

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS  
An Oral History Interview with Joseph Koncick  
7<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery, 1935-38  
Interviewed by Mary Rasa, NPS,  
July 7, 2004  
Transcribed by Mary Rasa, 2010  
Editor's notes on parenthesis ( )



Barracks 102 in late 1930s when home to 7<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery  
Photo courtesy of Gateway NRA/NPS



Joseph Koncick at Building 102 in 2004.

MR: This is Mary Rasa, Sandy Hook Museum Curator. I am here with a veteran of Fort Hancock on July 7, 2004. And we are going to start this interview. Please state your name.

JK: Joseph Koncick.

MR: When and where were you born?

JK: Manhasset, Long Island (New York)

MR: What year?

JK: 1917, July.

MR: Where did you attend school?

JK: Manhasset.

MR: Did your father or grandfather serve in the military before you?

JK: No.

MR: How did you become to enlist in the Army?

JK: Well, the reason why I came, I was looking for a home more or less, but when I got here, to be in the Army, I loved it very much and I loved to be a soldier.

MR: And what year was that?

JK: That was in 1935.

MR: And how old were you then?

JK: I just turned 18.

MR: And how long did you spend here?

JK: The whole three years.

MR: Where did you sign up?

JK: (39) Whitehall Street, New York City.

MR: From there, did you immediately go, or did you have time in between?

JK: I had time in between and they sent us to the Statue of Liberty, which I think at that time was called Fort Wood. There was a bunch of MPs (Military Police) there. So, we had a ball there. We ate good there and everything. We slept at the foot of the Statue of Liberty.

MR: So immediately from enlisting that's where they sent you.

JK: Right. And after about a week or so, they sent us to Fort Slocum (NY).

MR: In Long Island?

JK: Off New Rochelle. Yeah. And then from there I came to Fort Hancock.

MR: And that's when you became part of the 7<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery?

JK: Yeah.

MR: Do you remember what Battery you were in?

JK: 7<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery. There was no Battery at that time, just 7<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery as far as I know.

MR: Okay. How many soldiers were in your unit at the time?

JK: Oh, there must have been I would say....

MR: Around a hundred?

JK: Easy a hundred. Yeah.

MR: And you lived here in Building 102? (The interview took place in Bldg 102)

JK: Yes. I lived upstairs on the far end there.

MR: On the north side. Did you know anything about this place before you came here?

JK: No. Not at all.

MR: Did you know what type of job you'd be doing?

JK: Not at all.

MR: What was your title?

JK: I was just a Private.

MR: And what was your job?

JK: Well, we used to go clean the guns, you know, down there. We used to train on those guns. We also had a gun way out in Keanon (Battery Kingman) and Mills, I don't know if it's still there or not. There was a great big twelve inch in there.

MR: Yeah. Battery Kingman and Battery Mills.

JK: Yeah. Battery Mills, right. Yeah. And then they had tunnels there, big tunnels there I remember and all the ammunition and powder and everything we used to clean them up. And we used to train on those guns there. And the disappearing guns were over here. (pointing out window)

MR: So you actually were able, other than cleaning them, you did fire them?

JK: Oh, yeah. Right, and then also in my outfit we used to lay mines out in the (Sandy Hook) Bay here. As a matter of fact, we won the efficiency medal which was on the mine in front of the barracks here. (A display mine was on the steps leading up to the building in the 1930s.)

MR: Now, those mines, they were electronically detonated from here?

JK: No. The way we did it, we put them in the water. And there was a yole boat alongside that would draw and heave the line with the great big cable and they would put it on each, it was like a plate. And the way they used to set it off was from that boat.

MR: Oh, okay. Now that was for practice, did you also do it to actually place it in the Harbor or was it all practice?

JK: No, it was all practice over here. We never had to put them in the Harbor.

MR: Did you put dynamite in them?

JK: Oh yeah. As a matter of fact, after a while we got them all in we used to shoot them. They had a boat tow on a target, you know. And the guys would, they were numbered and then we pressed a button and off it goes.

MR: Was it the *General Ord*, the name of the ship you were on?

JK: Right. Right. Right. The *General Ord*. Yeah. It used to come from the Army base over here. We used to go off that boat there. But we also had a bunch of Yole boats too, you know.

MR: So, tell me about firing a 12-inch gun. It must have been pretty loud.

JK: Oh yeah. But those guns, it amazing, it would shoot and then recoil right back down. They call them disappearing guns. Like you think, what good are they today with airplanes around forget them.

MR: So would you also have targets out when you were firing disappearing guns?

JK: Oh yeah.

MR: How about Battery Kingman and Mills what was that.. they were...

JK: That was a big gun. That was a great big twelve inch. And when that thing went off man, that thing could shoot a shell about twenty miles.

MR: Anything else about working on the guns that comes to mind?

JK: Well, there's a lot of guns that we changed over to...more or less one guy would be down there and another guy would change the wires and stuff like that you know. It was good. Plus there were a couple of other outfits out here besides us.

MR: The railway guns were here at the same time, weren't they.

JK: Right, right. Yeah.

MR: The 52<sup>nd</sup>.

JK: And they also practiced off there too. I remember them.

MR: So when you were firing the gun, when they were doing the whole gun drill, what was your job? Would you be bringing the gunpowder or..?

JK: Right. Gunpowder, yeah. Jamming it in, you know, stuff like that.

MR: Cleaning it out and things like that.

JK: Right.

MR: Did they use a sponge? What was the system of cleaning the inside of the barrel?

JK: Some kind of rags wrapped around, you know.

MR: Clean all the embers out.

JK: The job I used to hate, they used to put all cosmoline on all the guns, you know, when no one uses them and every so often we used to have to take the cosmoline off. And that's like you mother said, tye you know, grease.

MR: Did you wear blue denim outfits when you were firing the guns?

JK: Yeah. Blue denim fatigues. We used to call them fatigue hats.

MR: What type of work did you used to do after you left the service?

JK: After I left I got a job in the school and I worked there all my life and I retired.

MR: What did you do?

JK: I was a custodian and then a head custodian. While I was (in) World War II, the kids sent so much mail to me, wrote to me, because I was a big hero you know, B-17. And then when I came back from the War, you know they had a big parade for me. You'd think I won the war all by myself. (laughter)

MR: Sounds pretty good. While you were here, were there ever any alerts of potential enemy attack?

JK: No, never.

MR: So, on a typical day where would you be most likely working?

JK: Some days at the batteries where all those guns were. We'd go to Kingman Mills or we'd go down to where all the mines were and sort out the cables.

MR: So, it kind of varied from day to day.

JK: Yeah. Right.

MR: So, what was it like living in this building? There was a kitchen wing. Was the kitchen on this main floor?

JK: The kitchen was downstairs.

MR: Oh, it was in the basement.

JK: They used to have a dumbwaiter. That big room there was a dining room. (East wing)

MR: Do you know what was in this side of the building?

JK: In this side, of course now there are partitions there, guys sleeping there.

MR: It was bunks and then also the whole second floor?

JK: Upstairs and the other side. Yeah.

MR: Anything come to mind about living in this building? Was it cold in wintertime?

JK: We had a good fireman. We had plenty of coal so we kept warm and then in the summertime, like Nancy asked me if it was hot here and I said, "No. You'd open those windows and you'd get the sea breeze." I can't remember it being hot. And I'd love the parades. We used to have parades every Saturday morning. And Wednesday afternoons it was a half a day. Saturdays after the parade the guys would get a pass to go home.

MR: What type of social activities did you take part in? Did you go to the theater, dances and things like that?

JK: At that time they didn't have it like in World War II with the USO dances. At that time they didn't have nothing like that.

MR: Do you ever remember going to the theater, because that was built in 1933?

JK: Yeah. I went there a few times.

MR: Do you remember how much it was to go and see a movie?

JK: 10 cents.

MR: Okay. (laughter) Did you ever go to the beach?

JK: Oh yeah. All the time. We used to go straight down there to the beach (gesturing towards today's North Beach). We'd always go down to the beach. And then at night time we could see Coney Island lights.

MR: You still can. When you would go to the (New York) city would you mostly take a boat or train?

JK: Well, sometimes if the boat was here, the *Ord* you know, we'd take it to that Army base. Brooklyn Army base. Or then otherwise we would have to hitchhike. There used to be a train station that's no more there.

MR: Where was the train station located?

JK: Right as you come into the base here. Right there. There was a station and where are the railroad tracks. I'm looking for the railroad tracks.

MR: They are long gone.

JK: I used to take a 4:15 (pm) train. We used to go to Jersey and at Jersey take a ferry across.

MR: Jersey City and that would take you right, okay....

JK: Yeah. But the thing is half of the time, the train, like the train wouldn't stop at this place, but we used to get a ferry to Keansburg from New York.

MR: And then take the train from there here.

JK: Right.

MR: Okay. Did you, were you, tell me about some sporting events going on?

JK: Well, we had a very good baseball team. Very good, excellent baseball team. And that was about it. We did have a good basketball team too, but the baseball team was

great. Matter of fact, the fellow I was going to bring with me was a very good hitter, but he passed away, so... He loved this place too.

MR: So, you were kind of remote from the rest of the soldiers. That you were kind of far to the north so you would have to walk quite a ways to go on parade I guess.

JK: Oh, yeah. Well, we used to march in full formation, you know ahead of time. They had these wonderful bands playing, you know.

MR: Do you ever remember parties going on at the Officers' Club? Do you remember seeing anything interesting going on over there?

JK: Well, I had just got here, but I remember the club there, because a couple of times some of the fellows used to work there and they asked me to work with them out there.

MR: So, did you do it? Did you go over there?

JK: Oh, yeah.

MR: So was it interesting to see what was going on?

JK: Oh, yeah. The officers would be there. Well that was Non-Coms (Non-Commissioned Officers) Club, you know, the first three grades. (NCO Club was in Bldg. 112, no longer standing) Not Lieutenant, but Sergeants and Tech Sergeants. And of course here were buildings there where the Non-Coms used to live.

MR: Yeah. They are all gone now. Did you attend any religious services out here?

JK: Not that I remember, no.

MR: Okay. Do you ever remember any servants like that would work for the officers or did you ever meet any servants?

JK: No.

MR: Any minorities at that point in time?

JK: No.

MR: Did you ever work with any civilians?

JK: Yes. Mr. McFadden, he was the engineer and he helped us with the guns. We used to wire them and he was a very good machinist.

MR: So, he actually worked right with you then.

JK: Yeah. He wasn't in the Army. He was a civilian.

MR: Did anything especially humorous occur while you were here?

JK: Well, we had that big flood that time, that hurricane. It washed all our boats almost away.

MR: Do you know what year that was?

JK: That was in 19...When was that hurricane (speaking to wife off tape)?

Mrs. Koncick: Was it in 1939?

JK: No. It was before that.

MR: Well, what year did you get out of the service?

JK: '38. So it had to be before I got out.

MR: Well what month did you, there was one in September of '38.

JK: That's the one. That's the one. And then as a matter of fact we were cut off. The road coming in here. We were out there trying to get our Yole boats in.

MR: So, you had to go to work and clean up the roads, I assume?

JK: I remember Capt. McFadden. I remember him.

MR: So this was a fun place for you?

JK: I loved it here. As a matter of fact, I even, my buddy John and all the guys who were here, they seemed to love it, you know. When you got sick you had a nice hospital, a doctor's there, a nice bed.

MR: Were there any nurses there?

JK: Yeah. There were a few nurses.

MR: Oh, okay. Because I wasn't sure they were here before World War II.

JK: The doctor was an Officer from the Post.

MR: Anything else stand out in your mind about Fort Hancock?

JK: No. Just about everything I guess. Planting of the mines, shooting the guns, parades, meeting a lot of nice guys.

MR: Okay, so when you got out in '38, you went back to civilian life and you were then drafted?

JK: Well, we got married (speaking to wife)

Mrs. Koncick: Well, you met me in '40 and we got married in '41.

JK: Yeah. The war broke out.

Mrs. Koncick: And you were drafted in '42.

JK: So I tell them I was in the Coast Artillery. I said, "What are you guys putting me in the Air Force." Well he's a gunner, because I reckon I was a good gunner. They said, "We need gunners on the B-17s." So it worked out good.

MR: So you immediately to Europe or where you here for a while? Where did you go?

JK: I didn't stay here too long. I went to North Africa. And then from there we went to Italy. We did a lot of bombing missions and I was one of the fortunate ones that got away.

MR: Did you stay in Italy near the end of the War or did you go to Germany and all?

JK: No. Italy.

MR: Oh, okay. Is there anything else you would like to say?

JK: No. The Army gave me a good background, I mean, you know, a very good background at that time. Of course, a lot of people never cared about soldiers but they never knew the inside of it. A lot of guys were hell of nice guys. You couldn't beat it. Very good.

MR: Okay, well thank you very much.

(one last story Mrs. Koncick asks him to relate)

JK: Well, I took the train to New York and from New York I took the subway down to Whitehall Street. That's where all the ferries used to run. So there was the last ferry going to Keansburg. And I ran trying to catch it and I made it but I slipped my foot in the water. This was February and it was cold. But they got me out alright. No, but if I were to miss that ferry, I would have been AWOL (Away without leave). You know, I didn't want to do that.

MR: So did you freeze up on the way down?

JK: Yeah. And then one time I got out on the train. I fell asleep. The guy woke me up way down I think in Asbury Park someplace. I had to walk all the way back. Three o'clock in the morning. There were no cars at that time to hitchhike.

MR: That's a lot of miles.

JK: Yeah. I had to walk back. You know those trains had something like steam heat and it put you to sleep. This is wintertime and I fell asleep. Of course I was running around all night here with the guys and everything else and you're tired and it was. In other words, I am so happy to be here. It brings a lot memories of the old place.

End of Interview