from Racine—fifth graders. Little guy comes up to me and he says,

"Can I come over to talk to you?" "Yeah, yeah." I sat and talked with him and then all his buddies started coming over. He says, "I'm gonna come up and see you, my mother's bringing me up. Can I come out?" "Yeah!" So the other day I sat in my room and looked up, he's standing there and I motioned him to come in. And his mother comes in with him, and you talk about somebody interesting to sit and talk with—I really enjoyed it. We're gonna have a good country one of these days 'cause kids are smart. They have a good bringing up. All we ever hear about is all this junk going on. But we got some smart people coming on.

Ron Tichy: Yep. Amen. Yep.

Tichy: And so good to hear someone like you be positive about our young people.

Schreiber: I've been on both sides of the fence. And I'm happy about what I see that's gonna happen. Yep.

Tichy: That's great.

Ron Tichy: Good.

Tichy: Is there anything that you'd like to add that we haven't addressed?

Schreiber: Well I bet you people [inaudible]—you and your husband. Her husband is a Marine too. He's in here with us right now, and a very good man. And he's a retired minister too. I really like the both of them.

Tichy: That's really nice but we wanna talk about you.

Schreiber: I wanna talk about you [laughter].

Tichy: Well, I know there's a lot you don't want to talk about, but—

Schreiber: I'd just rather not talk about it.

Tichy: —I would appreciate, I mean, I appreciate that you would talk about the things that you did. I really thank you.

Schreiber: Oh, thank you.

Tichy: And we will be able to hear from you when this is all done.

Schreiber: You better—well thank you dear. Don't forget we've got a nice lunch coming up too.

Tichy: Yes sir [laughter] And that concludes our interview. And we thank Spanky, or Robert, for—

Schreiber: And God bless America.

Tichy: Amen. Thank you Spanky.

Ron Tichy: Thank you Spanky, for your service.

[End of Interview]