

**Arthur DeCelle
Veteran**

**Interviewed on January 30th (year unknown)
At the American Legion Post, Saugerties, NY**

AD: Art DeCelle, living in Saugerties now. I was in the Korean War although I was not in any combat action or anything like that. I was assigned to Tokyo. One of sixty persons out of eight thousand who went from a Repple Depple (slang for replacement depo) to local shipment. The rest went to the front lines in Korea.

Q: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

AD: I was drafted, trained at Camp Stewart, Georgia and later at Fort Custer, Michigan.

Q: What was your occupation/specialty?

AD: I was a clerk typist, basically. Somebody in Tokyo needed a GI insurance person and I had been in the insurance business as a fire insurance placer and that's how I ended up there.

Q: Did you live in Saugerties at the time you were drafted?

AD: No, I was on South Shore, Long Island and East Rockaway. I grew up between Rockaway beach and East Rockaway, LI.

Q: What year was it when you were first drafted?

AD: 1951.

Q: So Korea was already underway?

AD: Yes, they had already gotten the benefit of the same bad intelligence. The man advising President Truman, I think it was General Bradley said "Pull the troops out and send them home for Christmas." Six months to the day after Christmas, June 25th, the North Korean's invaded.

Q: So you're a clerk typist. You went to boot camp? Where did you go for basic training?

AD: Yeah, Camp Stewart, Georgia. The Yankee draftees were all put in a federalized Georgia National Guard battalion and to train as anti-aircraft gunners and so on.

Q: So, you are a New Yorker drafted into the Georgia Nation Guard?

AD: Yes. New Yorkers and a gang also from Lowell, Massachusetts, very interesting.

Q: Yeah, I can imagine your instructors were pretty interesting characters also.

AD: Yes.

Q: So, after that you went to a clerk typist school?

AD: No, again they just needed somebody that could type and then they put me in there.

Q: So you were the anti-aircraft?

AD: Yes, yeah.

Q: What was actually your weapon?

AD: Ninety millimeter, AAA guns. Again, like today, we had guns that were outdated from before World War II.

Q: So your instructors, they must have really liked a group of Yankees doing it?

AD: Yes, they did. We got along rather well and didn't have any serious difficulties with them. Just went along with the flow as it were.

Q: So you're schooled for anti-aircraft, ninety millimeter guns, that was in Fort Stewart?

AD: That was right there in Fort Stewart. The entire post had fourteen battalions at the time and every one of them was some kind of ninety millimeter anti-aircraft weaponry. I think the reason being that it was right next to the Okefenokee Swamp and it wouldn't harm anybody if the shrapnel fell and so forth.

Q: Just get a few ducks in the way?

AD: There was something like a couple of hundred thousand acres swamp in that part of southern Georgia there, east, or rather west of Savannah.

Q: So you're unit, did they actually go to Korea?

AD: No, no we were not sent as units in those days. They pulled you out by your MOS or sent as individuals. After we finished the basic in Georgia, we were transferred to Fort Custer, Michigan between Battle Creek and Kalamazoo. Then a draft came from the Pentagon saying "we need so many of this, so many of that, and so many of another thing". We, well about a dozen of us out of the battalion were selected. There was another fellow who was actually selected, he had just been married and his wife was expecting so I volunteered to take his place as the one clerk typist. We had to report to Seattle, Fort Lawton for trans-shipment. That was actually the worst part of my life. Fourteen days sea sick! I am not a sailor.

Q: So you said you went from Seattle to where?

AD: Seattle to Yokohama, and then a repple depple told us it had been like the Japanese West Point Camp Drake. The one place where I saw the Army very efficient. In about eighteen hours or less, they had reassigned eight thousand men and given them new weapons, and winter clothing because it was mid-September.

Q: 1951?

AD: Yes, they already had one winter with a lot of bad frost casualties and such. And lectures on “this is your enemy”, so on and so forth. And then they started posting “John Jones through 24th infantry, 24th division”, “so and so to this 15th and the 5th division”, so on and so forth.

Q: Even though they were actually trained as artillery men?

AD: Yes, it didn’t matter if we had. A man, we called him Pop, he was a track vehicle mechanic because the 90 millimeter guns were hauled by this big tractor type thing. Front line infantry and poor guy got his shoulder blown apart by a potato grenade, it was only the second day.

Q: He was older than most of you?

AD: Yes, he was 43 and most of us were 21 or 22.

Q: Was he National Guard from the south?

AD: Yes, he was National Guard

Q: From Georgia?

AD: Yes, from Augusta, Georgia. He was a really great person, a very great individual.

Q: So what about your job assignment, as a clerk typist?

AD: I was then sent to Tokyo from there, out of 8 thousand there were 60 for a local shipment. I was sent to Tokyo because they needed a GI insurance clerk. They saw in my record, my 201 file that the last thing I did in my civilian life was as an insurance placer with Marsh McLennan. So I was it! The man who I replaced down there, he had been in Japan for something like 5 or 6 years in the occupation forces.

Q: You never met MacArthur?

AD: No, he was already gone, General Ridgeway was in command. We were loaded with generals, MacArthur just had happened to be one at the time, I think there were 37 generals and admirals around there. Our particular building had been the Japanese finance ministry building and it was so loaded with generals that in the halls, inside, we didn’t even have to salute because you would spend the whole darn day saluting!

Q: Your unit, did they have a lot of combat casualties or anyone you went through training with?

AD: No, most of them stayed in the states. Some of our Long Island friends even married gals from Michigan and stayed in Michigan! My best buddy’s there. The other casualties as I mentioned the man I described as “Pop” and another boyhood friend of

mine who was a Marine, was killed in action. The number of people out of individual outfits was scattered by the time we were there.

Q: Did you get letters or communication from home?

AD: Yes, I would write and receive mail. The life we had in Tokyo was just the absolute opposite than Europe. Big metropolitan City and the Japanese were very, very used to our being there that we had Japanese to do all of the KP and all of the army dirty work. I mean, it was astounding honestly. I never expected anything like that, neither did anyone else for that matter!

Q: Tokyo, was in the process pretty much of rebuilding?

AD: Oh yes, it was well rebuilt by that time and we had all kinds of good activities. We actually didn't have to leave that building that we were in. It was one of the buildings built in four squares and within it, there was a snack bar, as well as a huge mess hall. The mess hall could serve almost 350-400 men at a time. A bowling alley, a movie, and we lived on the fourth floor! So if you were shy or didn't want to see what was going on in the Japanese world or anything like that or the rest of the city, you could've stayed in the building the entire time. We didn't, we went out and around and learned a trace of the Japanese language so we could find our way around.

Q: Did you get a chance to get out to go to Osaka or Kyoto, the religious capital??

AD: Yes, I got to Kyoto and I thought it was very, very beautiful. And also Nara, which was the very ancient capital. We were pretty surprised at how far along the Japanese were toward governing themselves. Technically we were still an occupation force about halfway through my time over there, they ended the occupation and I don't know what they called us then, but we were no longer occupiers. We had a city, not as big as New York but almost, and a whole lot to learn about the country that we had been so bitterly at war with.

Q: Did you get a chance to see Hiroshima or Nagasaki?

AD: No, I never was able to get down there.

Q: Did you take any pictures or anything like that?

AD: I don't have any left unfortunately, in a number of moves in life, I haven't been able to preserve them. We had a fair amount of pictures, but changing life and raising 12 kids, we don't keep everything and they passed with us unfortunately.

Q: Do you have any people that you've remembered over time or ever kept in contact with anybody?

AD: I had some contact with a couple of the fellows in Michigan but they've passed on so I haven't seen any of the fellows from Georgia since, no.

Q: Any reunions or anything like that?

AD: No, they never had reunions. Somehow or another in the general headquarters business, they don't think that much of reunions, I guess. Maybe the generals do but the private first class and the like didn't.

Q: So how long were you in Japan?

AD: Just 18 months. I left on New Year's Day of '53.

Q: So you weren't there when the armistice was signed in Korea?

AD: No, and there is still an armistice, even after all these years.

Q: Almost 60 years.

AD: And 8,000 of our guys are still listed as missing in action. Almost 58,000 killed and I don't know how many wounded. Really sorry business. One thing is, in those days we really had allies, not in huge numbers, but the Turks and many of the Europeans and particularly the Australians and New Zealanders were really, very, very strongly with us, and did yeoman's service in the battles and the whole Korean debacle.

Q: When you returned here, you returned the same way, back through Seattle?

AD: No, as a matter of fact, (when) I came back, I flew the ocean because I came down with the flu or pneumonia or something on the day I was supposed to be shipped home, so I ended up in the hospital for a week or two. I flew all the way from Tokyo to San Francisco. With propeller planes, it was over 40 hours flying, we celebrated New Year's 3 times that year. We were in Tokyo when we took off, we were in Wake Island for breakfast the next morning. We took off at sunset, Wake Island to refuel and get a breakfast, and then we flew all day and boy that Pacific Ocean that is one wide piece. We landed at Hickam Field in Hawaii, at about 10 o'clock at night and we celebrated there, they had a big dinner for us, and we got back on the plane about midnight-1 o'clock and flew until noon-time the next day to San Francisco. It was a different adventure and it was certainly much better than that ship, anything but a ship for me. I'm not a sailor!

Q: I know your daughter Isabelle, she's in the Coast Guard, and so she must've taken it from your wife. After you got back here, they muster you out to Georgia?

AD: No, Camp Kilmer New Jersey. I was fortunate enough to be under that Korean GI bill, and I was hoping to go to St Johns College in Brooklyn, it wasn't Brooklyn then. And later transferred, by the time we graduated, we graduated from the campus where it is now, in Queens.

Q: So what did you use the GI bill for, what did you take?

AD: I majored in English, and I was working for various New York newspapers at the time, at night after classes. First the Brooklyn Eagle, when it cracked up on strike I went to the World Telegram and Sun. Then after graduation I came up here to the Saugerties Daily Post, in 1957, to get a couple years in the country newspaper business. I had married by then, my wife and I had one little 1 month old baby boy, and I've stayed in Saugerties ever since.

Q: So were you a part of the veterans organization?

AD: One of my first neighbors there, quickly got me into the post 5034 VFW and I was active in that almost all the time I've been here in some way or another. Became the commander in '59-60, we had a number of different things around the area, we were able to win the state award for community service that year.

Q: That's from the VFW?

AD: Yes, and also my wife Isabelle was very active in the VFW axillary. In many cases with the VFW and the legion, wives and sisters and so forth were active people fortunately within the units and very, very helpful. There are many patriotic events.

Q: Your military experience, did it affect any of your thinking after your discharge?

AD: Well, naturally you learn things everywhere you go, and the business of being close to warfare at a command level like that, clearly was an education in itself. You never think of yourself, unless you go to West Point or someplace that you would be in that kind of a situation. Different things and people with intelligence, units, and so forth. One of the people I was over there with had been at Pearl Harbor during the 1941 bombing, he was already a boy of 11 at the time, and his description of it was considerably different than what you would read in the newspaper.

Q: Then he enlisted after that, because he was older?

AD: He was the son of a naval officer who had taken off that morning to look at the volcano on the island of Hawaii, and when he got back he could barely land the airplane.

Q: Okay, is there anything you would like to add onto this article?

AD: One of the things, you see and hear a lot of complaints nowadays about bad intelligence, or this that or the other thing. Remember, "bad intelligence", or "poorly read intelligence" has a long history in our 20th century. The Secretary of State told both the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy, "We have sent the Japanese an ultimatum, prepare for the worst." That message was never transmitted to Pearl Harbor, and the one I described about President Truman and General Bradley, much the same. You know, "They'll never invade."

Q: Marshall was Secretary then, wasn't he?

AD: I think Marshall was the Secretary, yes.

Q: Okay then, thanks very much.