

James William Morris Interview #2

80th Infantry Division

(Library of Congress: Veterans History Project; interviewed by Tony Mavredes)

(MS Word Audio Transcript [NOT edited, just transcribed])

00:00:00 Speaker 1

You know what happened to the rest of the company?

00:00:02 Speaker 1

After that but.

00:00:03 Speaker 2

Yeah, go ahead now. You went to your when you got back, you'd seen your brother off on the train, and you're getting back to the mass unit there. And how would they handle you from this point on?

00:00:08 Speaker 1

Right.

00:00:14 Speaker 1

Alright, when they when I saw him put him on the train and the train pulled out, I went to the. As I said, the RadioShack and talked to the young man that was took care of the radios and asked him if he could call my unit.

00:00:28 Speaker 1

And he did. And I talked to my platoon leader, who was a Lieutenant homon.

00:00:36 Speaker 1

And ask him if he could come and.

00:00:37 Speaker 1

Get.

00:00:37 Speaker 1

Me and he said. You sure I can come and get you? I said you come to the parking lot and I'll be watching for you.

00:00:46 Speaker 1

I still had the bandages on and the same old clothes that I went back there and that they tore off, but.

00:00:53 Speaker 2

Now where? How were you wounded in all this?

00:00:56 Speaker 1

I had some wounds to the right leg.

00:00:59 Speaker 1

Into the right arm.

00:01:02 Speaker 1

And.

00:01:04 Speaker 1

Concussion.

00:01:06 Speaker 1

Mine were very minor.

00:01:09 Speaker 2

So you were ready to go back? Were they really? Were they?

00:01:10 Speaker 1

Yes.

00:01:11 Speaker 2

Willing to send you home.

00:01:13 Speaker 1

No, I wouldn't have. I couldn't have come home. No, it wasn't that type of injury I would have if I had not went back to my company after I'd been there until they decided to release me. They would have reassigned me, but I wanted to go back to my company, so I took it on my own to do what I did.

00:01:31 Speaker 1

And my platoon leader and the Jeep driver came and pulled into the parking lot and I got in it and and went back. And I tell folks, as far as I know, I was never released from that hospital but released myself. But I went back to my company.

00:01:48 Speaker 1

And this happened on the 22nd day of December and the couple days later at night, the company was attacked by the Chinese and we lost. When I went back there was very few of the.

00:02:00 Speaker 1

Regional.

00:02:01 Speaker 1

People there, rest of them had been wounded or killed and we're gone.

00:02:08 Speaker 2

Sort of a tough question, but how much was your brother still in your mind through all this?

00:02:13 Speaker 1

Continuously wondering where he was, what was happening.

00:02:19 Speaker 1

And sometime in January, they decided to give a special R&R to two people.

00:02:28 Speaker 1

They chose a World War 2 veteran.

00:02:31 Speaker 1

A Sergeant layman.

00:02:34 Speaker 1

For one of them and ask him to pick somebody to go with him to Tokyo and he chose me.

00:02:40 Speaker 1

And so we went to Tokyo.

00:02:43 Speaker 1

And I went to the Tokyo Army Hospital as quick as we got there.

00:02:47 Speaker 1

And ask if they had my brother and they said no, we don't.

00:02:51 Speaker 1

Well, they told me he was probably sent to Hawaii or some other army hospital, not to the states. They didn't think he was in.

00:03:01 Speaker 1

And they said, wait a minute, we do have an annex in Tokyo. You might check there.

00:03:08 Speaker 1

So I went to the army annex and quacks. I called his name. They said we have him and I got to see him then.

00:03:16 Speaker 2

What was that like?

00:03:18 Speaker 1

Very emotional, of course, to he couldn't believe I was there. He asked me why I was there.

00:03:24 Speaker 1

And.

00:03:27 Speaker 1

I spent that five days with him.

00:03:32 Speaker 2

He was on his way home. It was just a matter of time, no.

00:03:34 Speaker 1

No, no. He stayed there and I got a I got my regular R&R, I believe in May, April or May. And I went back to Tokyo.

00:03:49 Speaker 1

And went to the hospital. He was still there.

00:03:53 Speaker 1

And he had he got a three day leave and we spent three days in Tokyo together.

00:04:00 Speaker 1

And then he they sent him back and he his wounds healed. He came back to Korea.

00:04:07 Speaker 1

Probably in June that I'm not sure of that exactly, but not back to my unit. They reassigned him to another unit and I got seen him twice there.

00:04:18 Speaker 1

And then I came home.

00:04:21 Speaker 1

In August.

00:04:24 Speaker 1

And he came home in September.

00:04:28 Speaker 2

Now while you're in Korea through that whole year period, how was communication with the family and friends back home?

00:04:36 Speaker 1

The only communication we have with just by letter.

00:04:39 Speaker 2

Was that fairly regularly or was it?

00:04:41 Speaker 1

We get it the May. They got the mail to us very regular, yes.

00:04:48 Speaker 2

So you are getting some correspondence from family.

00:04:50 Speaker 1

Yes, yes.

00:04:50 Speaker 2

And.

00:04:51 Speaker 2

And letting them know what's going on with your brother and and.

00:04:54 Speaker 2

Things of that sort.

00:04:55 Speaker 2

How tough was it to have to write that left-handed letter?

00:04:59 Speaker 2

Back home from the hospital.

00:05:01 Speaker 1

Very tough.

00:05:02 Speaker 2

Not the left-handed part, but just the whole emotion of the.

00:05:05 Speaker 1

It was tough. We didn't go into detail as to what happened. I told in that I don't know, don't think my wife still has the letter, but.

00:05:15 Speaker 1

I just told them where we were that we've been wounded.

00:05:19 Speaker 1

Because they got a telegram before they got the.

00:05:22 Speaker 1

Letter, right? That would be.

00:05:25 Speaker 1

But it was a short letter. I can remember that.

00:05:29 Speaker 1

And I asked one of the nurses to mail it for me. I remember doing that.

00:05:33 Speaker 1

And they did.

00:05:36 Speaker 2

When you when you came back in August.

00:05:40 Speaker 2

Where would you come back through? Where did you get processed through again?

00:05:43 Speaker 1

Came back the same route back to Tokyo Camp Drake from Camp Drake to Yokohama on a boat in Yokohama.

00:05:51 Speaker 1

Well, we first, we bowed out of Korea to Japan.

00:05:57 Speaker 1

And then back to Camp Drake in Tokyo and spent. I don't know how long, maybe a week. And on a boat to back to Seattle, WA.

00:06:07 Speaker 1

And from there to Fort Meade, MD.

00:06:11 Speaker 1

And then a 30 day leave home.

00:06:15 Speaker 2

Now, had you finished your commitment or that initial commitment, I know you'd end up staying in, in.

00:06:16 Speaker 1

No.

00:06:20 Speaker 2

The service longer.

00:06:20 Speaker 1

No, I had to go. We came home on 30 day leave and my brother came home, as I say, about a month after I got a 5 day extension to to spend with him.

00:06:32 Speaker 1

And then we both went back to. I went back first to Fort Meade and we stayed there from.

00:06:40 Speaker 1

That would have been what, 1st of October, probably.

00:06:45 Speaker 1

Stayed there until November and were released into the you had to go into the reserve.

00:06:53 Speaker 1

Inactive reserve from there, but I went on the active reserve.

00:06:58 Speaker 2

Did you have any concept after that point, after your 30 day leave again? I mean once again, you've been through everything you've been through in Korea. You've had your life before Korea.

00:07:08

MHM.

00:07:09 Speaker 2

When you got that thirty day leave, were you just ready to say I'm done?

00:07:12 Speaker 2

With this mess.

00:07:12 Speaker 1

No, no. In fact, I intended to stay. My intention was to stay in the military.

00:07:18 Speaker 1

And I came home on the leave and.

00:07:21 Speaker 1

I got the impression that my wife didn't want me to stay, but she had said, well, you could have went to matter to her, you know, because she encouraged me to stay in reserve. But but I'm glad I did what I did the way I did it. Yes, it's worked out OK.

00:07:37 Speaker 2

So you went back up there in October so?

00:07:41 Speaker 2

Discharged out as far as the active service at that point in November. So back home, what was next for you back home?

00:07:44 Speaker 1

Right.

00:07:50 Speaker 1

OK, while I was home on leave in August or Sept, August, I guess my wife and she had saved the money working and she'd save what I had. I didn't need money and I kept \$5.00 a month. That's all I.

00:08:04 Speaker 1

Kept.

00:08:04 Speaker 1

Sent the rest of it home and she had saved it.

00:08:08 Speaker 1

And we bought a home.

00:08:10 Speaker 1

While I was on leave.

00:08:13 Speaker 1

And when we came back, we just went and got all of our furniture and gathered it up from the various places where it was and.

00:08:20 Speaker 1

And just settled in.

00:08:22 Speaker 2

How? How was that as far as was this almost like starting over again or was this, I mean, even in, in the relationships around you, whether it's spouse, whether it's mother, Father, whether it's brother, because you're not the same person you left as?

00:08:26 Speaker 1

Like starting over.

00:08:37 Speaker 1

Getting reacquainted and I'm sure I wasn't the easiest person to get along with once we came back, I was pretty bitter.

00:08:44 Speaker 1

Over over what had taken place.

00:08:47 Speaker 2

Now, how was? How did you sense that when you're coming back to the states now? I mean, you were towards the later end of the Korean War, but you've been through a lot yourself.

00:08:55

Yeah.

00:08:56 Speaker 2

How? How did you find that the people in the states accepted? You rejected you or could care less?

00:09:05 Speaker 1

I never got that impression from anyone. The folks around where we live. Family, we're.

00:09:12 Speaker 1

Completely supportive of what we were.

00:09:14 Speaker 1

Doing.

00:09:15 Speaker 1

I don't ever remember anyone speaking negatively to me toward about that.

00:09:21 Speaker 1

And I know there have been some that says it's the forgotten war.

00:09:27 Speaker 1

It could be all words are hopefully are forgotten by some folks I guess, but those that served in it, it's not a forgotten war.

00:09:35 Speaker 1

And that's why I do this. I want folks to know that Korea was a war. People died.

00:09:42 Speaker 1

People were hurt, people's lives were changed.

00:09:45 Speaker 1

And it took a lot of years for me to do that.

00:09:50 Speaker 1

But I come to the conclusion folks need to know that war is war. I don't care where.

00:09:54 Speaker 1

It is.

00:09:57 Speaker 1

If people are shooting at each other and people are dying, you can call it whatever you want to. I know they call it a police action. They can call it what they want to.

00:10:08 Speaker 1

I just read a book by a gentleman from here in Tennessee and I can't recall it.

00:10:15 Speaker 1

Name but I read it, he said. We called it war.

00:10:19 Speaker 1

And that's what it was. I don't care. Even the war that's being fought today, they don't call it a war. They're calling it a.

00:10:26 Speaker 1

Whatever.

00:10:28 Speaker 1

But you asked the folks that are over in Iraq today and they'll tell you it's war, it's war.

00:10:33 Speaker 2

Yeah.

00:10:37 Speaker 2

You were in the reserve. How active did you have to be in that reserve? What was your commitment to the reserve at that point?

00:10:44 Speaker 1

The commitment was at the beginning was meeting one day a Week 1 evening a week and then we went to a weekend a month.

00:10:53 Speaker 1

And we spent a Saturday and Sunday every month in training and we we pulled 15 days of active duty training at some army posts that these army posts I've listed, that's where we would go spend 2 weeks doing that.

00:11:11 Speaker 1

And the rest of the time was training. We had a mission.

00:11:14 Speaker 1

And the mission was to if it was to be activated to, we would replace some unit.

00:11:22 Speaker 1

On an army post and I won't get into that.

00:11:28 Speaker 2

Was there ever a concern that you get called back to the A fighting war?

00:11:33 Speaker 1

Well, they then there was Vietnam was the next one and.

00:11:38 Speaker 1

I don't. None of my reserve unit was activated during the Vietnam War. There may have been some elite support units that went that I wasn't aware of.

00:11:50 Speaker 1

When we would go to these two week active duty training, that was part of our duty. We fell in with a regular army training. We were a training unit and we fell right in, did the job that they were doing. They would turn the turn it over to us to do so, we had to know what we were doing. We had to keep up with what was going on in the military.

00:12:11 Speaker 2

When the you said that nobody around you that you knew of got called into Korea, I mean to Vietnam.

00:12:15 Speaker 1

Right.

00:12:18 Speaker 2

You were fairly surprised when you got called into Korea.

00:12:22 Speaker 2

Were you concerned when Vietnam was getting fired up that you would?

00:12:25 Speaker 2

Get called in again.

00:12:25 Speaker 1

Well, that was on our mind and we were.

00:12:28 Speaker 1

There was always rumors that we would go. I can remember one time there were two divisions that they said. One of the two was going to go and we did all we could to get to go. We were trained, we were ready to go. As you read today about your reservists, and now we were trained, we were ready to accomplish mission. But a division out of Kentucky, the 100th Division.

00:12:49 Speaker 1

Is the one that was activated.

00:12:51 Speaker 2

Now.

00:12:53 Speaker 2

Things.

00:12:54 Speaker 2

In Vietnam time, the time frame we're talking about now, life has changed a little bit for you and your family.

00:13:01 Speaker 2

Because it probably wasn't just the two of you anymore.

00:13:05 Speaker 1

Our first child was born in 54 December 54.

00:13:10 Speaker 1

And then we had to know of them come along in 57.

00:13:12 Speaker 1

We had two children.

00:13:14 Speaker 2

So when when Vietnam's coming around that tugs on a different meaning when you're sitting here saying we were ready to go choose us.

00:13:22 Speaker 1

We would have still done it.

00:13:25 Speaker 1

Been no question my wife understood that.

00:13:31 Speaker 2

The.

00:13:33 Speaker 2

Already we have seen through that time frame.

00:13:37 Speaker 2

The veterans come back from World War 2 and come back in great.

00:13:41 Speaker 2

Celebration. I mean, really heroes.

00:13:44 Speaker 1

Mm-hmm.

00:13:45 Speaker 2

Korean War over a period of time after it was over and after you got back.

00:13:50 Speaker 2

Whether we like it or not was called was forgotten.

00:13:53 Speaker 1

MHM.

00:13:54 Speaker 2

And Vietnam had a lot of political strings tied to it.

00:13:57 Speaker 1

Mm-hmm.

00:14:00 Speaker 2

Did you ever have a point in time that you said?

00:14:03 Speaker 2

This just isn't worth it.

00:14:05 Speaker 2

This military stuff, just not what it's all cut up to be. I've done my duty. I'm done.

00:14:10 Speaker 1

No, I don't ever remember feeling that way.

00:14:16 Speaker 1

I never felt that the military was it was an obligation that I asked for.

00:14:24 Speaker 1

In the beginning it was, they told me I had to, but the rest of it was fully voluntary.

00:14:32 Speaker 1

But I never felt any.

00:14:38 Speaker 1

I know folks said well, you know, we're we're fighting a war we can't win Vietnam. We just pulled out and left. Some folks are saying we should do it. I don't feel that way. We started a job. We have a mission to accomplish, and the mission must have been right or our President wouldn't have started. And I felt the same way in Korea.

00:14:57 Speaker 1

Yes, there was times in Korea that.

00:15:01 Speaker 1

I felt, why can't I get more ammunition or what this type thing sometimes, but we always had it was sufficient.

00:15:08 Speaker 1

But I never felt that we were in the wrong place.

00:15:13 Speaker 1

I never had any very little contact with Korean civilians, most of it with.

00:15:19 Speaker 1

The Korean Army people. But I never had any thoughts about this. I shouldn't be here. It was lonely. I wish I had been home. Yes, with the wife. But she understood. She was from a military family. She understood what it was.

00:15:36 Speaker 1

And I never heard her complain. She never wrote me a letter of I wish you, you know, she'd say yes. I miss you. And she wrote me. I get a letter every day.

00:15:47 Speaker 1

And.

00:15:50 Speaker 1

There was never anything in it to make me feel. Jimmy. You're where you shouldn't be. Right. There was never any any from my family.

00:15:57 Speaker 2

Please support.

00:15:59 Speaker 1

Complete support.

00:16:01 Speaker 2

Now you would stay in still a bit longer, even going through the Vietnam process.

00:16:08 Speaker 2

Tell me about your.

00:16:10 Speaker 2

Last years because not only are you in the reserve, but you had picked up a career along the way as well.

00:16:15 Speaker 1

Yes, I went into insurance business and the company that I worked for was very supportive of what I had to do to fulfill my obligation and military. There was never any problem there. If I had to be gone extra week, I just went.

00:16:35 Speaker 1

I just kind of it fell into a daily routine to do and this obligation was there and.

00:16:43 Speaker 1

I felt that it was necessary that I do it and my goal was to stay in until I could retire from it, and that was my goal from the beginning and my wife pushed me in that.

00:16:55 Speaker 1

And I'm happy with it was a I was fortunate to have a civilian job that I could fit in my military duties in with it, and I could leave at any time I wanted to.

00:17:10 Speaker 1

Do whatever I needed to military. What go wherever I needed to go.

00:17:15 Speaker 1

My family now.

00:17:16 Speaker 1

There, they never complained that it was. I just had an enjoyable. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed my military. Of course, after I got up to the point where the orders were a little less and and I had some leeway in what I did and where I went in that.

00:17:37 Speaker 1

But there was never any hesitation about reenlisting that it was just automatic. You just till I get enough time to retire.

00:17:45 Speaker 1

And what they call they get your 20 year letter once you get a letter said you have 20 years. But I stayed 10 years or so after that but.

00:17:53 Speaker 2

So you're about 30 years total.

00:17:54 Speaker 1

MHM.

00:17:57 Speaker 2

You got your 20 year letter 10 years later. The time has come. It's time to separate. It's time to retire and going your way and whatever else I've had for you at that point.

00:18:04

MHM.

00:18:09 Speaker 2

Was it tough?

00:18:11 Speaker 2

Or is it?

00:18:11 Speaker 1

No, it just it would just. That's what I had been looking toward. So it was just that was just part of the goal is completed and I get on with the rest of it. And there was some doubt maybe along whether the benefits would be what we they said they would be, but they're exactly what they said they would be. I have no.

00:18:31 Speaker 1

Regret whatsoever.

00:18:36 Speaker 2

Here's a question that will grow by the time it leaves my mouth to the time it gets to your side, it'll probably grow a lot.

00:18:40

OK.

00:18:42 Speaker 1

OK.

00:18:43 Speaker 2

Define freedom for me.

00:18:52 Speaker 1

I guess we'd, we'd have to decide freedom from what?

00:18:57 Speaker 1

Freedom from aggression.

00:19:01 Speaker 1

The the right that we have in America, the right that we have for the freedoms that we have.

00:19:09 Speaker 1

And the freedoms we have are not free.

00:19:13 Speaker 1

The first part of that word, the free part, it should be there, but the freedom is not free.

00:19:22 Speaker 1

For me to say that.

00:19:25 Speaker 1

Or I would have to say this, that our freedom.

00:19:29 Speaker 1

Is not guaranteed by our military, but it is certainly enhanced by.

00:19:36 Speaker 1

And without it, I don't feel we would have. But freedom is having the privilege of going where you want to go, doing what you want to do within the laws of the within the law, not not the freedom to kill and to make that. No. But the freedom to feel that I can go where I want to do what I want to do.

00:19:57 Speaker 1

Work where I want to work, eat what I want to eat, sleep when I want to sleep without the.

00:20:03 Speaker 1

Fear of being attacked by someone.

00:20:07 Speaker 1

I don't know what the dictionary says freedom is, but it's, but it's freedom just like I am here. I have the freedom to sit with you or the freedom not to sit here with you. You're not going to put me in jail if I don't answer your questions. Some places, some countries that would, they wouldn't have the freedom to do what I'm doing.

00:20:10 Speaker 2

I don't care what the dictionary says.

00:20:27 Speaker 1

They wouldn't have the freedom to serve in a military that is great as we have, we have the greatest military in the world and I don't think that can be questioned by anyone. We have the greatest leaders. We may not agree with what they're doing, but they have a job to do and it's a job that.

00:20:45 Speaker 1

We hope have they have been trained to do so. Freedom is just to do what we're doing and to do what we want to do.

00:20:55 Speaker 2

When you think about the Veterans History project, as we mentioned earlier that this our Tom together today will be put into the Library of Congress.

00:21:03 Speaker 2

For all of history with that kind of an institution.

00:21:07 Speaker 2

When you think about that and you think about the generations.

00:21:10 Speaker 2

That will follow you.

00:21:13 Speaker 2

What would be the one message that you would want to share with the generations that follow you?

00:21:19 Speaker 1

I would hope that they would have this, that that I'm doing and others have done that they can look at it and realize what the price was paid for them to have what they have, the future generations and to tell them that.

00:21:36 Speaker 1

Hopefully they will not have to do what we had to do to guarantee those freedoms.

00:21:43 Speaker 1

And to tell, I would also like to come back one step back and and and ask the folks that have had the experiences that I have had they they're not dramatic. The ones that I've had, there's more dramatic things that's happened to folks. You've heard me tell about some of them.

00:22:01 Speaker 1

Listen to what we have to say.

00:22:04 Speaker 1

What we're telling you is something we don't want you to do.

00:22:08 Speaker 1

And to ask folks that are in my position.

00:22:12 Speaker 1

To also come forward and tell your story. Some folks can't do that. They get my age, they will.

00:22:22 Speaker 1

I want folks to know, as I said earlier, that war is real. I don't care how small or how large it is.

00:22:30 Speaker 1

Their consequences results are the same. Young men are the ones that are dying.

00:22:36 Speaker 1

Now we have had some here recently. They're up in the 40s and 50s that have been killed.

00:22:43 Speaker 1

I just wanted to know that we want them to have a free country, want to have the freedom of not being able to go, but never do, to be embarrassed to serve in the military, never back off from doing it. Don't give excuses to back off from it.

00:22:59 Speaker 1

I feel it's an obligation.

00:23:02 Speaker 1

And I have no regrets.

00:23:05 Speaker 1

I did it.

00:23:07 Speaker 2

Us coming together today as a pretty unique situation.

00:23:11 Speaker 2

Once again, I'm playing off the fact that this is a tape that will.

00:23:13 Speaker 2

Be.

00:23:13 Speaker 2

Available for generations that follow.

00:23:17 Speaker 2

We're in Chattanooga for a nurse pinning of your granddaughter. Give me a larger picture of your family now, with your kids and your grandkids, and all that kind of stuff. Great grandkids.

00:23:22 Speaker 1

Right.

00:23:32 Speaker 1

Yes, we have two daughters and four grandchildren, 2 great grandchildren.

00:23:39 Speaker 1

We have two wonderful son in laws that we're proud of our children. We're proud of them.

00:23:48 Speaker 1

Family is what can hold this country together and I believe in family.

00:23:53 Speaker 1

Support.

00:23:55 Speaker 1

The heartaches, the hardships we have to go through. But we face them together.

00:24:00 Speaker 1

But it's certainly a privilege to be here for the purpose that we are here.

00:24:03 Speaker 1

Today.

00:24:05 Speaker 1

To be with you and also for the pinning of our granddaughter. Yes, as a nurse.

00:24:11 Speaker 2

Anything that we really didn't cover that you want to?

00:24:13 Speaker 2

Make sure that you mentioned.

00:24:19 Speaker 1

No, it's. I could talk all night, all day about some things with those folks that that died with their families. I had some contact with them, but.

00:24:28 Speaker 2

Is that pretty tough or was it?

00:24:30 Speaker 1

It would. I have visited one of the families.

00:24:35 Speaker 1

I visited the Ledbetter family, my brother and I visited them and that was.

00:24:40 Speaker 1

We didn't know whether to do it or not.

00:24:43 Speaker 1

Because we're living in their sons dead.

00:24:47 Speaker 1

But we did anyway. But they were a real nice family, treated us with all courtesy.

00:24:52 Speaker 1

And I have pictures over there of his grave and so forth. But and I correspond with the Holland family also.

00:25:02 Speaker 2

Has that been a sense of?

00:25:04 Speaker 2

You're healing. Or is it? If you think that?

00:25:06 Speaker 1

It was at that time, yes.

00:25:10 Speaker 1

We corresponded with the Ledbetter family for years, until they've all died out and.

00:25:17 Speaker 1

We had no one to contact from his family now, never contacted the Holland family after I left the service.