

John M. Beauregard
Narrator

Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum
Interviewer

Interviewed on 1/12/2012 at the NY State Military Museum & Veterans Research Center,
Saratoga Springs, NY

INT: For the record would you please state your full name, and date and place of birth.

JB: John M. Beauregard, born 10/30/42, Schenectady, New York.

INT: Did you grow up in Schenectady? Attend school there?

JB: Yes.

INT: Did you graduate from high school?

JB: Yes.

INT: What year did you graduate?

JB: 1960.

INT: After graduation, did you go to work or did you go on to a secondary school?

JB: I went on to [??field] College for two years and got an associate degree.

INT: What did you get your degree in?

JB: Animal Science.

INT: Once you got your degree, what happened next?

JB: I came home and worked on a horse farm here in Saratoga for a while then went to horseshoeing school at Oregon State in Corvallis. When I came home, I was notified that I was going to be drafted, so I joined the service.

INT: You enlisted?

JB: Yes.

INT: Why did you pick the army?

JB: Because I had a choice of schools to go to and I wanted to go to welding school.

INT: When exactly did you go in?

JB: January 7, 1964.

INT: Where did you go for your basic training?

JB: Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

INT: What was your basic training like?

JB: It was certainly an awakening. I think I quickly learned what a lot of us learned: Keep your mouth shut and do as you're told, and then it's no problem if you do that.

INT: In 1964 were there rumors of possibly going to Vietnam?

JB: No. We had an emergency formation in Korea and we were put on alert because they had officially started the war in Vietnam. That would have been about September of 1964.

INT: Let's go back a little bit. Once you completed your basic, you went on to welding school?

JB: That's right. At Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland.

INT: How long was that school?

JB: Three months.

INT: What type of welding did you learn?

JB: Pretty much all kinds, electric arc welding, acetylene welding, MIG (metal inert gas) welding, TIG (tungsten inert gas) welding.

INT: Did you do any pipe welding?

JB: Real basic, not a lot.

INT: Once you completed welding school, where were you sent?

JB: I was sent to the Eighth Army, 1st Cavalry Division, 27th Maintenance Company in South Korea.

INT: You went right to Korea. Did you have any leave at home first?

JB: I had a week before I went over.

INT: Whereabouts in the States did you leave from?

JB: Travis Air force Base, near San Francisco.

INT: Was it a military flight?

JB: Yes. It was an Air Force flight and we went to Anchorage, Alaska in July of '64 at 1:00 in the morning, landed in Anchorage and it was daylight. [laughs] From Anchorage the flight was directly to Kimpo Air Base in Seoul, South Korea.

INT: What was it like when you stepped off the plane in Korea?

JB: I always remember looking out the window as we were landing and it certainly looked kind of primitive, even around the airport. There were hooches, huts they lived in. At that time, Korea was still a pretty much backward country, hadn't advanced a lot. It's certainly changed now.

INT: What about any unusual smells?

JB: Certainly was. [laughs] The rice paddies, they used human fertilizer on them and there was a constant smell of that.

INT: Where were you assigned?

JB: I was assigned to Camp MacKenzie which was just south of the Incheon River there in the DMZ (demilitarized zone) probably four or five miles south of Panmunjom.

INT: What was life like there for you?

JB: After you got adjusted to it, no problems. It was certainly backward, compared to the States, with all the dirt roads and things like that. There was a little village right next to us and you could see the people carrying on their day to day life.

INT: What kind of living quarters did you have?

JB: Quonset huts. They were quite sufficient but they got a little cold in the winter because they turned the heat off at night. Just before I got there, they had a fire and a number of troops were killed because of the kerosene heaters they had. So the orderly came through at night and pulled the plug on the heaters. It wasn't bad.

INT: Did you have indoor plumbing?

JB: Not in the Quonset hut, you had to go down to the main shower facility which was 20 yards away.

INT: What was your unit designation?

JB: It was C Company, 27th Maintenance, attached to the 2d of the 7th Cavalry which was a battalion or a regiment in the 1st Cavalry Division. It had the distinction of being [General George Armstrong] Custer's outfit. In the morning, they'd play "Garry Owen," the regimental song.

INT: Did any of them wear the cavalry hats?

JB: No.

INT: Any kind of ceremony?

JB: No.

INT: What was your daily routine like?

JB: In the morning we'd have formation, go to chow. I kind of got out of formation because I was the mail clerk and I got to skip formation and take the mail down to another post. After that we went to the mess hall and ate and came back, and shortly had a formation for another day's work.

INT: Being a mail clerk, did you have any other responsibilities? Did you work in your MOS (Military Occupational Specialty)?

JB: Yes, I did work in my MOS but as mail clerk, my responsibility was to take the mail from the company mailbox, bring it up to the camp I was on, take that and there were a couple other companies, take all that down to a another bigger mail drop place. The sergeants would give me money to get them mail orders and mail them to their wives back home. Sometimes I had an awful lot of money on me and I often thought that wasn't a very good thing for me to do if something happened. But nothing happened, everything went fine.

INT: Did you have a Jeep?

JB: Yes, a Jeep or a three-quarter ton.

INT: Did you have to pull guard duty at all?

JB: We did at first. We had guard duty in the motor pool, right across from the company area, then we had a garage area where they fixed the vehicles and a guy that fixed arms—rifles and stuff like that—and a welding shop. So we pulled guard duty there. The infantry company had dogs and the dogs were loose to walk around the perimeter with the infantry guard at night, but we kind of got out of that because the dogs would be such a problem when we were out walking around the place. I had some of them come after me but his handler was there so no problem, it just scared the daylights out of you.

INT: Did you have any interaction with the Korean Army?

JB: Yes. We had Koreans assigned to our company, ten of them maybe. They called them KATUSA, which was Koreans attached to the Eighth US Army. They were good guys, I really got along well with them.

INT: Did you eat any of the civilian food?

JB: Once in a while we would get stuff down in the village. They had a dish called yaki-mandu that was a deep fat fried pastry with fish and stuff inside it. God knows what was in it but it tasted good. We could get them for fifty cents.

INT: On your time off were you able to go into the villages?

JB: No, they weren't supposed to. We had a recreation center nearby where you could go and it was mainly GIs down there at another base.

INT: Did you get to any of the larger cities like Seoul?

JB: I went to Seoul, I went to the UN (United Nations) compound at Seoul. That was kind of interesting, it was the only place there that looked like the United States. They had sidewalks and lawns and things like that. Spent a couple nights at a resort down there, it was nice. Other people took time off and went to Japan or the Philippines but I didn't do that.

INT: How bad were the winters there?

JB: Not near as bad as last winter here. They were surprisingly not that long but it was cold, like a winter here cold. They started their gardens in March over there; they would have some stuff to eat in April, like radishes and other quick-growing things. The summers were the most humid places you've ever been. They were terrible.

INT: In the cold weather was your clothing and equipment adequate?

JB: Yes. We were on maneuvers for a week and the weather was 17 below. We slept in the back of a deuce-and-a-half. We had steel welding tables in there and me and the sergeant put our blow-up mattresses on the two tables and stayed there. It certainly wasn't the Ritz, but it worked.

INT: You mentioned listening to the North Koreans?

JB: Yes, that was pretty much a daily, or at night, happening there. You couldn't understand them but you knew that they were talking. At the rare time when the air was just right, you could hear what they were saying.

INT: Was it in broken English?

JB: Yes, it was mostly a girl talking. For some reason they knew when people showed up, GIs came to work, because they'd mention them by name. They must have had spies down there. Not all the time, but they would mention their names down there.

INT: Did you ever see any of the North Koreans?

JB: Yes. One Sunday, we went on a tour to Panmunjom. You're in South Korea just south of the DMZ, all the fields are stripped. There are very few trees growing because they use the twigs to heat their food and everything. But when you get into the DMZ,

nobody lives there, it's all forested and you get to the middle of the DMZ and that's where Panmunjom village is. The North Koreans had the roofs of the houses in the village a different color than the roofs on the other ones.

INT: Was there a barbwire fence between them?

JB: No, I don't remember there being a barbwire fence between the north and south section of Panmunjom but these different color roofs—the pigeons only landed on the different color roofs. I don't know how they trained them to do that but North Korean propaganda was that they were the doves of peace and only landed on the North Korean roofs. As you were walking around, the North Koreans would be like on that side of the table, with an imaginary line that you just didn't go over, but you could walk up to it. They'd run up to you, get in your face and take your picture. The tour guides would say, "He probably even doesn't have any film in it, it he just harassing you."

INT: Did they have weapons?

JB: No.

INT: You guys weren't carrying weapons?

JB: No. They had Swedish soldiers and English because they were part of the war effort at the time, the UN war effort. And Turks, they had a Turk company near us and they never had a fence around their base because the local rulers said if the Koreans went in to steal something, they'd just kill them. I don't know if that's true or not but it's amazing that they never had a fence around their base.

INT: Did your unit have any problems with stealing, with civilians?

JB: Yes, the civilians were always trying to get onto the base to steal stuff out of the garages and stuff, but the dogs usually kept them away.

INT: Did you have any civilian workers there, like hooch maids?

JB: We had a couple of guys that were taking care of the hooch for us but they were stealing so they were gone and we had to go back to doing it ourselves. One of their biggest stealing tricks was to open the tool boxes on the deuce-and-a-half as you're going down to the road and come to a stop. These guys would run out and try to open the thing up and steal a jack or whatever was in there. You were aware of it, it wasn't that bad.

INT: How long were you in Korea?

JB: Thirteen months. Then I got sent to USMA (United States Military Academy), West Point, NY.

INT: I noticed that you had been promoted to Specialist 5.

JB: After I had been at West Point a while.

INT: So you were a Specialist 4 in Korea?

JB: Yes.

INT: So tell me how you ended up in West Point?

JB: I don't know. It was the luck of the draw, I guess. When I was due to rotate out of Korea, Vietnam was going pretty good then.

INT: Yes, you had mentioned about the formation and that there was a rumor you guys might go there.

JB: You know how rumors fly in the military. We had a formation, they put us all on alert for a week, we had to have our rifles with us at all times. That's when they started the shooting down in Vietnam. The alert lasted a short time, but it was always on your mind that that was what was going to happen. So just before rotating out of Korea, I was waiting for my orders, I [was told] that I was staying in Korea for another week or so until these special orders came down. I thought I was going to Vietnam and I was sent to West Point, greatest thing in the world.

INT: What was your life like at West Point?

JB: West Point was an absolute country club for the military, the best place an enlisted man could be stationed. The mission there was totally the cadets, they didn't bother you too much.

INT: How were you treated by the cadets? You were a Specialist 5 so you were considered an NCO. Did they snap to attention when they saw you?

JB: No. When the cadets first got there they were a little intimidated by anybody with a uniform on but we didn't have a whole lot of interaction with the cadets. We would have them on a bus and take them here and there.

INT: What was your job at West Point?

JB: I drove a sedan. The main thing was going to New York City and the metropolitan airports, to pick people up and drop them off. We had to go to the Army Medical Center on Church Street in Manhattan and all the airports and train stations.

INT: Any incidents doing that? Any problems?

JB: No.

INT: No one bothered you?

JB: One time I was coming out of New Jersey and I didn't have enough—the dispatcher would give you coupons for the toll booth—and I didn't have enough. The guys in New Jersey are kind of surly and said, "OK, you gotta pull that over and you're staying here

until somebody pays.” Thirty-five cents is what I owed and I’m not going to take it out of my pocket. So I sat there for about a half hour and they came out, “Listen, we’re going to let you go.” [laughs]

INT: What kind of living quarters did you have at West Point?

JB: We lived upstairs from the post band. They were good, big brick buildings, kind of open sleeping quarters, it was pretty nice.

INT: You didn’t have your own room?

JB: I shared a room with a staff sergeant when I made E-5 and when I made E-5, I became the dispatcher in the motor pool. Usually it was a big hall barracks.

INT: Did you have any other duties? Obviously you didn’t have to pull guard duty.

JB: No guard duty, no KP, it was a country club, the greatest place in the world. I remember guys coming to drive a bus and they had their Class A uniforms on, and some of them wore loafers. Nobody bothered you, the cadets were the ones they were interested in.

INT: How long did you spend at West Point?

JB: I was there from August of ’65 to January 6, 1967.

INT: That’s when your enlistment was over?

JB: Yes.

INT: At that point you had your three years in the Army. Did you consider making the Army a career?

JB: No. I never had a bad experience in the Army but it wasn’t for me.

INT: Had anyone tried to talk you into reenlistment?

JB: Oh, sure. When I look back at it, it might not have been a bad option but I wasn’t interested at the time.

INT: You were discharged and did you go to work right away? Did you go on unemployment?

JB: I was on unemployment for a month or so and then I worked as a horseshoer up here at the harness track and was there ever since.

INT: When did you eventually retire?

JB: I retired a year ago September. I had a knee replacement, and I need another one, but I just couldn’t work anymore.

INT: You've been a horseshoer ever since? Did that keep you pretty busy?

JB: Yes. It was a great job, the harness track had its best years while I was there. There was a lot of work, a lot of horses. It was a great job, put two kids through college.

INT: Any bad experiences shoeing horses? Get kicked?

JB: No. Well, you always get tagged once in a while, but nothing bad ever happened.

An amusing incident happened to one of my friends in the motor pool at West Point: He was to drive a sedan during graduation week, he was to drive Omar Bradley around. He was a little country boy from Ohio and they were outside the sedan watching things. General Bradley had a high-ranking West Point officer with him. So the GI turns around and says, "General Bradley, can I have my picture taken with you?" The colonel says, "Soldier, we don't talk to the general, he's got more important things to do." Bradley says, "That's alright, come here, son." He put his arm around the guy and made the colonel take the picture. [laughs] That was a good story from West Point.

INT: Any other stories from your time in the service? I imagine you saw a lot of high ranking people at West Point?

JB: Yes, I saw Richard Nixon, Maxwell Taylor, Creighton Abrams. He was the second in command at West Point, he was a one-star general. He had a son who was a cadet at the time I was there. He used to come in all the time and pick up a sedan, he would drive the hockey team around or something, Creighton's son. He graduated and on graduation day he called up the motor pool and said, "This is Lieutenant Abrams and I would like a sedan up here." I said, "Sir, I can't do that. I don't have any authorization." He said, "Do you know who I am?" and I said, "Yes, sir, I do. I'm sorry, but you'll have to see the colonel to get this authorized." And that's the last I ever heard of Creighton Abrams' son. [laughs] I did hear that he stayed in the service and made general. My cousin's husband is on the faculty at West Point, he's a colonel, he was telling me that Creighton Abrams' son made general. He's probably retired. And that Pete Dawkins, ever hear of him? Pete Dawkins was a real great football player from West Point and academically did a great job there, they had great plans for him. He made general, too, but he got out of the service after a while. He was a classmate of my company commander in Korea, Joe Sullivan. Class of '58.

INT: Once you got out of the service did you join the American Legion?

JB: No, I didn't. I probably should have but I just never got around to it.

INT: Have you stayed in touch with anyone you were in the service with?

JB: No. There's a fellow lives in Corinth who was at West Point with me, Jimmy Robards.

INT: Ever run into him?

JB: No.

INT: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

JB: I think it gave you a little more worldly perspective on things. You knew that you weren't the only person in the world. I really enjoyed some of the Koreans that I met, I really liked those guys.

INT: Did you ever have a desire to go back to Korea?

JB: No. I'm sure it's changed a lot. You probably don't want to go back to Vietnam either.

INT: No, probably not.

JB: Mine definitely was not a bad experience over there, a little bit of adjustment but a pretty positive experience.

INT: Thank you so much for your interview.

JB: You're very welcome.

INT: You just mentioned that you had a commendation letter? Want to read it?

JB: This is from a lieutenant colonel of the Transportation Corps, West Point. "To Specialist 4 John Beauregard, Transportation Motor Pool, West Point. Please accept my additional appreciation for your know-how and gentlemanly manner in which you conducted yourself. I am sure the services you rendered were of assistance to the women's club and made the visit of Mrs. Dorsey successful. My congratulations on a job well done." Mrs. Dorsey was Colonel [Ben] Dorsey's widow, she was very elderly at the time, well in her eighties, and Colonel Dorsey was a real colorful cavalry officer on the Mexican border at the time of Pancho Villa. When I drove the sedan for Mrs. Dorsey and some women from the women's club, I had just finished reading a book about her husband. So I asked one of the women if that was Colonel Dorsey's widow and she said yes. The old lady and I had a nice talk, I was familiar with some of the things that she did, through the book.

INT: That probably made her day.

JB: I'm sure she told them, that's why I got this letter. [laughs] Another thing about West Point that always intrigued me was, have you ever been in the cadet library? [No] It's a huge old West Point type building, stone, oak, beautiful building, great big table in this one room. This one room is huge, a lot of windows, looks right on Trophy Point, the parade field. At one end of the room is an oil painting of Grant, it must be 15 feet high and on the other end is Robert E. Lee, the same big beautiful 15 feet high pose. Lee is in the Confederate uniform. Now here is the United States Military Academy and you have a guy down at the end, and I'm sure people in the South would object to hearing this, but

the guy was a traitor to his country, right? I guess you could use that term. I always thought that was pretty good. [laughs]

INT: All right, thank you again.

JB: Thank you very much.