

Vincent Cambareri

Korea



**When did you enter the military? and**

“6<sup>th</sup> September 1951”

**How old were you when you entered**

“21 yrs old”

**How long were you in the military?**

“I was discharged on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 1953. Actually they have it listed here as ,1 yr 8 months 11 days. They are pretty accurate that way”

## **2) What boot camp did you go to?**

“My basic training was in Columbia S.C., Fort Jackson. Before I left there I had a course in leadership training before they sent me overseas they wanted to make sure I had enough training. I took the Infantry Leaders Course.”

## **How long was your Boot camp?**

“I think it was usually about thirteen weeks.”

## **Did you join the military voluntarily?**

“No I was drafted”

## **What branch of military where you in?**

“The United States Army”

## **What equipment did you use on a daily basis?**

“Well when I first got into the service I was assigned to a heavy weapons infantry, which was mortars and stuff like that. In fact I taught a mortar training course in Columbia, South Carolina after I finished basic training.”

## **What rank you did you achieve?**

“Sergeant First Class”

## **I have a question on ranking, how do you rank up?**

“You go from private, to private first class, to corporal, to sergeant, to sergeant first class.”

## **Were you wounded while you were in the military? If you were in what way were you wounded?**

“No not at all thank God”

## **Were you in any famous campaigns or battles?**

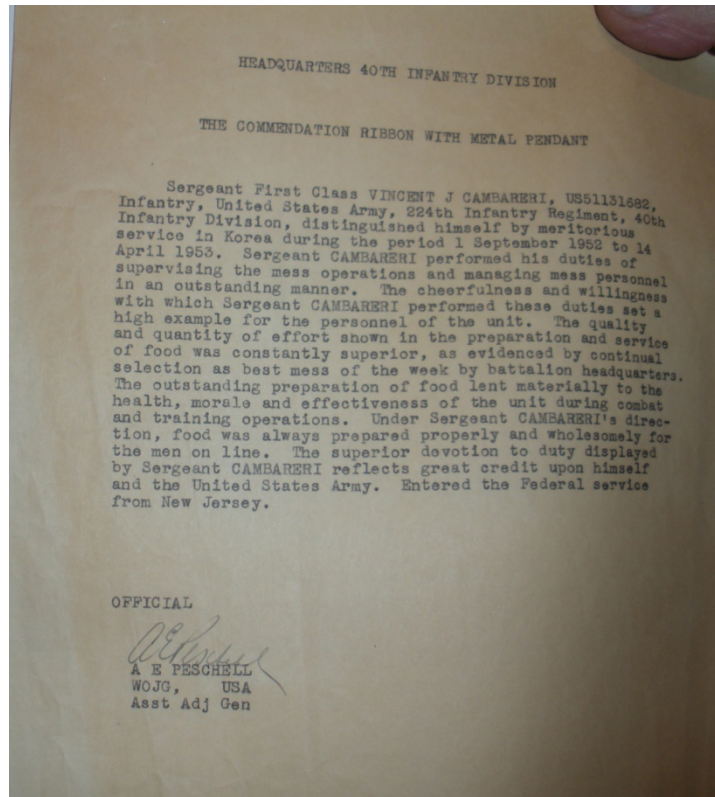
“Actually we were assigned to the California National Guard. We were the 40<sup>th</sup> division, the division that put down the prison riots in Koje-do Island, Korea. We had a lot of California Japanese Americans who understood the way they spoke and so forth and we actually quelled those riots in Koje-do Island at that time”(Koje-do Island- a prison camp where over 170,000 communist and non-communist prisoners were held from December 1950 until June 1952)

**Did you receive any awards or medals for your service?**

“Yes the one I’m most proud of- I got this Army Commendation from the Department of the Army



and also this certificate which was sent to me after I was discharged. This is a ...from the department of the army that came with that.”



### **What does the medal represent?**

“I don’t want to sound like I was bragging but when I got there I was assigned to the California National Guard. They didn’t have too much experience in any kind of culinary work. Because I had grown up in the bakery business I was in charge of the entire battalion mess. Whenever they knew the four Rifle companies kept their trucks packed and my company would disembark and feed one thousand men within one hour. Whenever we moved it was for that reason that I got this commendation. The other thing was we were always consistently awarded the best kitchen in the battalion. We were actually awarded for the best Thanksgiving dinner in Korea during the time I was there.”

### **How many people were in a battalion?**

“The battalion encompassed about a thousand plus men”

### **What was your favorite meal to cook?**

“I didn’t cook at all. I was in charge. Actually most people don’t realize that the military spends a lot of money on the very best food. It’s the inability of a lot of people who come from civilian life who are not really educated in cooking so they can take something that is really good and don’t really know how to handle it. It was my job to train and show them. So what I did was I went into the battalion records and got people who were professional in the business in civilian life. I was able to get a butcher from Chicago, a salad maker from NY a couple of guys that were Philadelphia who worked for Heinz Soup Company. For that reason I had people who kind of knew what they were doing and their good work reflected on me. It was my job to put it all together. I had a captain from Boston who was a clothing salesman. He saw the disaster. The guys from California were not bad, they weren’t trained. So I got these commendations. IN fact I have other commendations from the battalion commanders and the things we did to help them.”

### **The people you got to help you, were they in the service?**

“Yes, absolutely. What happens in when you get assigned into the service....For example, they may take this guy who was a butcher in civilian life, and they may put him in the motor pool driving a jeep. They don’t have the time. People come in as groups and are assigned in this company or that company. They really don’t have the time to disseminate what’s best for this person’s talent. So we went through the records and we moved someone who was in the kitchen and didn’t have a clue as to what they were doing. We didn’t knock them or give them any demerits. But they were better off driving the jeep, while the guy driving the jeep was better off cutting meat in the kitchen. We tried to put the right face on the right job is what we did”

### **What a “normal or average Day” while you were in the military?**

“For me it was every day, but for my group it was every other day. Because they worked long hours they got up at three or four o’clock in the morning in order to give the rest of the men their breakfast. They got up very early and they couldn’t finish until they were done late in the day. As a result everyone in my staff worked every other day. However, what we did around the holiday times because

it was to the benefit of the troops to enjoy what little benefit they could when they were so far from home. That was the only time that we required that everyone worked every day to make sure the men all got what they were looking for.”

**What was your normal or most common routine while you were at war or battle?**

“The difficulty is that the most common routine was packing and unpacking. We would be spending a few days here putting everything together on mobile trucks. Then we would be moving them forward and back or sideways and then start the routine all over again. We were probably the most mobile, because what they did with rifle companies and weapons companies is that they were in bunkers surrounded by sandbags. It was hard to make sure that what we had to offer got to them.”

**What type of firearm(s) did you use?**

“When I first got there I was a machine gun operator, and mortars. But after that the captain went through the records and decided I would be better suited to run the kitchens so that’s what I did.”

**Did you use any heavy weapon Artillery?**

“No, just mortars and machine guns. The strangest thing is that when we used to get...sometimes when we were up on the bunker, we didn’t always have the ability to get hot food. From time to time they would give us C rations: cans of chocolate, pork and beans and stuff like that. Because we couldn’t move around too much due to enemy fire from the other side; we would eat the stuff and throw the cans out the bunker window where the machine gun was mounted. The problem with that is that during the night the rats would run among the cans. You wanna talk about opening your eyes and staying alert, you didn’t know if it was rats or someone coming for you.”

**Did you take extra shifts?**

“Oh yeah the toughest part about being in the bunkers when I first got there was that we could only come down about once a week for a shower. With that once a week we had this very heavy oil heating in the bunkers for extra warmth. The only part of our body that was exposed was our face or hands. By the time we went for a shower and took our clothes off we were pure white under our clothes and our hands and faces were pure black from the soot that came from the oil cans. When you talk now a day about quality of air and environmentalism back then we weren’t concerned about quality of air, we were more about quality of life and wanting to stay alive, that was it.”

### **While at war, what helped you pass the time?**

“Basically, letter writing or reading. You read most anything you got your hands on books or brochures. Most of the time, by bedtime you were really tired. Getting to sleep wasn’t a problem. Some people had a drink now and then. It just wasn’t my thing. We would play cards and just socialize.”

### **Who did you write to?**

“At that time I was not married I wrote to my parents and my girl friend. Interesting story; today with cell phones you can talk with someone in China instantly. When we were in the service, when you were in Korea a certain amount of time they gave you five days rest leave in Japan. To rest, you went to a hotel and got a steak or something.

This is very interesting because it shows you how technology has advanced. At the time that I was in Korea you had to go to the telephone company today and make an appointment to call your folks say ten o’clock tomorrow morning. They would then call your people and tell them you are going to be getting a call tomorrow at 1000.”

### **What books did you read?**

“I would be hard pressed to remember. You would grab whatever you could, whatever was available. If it was interesting you finished it, if not after the first couple of chapters you went on to something else.”

**When you went to bed in your regular base and you thought of the future coming on, like going in to war were you scared or frightened in any way?**

“Not at all, you are scared when you first get there. I will give you the perfect illustration. When we got there at the seaport it was at night. They loaded us on trains and we travelled at night. You could hear artillery boom.. boom.. boom.. all over the place. The fear came because you didn’t know how far away that was. It could have been only a quarter of a mile away. It turns out it was many miles away and you had little or no chance of being harmed. It was a staging area for troops and you didn’t have much to worry about. But when you first get in there and its night time and you hear artillery shells goin g off and you are really a scared young guy and you figure the next ones coming for you, which was not the case.”

**While at war, what helped you get through hard times?**

“I had a little cardboard calendar that you mark off the days until you go back home. That’s really what kept you going.”

**After you came home from war, did your perspective on anything change?**

“I know it sounds kind of corny, but you really went away a boy, and you came home a man. All of us when we are young our parents are telling us to clean up our room and such. After a while when you get back you should know what you should do. You really, really matured. In my opinion, if you don’t get hurt or harmed, the best thing that could happen to you is to serve a little bit of time in the military. Because you really have to learn to be self sufficient, that’s the main thing. It will help you mature very quickly.”

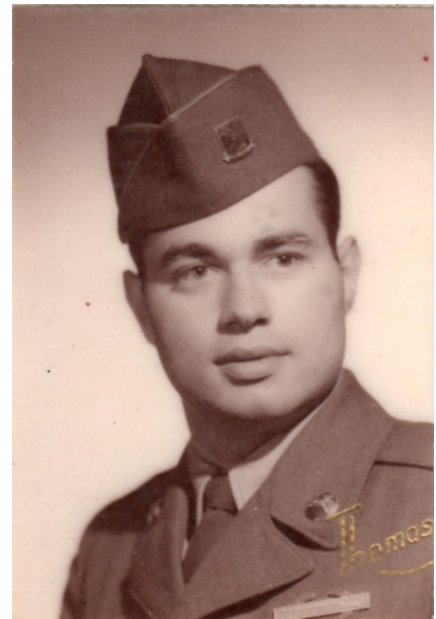
**Is there anything we missed that you would like to tell us?**

“I think you also learn how to do things as a team. You are not by yourself and you cannot do anything by yourself without the support of others around you you learn how to be self sufficient individually but work as a team collectively.”

**I see you brought some things could you explain them to us?**



“I brought a couple of pictures. Here is one when I was in the service. Here are some from when I was in South Carolina in basic training.



Here are my dog tags I still have those. There is also a miraculous medal. What I also have which is a little depressing, do you notice that there is a little groove in

the dog tags? That's what they used to stick in your mouth if you were dead. They wanted to record your death; that was your I.D. that's the little notch."

### **I don't understand**

"You see this little notch here? They would stick them in your teeth"

### **What is the miraculous medal?**

"It's because I was catholic and In my service I always wore this in , you had to wear your dog tags, and my miraculous medal I didn't take them off until I came home. It's almost been sixty years. This is part of your life. Thank god you get back unharmed you are very fortunate. *(The Miraculous Medal is also known as the Medal of Immaculate Conception. Many Catholic Christians around the world wear the Miraculous Medal, which they believe will bring them special graces through the intercession of Mary if worn with faith and devotion at the hours of death)*

Unfortunately, a lot of service men that left home never really enjoyed there lives. I grew up in Cliffside Park. Manhattan was just a ferry ride to NY. We had a lot of guys from NJ who went into the service. They went to Japan, Korea or Europe and had never been out of New Jersey. They had never taken the ferry ride to NY yet here they were being sent all over the world. It is very strange.

Today we go everywhere do everything, take a plane to go to California and take a vacation. In those days, it was just after the economy let down and big depression. Many of the people who went into the service it was the first time they left home. That's why you take someone like Tom Brokaw who wrote a book the greatest depression because a lot of the people in the Midwest, all they knew was tending the cows or riding a tractor. All of a sudden they find themselves around the world defending their country. This was quite a challenge for them."

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Personal Story

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