

Narrator: Gen John W Vessey, Jr

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor, Ph.D.

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(00:00) = elapsed time on digital recording

TS: Today is Friday, May 25, 2012. This is [the tenth of] our interview cycle with General John W. Vessey, Jr. My name is Thomas Saylor.

Today, General Vessey, we wanted to start by going back to Fort Sill, prior to your first tour in Germany, and you had some things you wanted to add there.

JV: Indeed. You had asked earlier about connections that I had made at that time. I had given an inadequate answer, because there were connections that were in fact very important to me later on in my military career that came about from that first tour at Fort Sill. We had talked earlier about my 34th Division comrades from World War II, but there were others that I met through the work I was involved in there, particularly one. The first job I had as mess officer and executive officer for the student detachment, the first commander I had was replaced by a Captain Ray Westmoreland, who became sort of a lifelong friend or friend through the years. Through him I was introduced to other officers that were senior to me, and some of them senior to Westmoreland, with whom I had connections through my career. So it's worth my remembering that at least.

And there was Ed Wendell, who was a captain at the time; later I served under him when he was a colonel, in my first tour in the Pentagon. And Major Elmer H. Almquist¹ – he was known as Hook and I don't remember him being called anything other than Hook. Hook and I had connections in a number of different places, and particularly several times when I returned to the Pentagon. I believe he was a lieutenant general the last time I served with him. But those people were important to me later on.

Then students that came. The class, the West Point class of 1946, which was a very large class and had about 600 artillerymen, field artillerymen, in it, who came to Fort Sill. It was a three year class at West Point; they went in in 1943 and graduated in '46. Sort of a wartime shortening of the course at West Point. But that class included Joe Wallace, Josiah Wallace, who was the son of the Regular Army instructor we had in the National Guard before the 59th Brigade was mobilized, and I knew Joe at that time. He was a little younger than I, but his father brought him to Camp Ripley [Minnesota] during my first summer encampment at Camp Ripley. Joe got married right after West Point and he and his wife, Vicki, and Avis and I were together several different times during our careers. In fact the last time Joe replaced me as Chief of Staff of the 3rd Armored Division in Germany, in the '70s.

¹ Elmer H. Almquist, Jr (1919 – 2005): US Army Lieutenant General. Gen Almquist served during World War II in the Solomon Islands and in the Luzon (Philippines) campaign.

Roy Thurman was a member of that class. He was associated with me a number of different times during his career. Retired as a lieutenant general. Roy Thurman and Max Thurman – Max was Roy’s younger brother, also a West Point graduate, but not class of ’46 – who became a four star general, and probably was the best recruiter we ever had in the Army. Years ago there was an Army recruiting ad with a song, “Be All You Can Be.” Max is the author of “Be All You Can Be.”

Ralph Steiner was in that class. I met him at that time, and later on he and I were fellow battalion commanders in the 3rd Armored Division. So I had clearly given an inadequate answer. Many others from that class of ’46 with whom I was associated through the years.

The other thing that I’d like to talk about a little bit was the importance of athletics in the Army, and particularly at that time, right after World War II. Pay was low and of course the war was over, so recruiting for the Army in the late ’40s was difficult, but in the 18th Field Artillery I remember we had a good athletic program. We had a great boxing team. Won the post boxing championship. We had a good baseball team. There were many members of the 18th Field Artillery, who had been in the 18th Field Artillery before World War II, who had drifted back to Fort Sill. Many of them Native Americans from Oklahoma. And good athletes who had come back. They came back to play on the baseball team. (*chuckles*)

TS: Appreciate the honesty.

JV: Right. We had a good softball team. I played on the softball team. We played in the local commercial league. We were usually the doormats of the league, because [it was difficult] producing a good softball team out of only one battalion when the local commercial outfits had much bigger draw for talent. But one year Lawton Realty, a big real estate firm in Lawton, Oklahoma, had won the state championship the year before and was bound and determined to go to the nationals, and they hired a fellow named Leo Morris. ... He had pitched the John Deere’s to the national championship the year before, and Lawton Realty brought him to Lawton. He had a job as a sports writer for the Lawton newspaper and pitched for the Lawton Realty softball team. Well, Lawton Realty didn’t go to the nationals. They didn’t even go to the state, because we in the 18th Field Artillery beat them the last game of the season. (*chuckles*) That guy had struck me out every time I batted against him through the course of the year, but the last game I got three hits off Mr. Morris. I sliced them all to right field, but our pitcher was on that day and we won that game 1-0, I think it was.

TS: And you still remember it.

JV: I still remember it. But athletics were indeed very important at that time.

TS: What function did athletics serve?

JV: Troop morale, and activities for the troops, to do something after duty hours. Just like today’s high school kids. The kids that are out there on the football field or the baseball field or the golf team or tennis team or track team are usually not the ones you’ll find

getting in trouble with drugs or something else. The same thing goes for soldiers that are a few years older than those children. But that's the journey back to Fort Sill.

TS: Very good.

JV: I'd like to jump back to Germany.

TS: Very good. I wanted to go there as well. You first.

JV: Okay. We talked about the nuclear business, the beginnings of the tactical nuclear weapons, and again my memory at the time was not as good as it should have been. I told you that I went to my first nuclear weapons school at that time. Recalling that school, a fellow who had come to the school as a student, but who was very much involved in helping the Army redesign itself for the nuclear world at that time was General James Gavin,² who was a great hero of World War II, an airborne soldier and much admired. I was in a class with General Gavin, which was a great pleasure because he added spice to that class that certainly we would never have had, had he not been there. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

(12:10)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

TS: One talks about training for something like that. What do you remember about the training, the talks about how this might be used, tactically?

² James M. Gavin (1907-90); U.S. Army lieutenant general. Served in both World War II and Korea.

JV: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Then for us at that school, as I think I emphasized before, most of it was how to protect against the enemy's use of nuclear weapons. Of course Gavin was there. He was one of the designers. We talked about the Pentomic Division, and Gavin was one of the principal designers of the Pentomic Division, and it was the idea of smaller formations, making smaller targets and counting on mobility. The mobility of smaller units to fight the enemy's attacks.

TS: Was it this understanding that, as we plan with or integrate nuclear capable weapons systems, the Soviets are doing the same thing?

JV: Yes.

TS: How much thought was required of you to think about what the other side had?

JV: Again for us, and for my level at that time, it was paying attention to the intelligence available and ensuring that the soldiers under my command had constructed the best possible protection for themselves. Of course it was just like protection from cannon fire, except it had to be a lot thicker.

TS: I remember in the early 1960s still the remnants of the old duck and cover routines at school, of getting under our desks. Was this kind of protection so to speak against nuclear attacks integrated into the kind of training you were doing in the early 1950s?

JV: Yes. But under much more cover than under your school desk.

TS: Sure. What do you remember about the kind of cover so to speak that was deemed sufficient or proper?

JV: Of course the nuclear weapons, first there's the blast itself, then the cover from the blast and the flash, the fire, and then the cover from the nuclear effects, which are longer lasting and more difficult to protect against. At that time the Army was struggling with both tactics, strategy and the reality that nuclear weapons did exist on both sides.

TS: During your tour in Germany from 1951 to '54, Joseph Stalin³ will die in 1953. Did the death of Stalin and the questions about succession within Soviet leadership, was this something that was discussed or talked about?

JV: You'd see it in articles in the newspaper, but at the company battery and troop level in the United States Army it was not something that came to mind. The Soviet Army didn't

³ Joseph Stalin (1879-1853); leader of the Soviet Union from the mid-1920s until his death in 1953.

move; it was still on the other side of the east-west zonal border and appeared to us to be exactly the same Soviet Army that was there the day before Stalin died.

TS: As someone who, as you've talked about, paid attention to events, did you find yourself talking about politics or this Cold War situation, East Germany, West Germany, the Soviets with other people?

JV: Sure. But it was probably over a beer in the Officers' Club. Not on the training field.

TS: You know, one aspect of the East Germany-West Germany relationship was Berlin and its position inside of East Germany. During your first tour in Germany did you have opportunity to visit West Berlin?⁴

JV: I did.

TS: Was it on a business or a personal trip?

JV: Personal trip. Went there on leave. The only way to get there was by train. Of course it was an interesting trip, through part of occupied East Germany.

TS: I was going to ask you what you remember about that.

JV: Looking out the windows of the train at the platforms and the stations, which were well policed by Soviet soldiers at that time. Berlin itself, the economy of West Berlin was obviously better than that of East Berlin. We had a chance to go into East Berlin. There was an opportunity to take a guided tour on a bus to East Berlin.

TS: What impression did East Berlin make with you in the early 1950s?

JV: I was glad I was on the other side. I think you just paint it gray. If you were going to make a picture of it, paint it gray would be East Berlin.

TS: How about West Berlin? The city was a special place with a special relationship to the West. What impression did that city make on you?

JV: It was obviously livelier. One thing that did impress me was how well the design of the city of Berlin was. That is, when the city was complete. I've forgotten the name of the place we stayed in, but it was something that belonged to the U.S. Army. But the system of railroad spokes that went into the center city and then rings of railroads at various radii from the center: how efficient that transportation system would have been had the city been united. Of course the way it was it still worked, but it wasn't complete.

⁴ West Berlin, occupied by the three of the four World War II Allied powers (France, Britain, U.S.A.), was located inside East Germany and only accessible via rail, road, canal and air routes agreed at war's end.

TS: When you think about being in Germany, West Germany or in Berlin, what was your favorite thing about being in Germany? What did you like the best?

JV: The duty was challenging, it was good. You worked hard. Training was challenging. At that time there was a real concern about a Soviet attack, and the U.S. Army had not only itself there and its units, but it had families there so concern about what happens to the families if there was a Soviet attack. There were frequent exercises, alerts they were called. Families would have to report to certain places and be transported to the rear in some fashion while we in the troop units went from our barracks toward the East-West zonal border. The duty was good, or interesting and again, I would get back to the importance of athletics at that time. Athletics were very important for morale of the troops.

I think I mentioned that I had three all-Americans for officers. That is, All-American athletes. When the Army was integrated Gus Henning was a black officer, and had been an all-American basketball player at a school in Indiana. Ray Schmul was the motor officer, and he'd been a little All-American football center from St. Bonaventure. Bill Yeoman⁵ was my executive officer; he was an All-American basketball player and football player from West Point, and later went on to coach football at Houston University, for about thirty years I believe. So I had a good basic building block for athletics in the battery. My theory was – the Army called them jocks – any jock that wanted a job, I had an opening for them.
(chuckles)

TS: You encouraged the troops under your command to participate in athletics.

(24:45)

JV: Yes. We had a great basketball team. When I commanded headquarters battery there in the Div Arty we played for the division basketball championship two years in a row. We didn't win it, because we were playing against a team that was drawn from a whole regiment, but we put on a good game. As I say, the activity was intense. Being in Germany at that time, the German postwar officials were snagged with this big influx of American troops. In Hanau we had I don't know how many caserns ... one, two, three, four, five, six, seven caserns in Hanau with American troops. Most of them were combat troops, but a few housekeeping outfits, and a number of families. So German-American relations was a big concern.

TS: How would you characterize those?

JV: In Hanau they were pretty good. The people in Hanau had more soldiers than they could stand, but that had been true with the German Army before. So they were fairly used to large batches of soldiers. Payday Saturday night found some soldiers misbehaving, and we spent a lot of time with courtesy patrols from every unit in the garrison there. And Hanau had a wonderful police chief, Ludwig Holbein. Lux Holbein. I became friends with him during that first tour, and then went back twice more.

TS: And he was still police chief?

⁵ Bill Yeoman (b. 1927); served in the U.S. Army 1950-53. Head Coach at Houston University, 1962-86.

JV: He was still police chief. We usually met once a week, the commanders, with the German leaders to discuss problems or programs, whatever.

TS: So lines of communication were really kept open between the two sides.

JV: Yes. Actively. Avis and I lived in a requisitioned house in a little German community outside of town. Hohe Tanne it was called. The *Landrat*⁶ lived over the fence from us, as a matter of fact, and we became friends with him. That part of life added spice to the tour certainly and frankly, I enjoyed German food too.

TS: I was going to ask you about the kind of opportunities to travel around. Hanau is centrally located, and within a couple hours you can be many places.

JV: Right.

TS: It sounds like Germany, this tour, you looked forward to the next time you could come back to Germany?

JV: Yes. After World War II the overseas Army, or the Army itself, you had the Army that was in the United States, then you had a big chunk in Japan and an even larger chunk in Germany. Before the Korean War a somewhat smaller chunk in South Korea. After the Korean War [armistice in 1953] of course then the piece in South Korea became larger.

TS: Did the number of troops that we had permanently stationed in South Korea increase from before the Korean War to after?

JV: Oh, yes. Yes, and it steadily went down and still is going down even to this day, but we still have a fairly sizeable force. Probably 30,000 or so.

TS: How large was it by comparison when you were there in the mid-1970s?

JV: It's less than half what it was at that time.

TS: So it's been continually decreasing in size.

JV: Right. And the same with the forces in Germany. It's miniscule today compared to what it was during the height of the Cold War.

TS: Right. Even in the 1980s there was base expansion, there was new construction in Berlin, new barracks facilities, etc.

⁶ *Landrat*: German term, highest ranking local official of a county or district.

JV: In fact the '80s was probably the peak of the U.S. Army in Western Europe as a whole. Not just Germany.

TS: I know from [working with] the Air Force in Berlin, that was when they hit their peak as far as personnel at Tempelhof Air Base.⁷

JV: Right.

(31:00)

TS: If it's okay with you I'd like to talk a little bit about desegregation of the U.S. military. You alluded to a black officer you had, just a few moments ago. Let's just read an excerpt from Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981, which was dated 26 July 1948. The president wrote, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the president that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed forces without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale." So the president's Executive Order 9981.⁸

I also was referring to a book by Morris J. McGregor, Jr., and the book was entitled "Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965," published by the Center for Military History of the United States Army in 1985. McGregor writes the following: "Segregation officially ended in the active armed forces with the announcement of the Secretary of Defense in 1954 that the last all black unit had been disbanded. In a little more than six years after President Truman's Executive Order, some quarter of a million blacks had been intermingled with whites in the nation's military units worldwide." That's from McGregor, page 24.⁹

Six years. Some might look at that and say, "Six years – what factors hindered a faster implementation of the president's executive order?"

JV: I'm not sure I'm a good one to answer that question. People that had far more authority than I at that time would have to answer that. But there was a lot of training. We had talked earlier about the Troop Information and Education Program. It was used to help orient the soldiers. When it actually occurred, I think that it had to be somewhere around '52 or '53 that the Army in Europe was integrated. I think, as we had perhaps discussed before, in the 4th Division there were two black battalions: the anti-aircraft battalion was all black soldiers, and one of the battalions in the 22nd Infantry was an all black outfit. So when integration occurred in Europe, the soldiers in those two battalions were spread throughout the division. And we may have gotten a few more black soldiers from some of the all black outfits that were in Europe, but not part of the division. But I don't remember

⁷ American military forces used Tempelhof airport in Berlin, opened by the Germans in 1936, from July 1945 to the end of the Cold War era. The last U.S. forces left Tempelhof in 1994 and the facility was returned to the Germans.

⁸ Full text available at Truman Presidential Library, and at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/9981.htm>. Last accessed 10 January 2014.

⁹ Morris J. McGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965* (US Army: Center for Military History of the United States Army, 1985), 24.

that. In my outfit we got all of ours from the anti-aircraft battalion. Frankly, it was no big deal. It was easier done than we had been led to believe.

TS: What had you been led to believe?

JV: Well, that there might be trouble, that either the black soldiers or white soldiers would object to it or something like that. We got a good batch of black soldiers in my battery. Gus Henning had been assigned a bit earlier to the battery, so we had a black officer before we had black soldiers in the outfit. But they were integrated into the barracks and went to work in the outfit. We got a couple of good athletes, so it improved our basketball team. *(chuckles)*

TS: The Army is big on training, as you've noted. What kind of training was there for you as an officer, ahead of time, to prepare you and your unit for this impending change?

JV: It was discussed at length at Officer Calls. I think the concerns of the higher level commanders were greater than the actual incidents really deserved. I had no trouble.

TS: From your perspective, in this unit it went smoothly.

JV: It went smoothly.

TS: There is much made in the literature about resistance of so-called traditionalists in the military, who had dragged their feet. Upper echelons had dragged their feet for a long time about this, suggesting that either performance or efficiency would suffer. What about those arguments? They were out there.

JV: The arguments were there and I can understand the arguments based on the performance of all black units, but what this said was by having all black units you were guaranteeing a lower level of performance by the all black units – they were also already considered inferior to the all white units.

The wonderful story about the black airmen, the Red Tails, the Tuskegee Airmen.¹⁰ They were a combat unit and they were determined to be as good and probably better than many of the all white units. Unfortunately the other units in the Army were led by white officers. I know many of them, or at least a number of them who were in the 92nd Division, who had a great deal of respect for the capabilities of their soldiers and thought they were maligned because they were an all black unit. But there are others that served that went in with the idea that, I'm leading people with less capability than the ordinary soldier, and all that does is guarantee that you have a poorer outfit. So on the whole, it made the Army a much better Army.

¹⁰ Tuskegee Airmen: during World War II, the first African-American military aviators in the United States armed forces. Officially, the 332nd Fighter Group and the 477th Bombardment Group of the United States Army Air Forces. Nicknamed Red Tails as the tails of their aircraft were painted that color.

TS: So the ramifications of this, the integration of our armed forces, turned out to be not the issue that it was...

JV: Not the issue that was anticipated, at least from my perspective at the time. But there's a whole lot of the Army that I didn't see at that time too.

TS: Of course. Right. And there's a range of responses and experiences here, but your personal experience in this unit and time, it wasn't an issue.

JV: It wasn't an issue.

TS: Before we put your first tour in Germany away – and you spent nearly three years there, 1951-54 – in what ways do you feel you were a better officer after this tour in Germany than before you went over there?

JV: As we discussed earlier, the 4th Division was a reconstructed division for its service in Germany at that time, and it wasn't very good when we arrived in Germany. We were loaded with a new set of draftees, as I pointed out before, with officers many of whom had been involuntarily recalled to active duty, and NCOs that were cadres from other outfits. If you're commanding an outfit and you're ordered to send a cadre to somebody, you usually don't pick your best to go.

TS: On the contrary.

JV: On the other hand, the Army finally learned that and later on, in my time, you were told to pick two cadres, one of which you will keep and one which will go. But somebody else will choose which one you'll keep and which one will go.

TS: That's a pretty clever way around that.

JV: Right. That clears that up.

TS: Exactly. Otherwise there's a tendency, I suppose, to simply dump.

JV: Yes. But by that time I left the 4th Division was a very competent division. At least the division artillery was top notch. We had a good commander. As I had mentioned earlier, I was involved in the battery test both before I became a battery commander and then after I left that post I was again involved in testing the batteries, and I can attest that they were good. They shot well.

(42:30)

TS: Did you know that the next step for you would be back to Fort Sill?

JV: No. Of course I got orders probably three or four months before I went home and knew it. Curiously enough I had, as I had mentioned before, I had completed what was called the Associate Advanced Course at Fort Sill, which was a four month long course designed primarily for Reserve and National Guard officers and for regular officers who were late or

sometimes early in going to the Advanced Course. But there was also a Regular Advanced Course, which was a nine month course, and I was ordered back to go to the nine month course. And I thought I was being over-schooled, frankly.

TS: How come?

JV: Well I'd been to the Associate Advanced Course. I think I graduated second in the class, and thought I had done pretty well and didn't really need to go to the Advanced Course again.

TS: How was it you got assigned to that then?

JV: From the time I went to the Associate Advanced Course I had become a Regular Army officer and Regular Army officers go to the Regular Advanced Course. So I was sent. But it also there was a change in the field artillery at that time, and you'll note from the records there that it was called the Artillery and Guided Missile School.

TS: You're reading my next question here. Yes, I did notice that. It is now called Artillery and Guided Missile School. This is new technology. I was going to ask you, for the lay person, to explain this guided missile technology. What is this stuff exactly?

JV: For a field artilleryman, before that time you shot at targets with cannons.

TS: Larger or smaller, but you put in a shell, you fire it, and it goes over there.

JV: Right. After that, the anti-aircraft artillery and the field artillery were integrated into one branch of artillery. So we had something new to learn, because shooting at airplanes you're shooting at a whole new target whereas generally field artillery shot at fixed targets. Sometimes it was a moving target, but that was an unusual occasion, and you usually fired direct fire. But shooting at an airplane is more than simple trigonometry. You've got some movement involved here, and it's more like shooting quail.

But at any rate, guided missiles had been introduced by that time, and for the most part they were propelled by rockets and then had some guidance in the warhead portion of the rocket to guide it to the target. The guided missiles at that particular time that the Army had were all anti-aircraft missiles.

TS: These are ground to air?

JV: Ground to air.

TS: Not ground to ground at all?

JV: No. We had ground to ground to missiles, but they weren't guided.

TS: When I think of ground to ground missiles I think of like the Soviets had a Katyusha¹¹ and the Germans had a *Nebelwerfer* in World War II that fired from the back of a truck, so to speak, but they were area weapons, weren't they? They weren't accurate or guided.

JV: Right. They were unguided rockets.

TS: That simply covered an area.

JV: Right.

TS: These are now, the ground to air, have some kind of guidance system.

JV: Yes. Right. Usually a radar tracking the target and radar tracking the missile and giving guidance to the missile. Of course it had fins on it that would in theory guide it toward the target.

TS: You said "in theory" there, so I'm going to pick up on that. The "in theory" part of this: how well did these guided missile systems work?

JV: (*chuckles*) Remember I talked about Joe Wallace in the class of '46. Joe Wallace was also in the Regular Advanced Course that year. Joe Wallace and I were sitting next to each other in the auditorium at Fort Bliss, Texas, when we moved from Fort Sill to Fort Bliss for the Fort Bliss part of it. Fort Bliss was the anti-aircraft school. The commandant of the school, a major general whose name I've forgotten, was lecturing us and I was sitting on one side of Joe Wallace and this other fellow, who was an anti-aircraft man by trade, was sitting on the other side of Joe Wallace. This major general was principally talking to the cannon field artillerymen and he said, "Guided missiles are here to stay and no amount of wishing will make them go away." This guy, who had had some experience with the missiles, said in a whisper to the two of us, "And a lot of times no amount of wishing will make them go, either." (*chuckles*) So this is the early stages.

TS: Infancy. So these systems, I take it, progressed and became more complex.

(49:40)

JV: Right.

TS: So you had to learn how to use these.

JV: Indeed.

TS: There's the technical piece of, how do I fire this, and how do I instruct people to do this. The larger question I think that occurred to me was, In what ways does this technology transform the battlefield, from your perspective as an artillery person?

¹¹ Katyusha: rocket artillery, used by the Soviet Union during World War II.

JV: I want to point out that, by this time, the artillery and guided missile school was also into the surface to surface missiles. The first ones were unguided missiles. That is, the surface to surface missiles were unguided. The Army at that time had the “Honest John” rocket, which was an unguided rocket with a range of probably six miles or so.¹² But it was a big rocket, and you could put a [REDACTED] nuclear weapon on the thing. So it had a lot of bang, and it had a lot of bang conventionally as well. It carried what was called improved conventional munitions, which were the grenades that were dispersed over the target area.

TS: Like a cluster bomb?

JV: Yes. Same thing. Then the other missile they had at the time was called the “Corporal,” which was a much longer range rocket but still did not have any sophisticated guidance to guide the thing. Basically ballistics and meteorology were the factors of whether or not you could hit it, as well as the quality of the propellant, the temperature of the propellant, the outside temperature and so forth.¹³

TS: Factors that were beyond your control. Once it went on its way, it was on its way.

JV: Yes. But the other were the anti-aircraft missiles. The “Ajax” was the first guided missile that we had, which was a radar guided missile. It was actually pretty good.¹⁴

TS: Are these mobile weapons?

JV: Yes. Right. Right.

TS: Mounted on trucks or half-tracks?

JV: Trucks.

TS: So artillery is becoming a more mobile technology, it sounds like.

JV: Field artillery is always mobile. We had a branch called coast artillery, which were big cannons in fortresses. That didn’t move. In fact the anti-aircraft artillery grew out of the coast artillery. The first anti-aircraft artillery was guns, cannons. During World War II we had not only the 90 millimeter anti-aircraft gun, which was about comparable to the German 88, but then [also the] 40 millimeter anti-aircraft guns.

¹² Honest John: designation MGR-1; first nuclear-capable surface-to-surface missile in the U.S. military. Initially deployed 1954.

¹³ Corporal: designation MGM-5; first guided weapon authorized to carry a nuclear warhead, the surface-to-surface Corporal could deliver a warhead up to a range of 75 nautical miles. Initially deployed 1955.

¹⁴ Ajax: designation MIM-3 Nike Ajax; first operational surface to air missile. Initially deployed 1954.

TS: The Korean War, another event that could change things. After the Korean War was Army training different because of our experiences during the Korean War, specifically with the development and use of artillery?

JV: Not for the field artillery. I think World War II was sort of the peak of field artillery training and employment for battlefield conditions, and Korea didn't change any of that at all. The lessons of World War II were very effective in the use of field artillery in Korea.

TS: Were there lessons learned from Korea? That was a three year conflict.

JV: I think that one of the major lessons learned from Korea was about prisoners that were captured by both the North Koreans and the Chinese. Apparently, as I remember it, the both the Chinese and Koreans were able to torture the American prisoners and got useful information from American soldiers. The conduct of the Turkish soldiers who fought in Korea that were captured was in sharp contrast, or held in sharp contrast to that of some of the Americans. So after the Korean War a Code of Conduct was developed and the importance of only giving name, rank and serial number and so forth, and training soldiers to withstand torture, became important. Frankly, other than that, of course the Korean War, for those of us who were in Italy, the Korean War was mountain fighting much as the fighting in the Italian Campaign. Terrain was difficult. Terrain and weather, which were major factors in Italy, were also major factors in the Korean War.

TS: Yes. Good point. With the change in conflicts, World War II was in many ways a set piece war between industrial powers that were in many ways equal opponents as far as the output of their industrial machines. We're drifting away from that. By the 1950s we have two superpowers, but the idea of a pitched conflict has to be considered with other smaller conflicts, with different types of conflicts, whether it's the anti-colonial struggles in Africa or whether it's the French in Indo-China, where we don't have pitched battles so much anymore. With the prevalence of nuclear weapons now and the ability to use them in different ways, tactically which you've talked about, battles and wars are changing. As an artilleryman, is this a case of a changing role for artillery, or a diminished role, or both?

JV: No, I'd say certainly not a diminished role. The fight in Korea in terms of the way the war was fought was very parallel to the way the war was fought in Europe, or at least in Italy. The battles were very similar. You talked about not having pitched battles – well, these were pitched battles in Korea.

TS: There was a long period of stalemate in Korea from '51 to '53, with the lines not moving a lot.

JV: Right. Right. It was a repeat of an Italian winter campaign.

TS: Yes. Redux, sort of more than once, right?

JV: Right.

TS: And there was rapid movement then. The first six months in Korea especially, as I recall, in both directions.

JV: Right.

TS: So is artillery adapting, changing, or is it more a constant as far as the technology and the tactics?

JV: Both tactics and technology were constants. There was slight improvement in the weapons capabilities, but not much. Basically the World War II weapons were used throughout the Korean War. There were no new artillery weapons manufactured for the Korean War.

TS: By the time we get to the 1960s, mid-late-1960s, the United States is involved in Southeast Asia. Are we still using the same types of artillery weapons or had there been by that time change?

JV: Yes. Right. Same weapons. By that time the Army, the main thrust of the Army, was against the Soviet Union in Central Europe, and here there are more self-propelled artillery units with the cannons on an armored chassis. In taking them to Viet Nam we did it; they didn't add anything. Much of the terrain in Viet Nam was low and intermittently flooded and so forth. The road network was much poorer than the road network in Europe. So those things in many cases were a burden, but they did carry bigger cannons so they used a bigger shell.

TS: Fort Sill, a place you first went in 1945, by the mid-1950s new technologies, changing military. How is Fort Sill changing or responding to changes around it?

JV: The OCS had been revived after World War II in order to supply the Army for the Korean War and the aftermath of the Korean War and the occupation of Korea and Japan and the NATO forces of Europe, which were growing, so some of the World War II physical aspects of Fort Sill were revived for the Army in the late '50s and '60s. And some new housing was built. The artillery was a larger organization than it had been before World War II, so there was some new family housing built. But the activities at Fort Sill were about the same.

TS: Physically you noticed the place adapting, changing, updating?

JV: Yes. All the old pre-World War II horse barns were converted to other uses by this time. The Post Exchange and the Commissary were in some of those buildings. Fort Sill Bank was in one of them.

TS: Was the footprint of the fort, the actual acreage, did that grow or shrink during the time you were there?

JV: No, it grew. Just as at the beginning of the World War II era it grew and it grew a little bit in the '50s or '60s, I've forgotten which. It had to be in the '50s I think. The Army acquired a little more land out on the far ends of the reservation, because we were getting longer range weapons. You had that 280 millimeter cannon.

TS: You had to practice fire it somewhere I guess.

JV: Right.

TS: So Fort Sill, how large was this facility? I mean how many square miles or acres or how was it measured? If you're practicing with a 280 millimeter gun it must be pretty big.

JV: It never fired anywhere near its maximum range at Fort Sill. In fact I'm sure it never fired anywhere near its maximum range anyplace.

TS: You mentioned that the range was significant with this weapon, potentially.

JV: Yes. But I'd say Fort Sill was probably 200,000 acres. Somewhere around there.

TS: Sizeable post.

JV: Yes. It's a big place.

TS: Okay. That's a good stopping point for today. I'm going to ask a little bit more about some things about Fort Sill, but that will take us a little bit longer, so if it's okay with you I'll hit the pause button for today.

JV: Yes.

END OF INTERVIEW

Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981, dated 26 July 1948. Full text available at Truman Presidential Library, and at <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/9981.htm>. Last accessed 10 January 2014.

Morris J. McGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces 1940-1965* (US Army: Center for Military History of the United States Army, 1985).