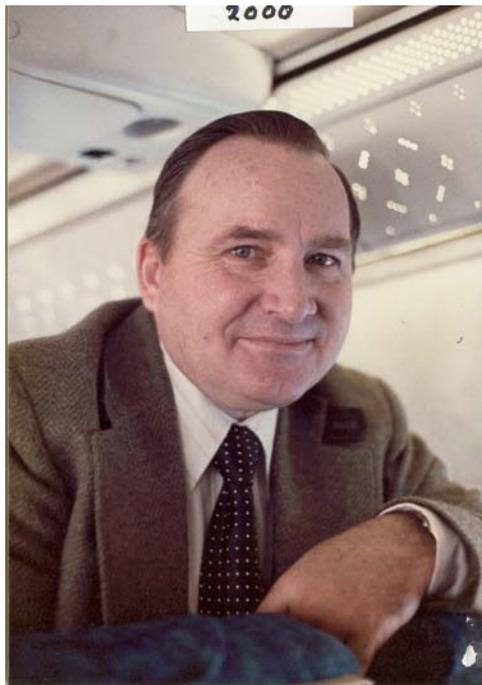


**Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Erwin Taper
16th ADA at Fort Hancock in 1951
Interviewed by Mary Rasa, NPS 2003
Transcribed By: Melissa Shinbein, NPS 2009**



Erwin Taper at Fort Hancock in 1951



Erwin Taper in 2000.

MR: Hi, this is Mary Rasa and I am the Museum Curator for Sandy Hook and I am here today for Erwin Taper and we're going to do an oral history interview. Today is October 26, 2003. My first question is when and where were you born?

ET: I was born in Watertown, NY on March 13th, 1931.

MR: Where did you go to school?

ET: Watertown.

MR: Through high school.

ET: Yes. I spent some time in Germany too, in between.

MR: Was your father or grandfather in the military?

ET: No, they weren't in the military at all. Because my Dad died, I was about 2 years old.

MR: What years did you serve?

ET: I went in September 9, 1948 and I got out in July 12th, 1952.

MR: How did you become involved in Fort Hancock?

ET: Well, after I got out of school in Fort Bliss, Texas, first I was shipped to Germany. I speak German and after my unit got shipped back to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Then I went to radio school up in Fort Bliss, Texas and after that they transferred me back to Fort Bliss, Texas where I was I think for about 4-5 months. Then we got shipped over to here I believe it was with the 16th Brigade Headquarters. And we got shipped over here. We were supposed to monitor the area around here to protect New York. I think there were a bunch of guns out here but I was not involved with that. I was mostly involved with communications. They had a radio station set up down here that I ran with communications between all the other areas. Fort Monmouth and Fort Devens and all the other areas. So, we were in constant touch. Every morning you would have to check in and report every morning how many people were there and so on. Back in, sometime in 1950 in March and back in October or November, I'm not quite sure, we got transferred, I mean the 16th Brigade headquarters, to Korea.

MR: So this was all in 1950?

ET: Yes, mainly. I was here a just a short time. But during that time, I met my wife over here.

MR: And we'll get to that in a minute. Did you know anything about this place before you came here?

ET: No, I didn't know anything about it. I came from New York state.

MR: What was your rank?

ET: Well, I started out as a private and got up to corporal.

MR: So you were with the 16th Brigade?

ET: 16th Brigade Headquarters. I have a flag for it at home.

MR: Did this job aid you in your future work?

ET: Well, it helped me more or less. I went to school after I got out of the service. I was in from 1948 to '52. It was a choice of getting drafted or joining. So, I joined the army. I still remember my serial numbers.

MR: And your profession after you left the service was?

ET: I went to work with General Electric up in Syracuse, NY and after I went to school I became a field engineer. I was in the broadcasting field for twelve years and we moved 1955. Lets see, after school, I think it was '56 or '57 we moved down to Belford, New Jersey here. And after that the company moved to Florida and I joined Fort Monmouth. I worked at Fort Monmouth in research and development.

MR: So were you a contractor or a government employee?

ET: I was with the government for 33 years at Fort Monmouth and retired in 1995.

MR: Were there ever any alerts or potential enemy attacks when you were here?

ET: The only thing I recall back in those days was that the Russians were flying some airplanes close to the New York area. We were on alert several times. I do recall that. But, usually we transferred that information to Lakehurst and Lakehurst would send out some fighter jets. We were strictly communications, even with the Air Force too. But we were on alert quite a few times. It was confidential at the time, but I don't think it is now.

MR: So you believe you probably worked in the radio station building. It's a little red building? Does that make sense?

ET: Well, if it is the red building I don't remember it.

MR: Well, its got a red roof and it's a concrete block building. On a little road. It wasn't part of the main post.

ET: No, it wasn't. We ran that thing 24 hours a day, and we were all radio operators and

repair men. We would monitor that thing for 24 hours.

MR: What was your duty shift? How many hours on and off.

ET: I wasn't in charge so I don't remember exactly. I was the only repair man in the area at the time. So, I had my own hours in a way and I made sure all the equipment was working properly and I made sure the operators I had, which were a lower rank than I did, were okay.

MR: So the folks you worked with were all military?

ET: Oh yeah, they were all military and they were all part of the 16th Brigade Headquarters.

MR: What building did you live in?

ET: We had the headquarters over here someplace, I can't remember the number of it.

MR: Was it a temporary wooden building or a brick building?

ET: It was a brick building and I remember the parade field every Saturday, we would had to come out here and parade.

MR: Was it the one that was U shaped? Did it have extra wings or was it like the regular barracks here or did it have a parking lot in back?

ET: I really don't recall. It was a long, long time ago.

MR: Where did you eat?

ET: There was a mess hall down there. We ate down there.

MR: That's probably Barrack 74.

ET: If you say so.

MR: Tell me about your wife. What her name was?

ET: Her name was Joyce Johnson and they set up a bowling alley down here. They had a lot of women working here. They were all civilians. She had graduated from high school. I guess it was in '48 and she was working here. I remember she said a Chinese Captain was in charge of the area. She still talks about it now. She liked it very much.

MR: And her job was?

ET: She was a secretary, typist I guess. That type of work more or less. And I met her in

the bowling alley, they were coaxing us back and forth because I was single and she was single. After I went to Korea, she kept writing me everyday.

MR: When did you get married?

ET: We got married June 6th, 1953, after I got back from service. She wanted to get married before, but I said, "no way." Since I was going overseas I didn't want to get married or anything like that. But she kept in touch with me. She would send a lot of packages that we all enjoyed. The packages were mostly cookies.

MR: So her job was at the commissary?

ET: Yes, I believe it was the commissary. The one where we get the food from. I do recall one time she told me there were bugs in the raisins. After that I gave up raisins.

MR: Where was she from?

ET: Leonardo. She went to school in Leonardo here and she graduated I believe in '48 and she got a job out here.

MR: How did she get to work?

ET: Well, first she didn't have a car, so I guess someone was driving her back and forth. Then finally after her father got her a car. It was a 1941 Chevy. I didn't have a car at the time, but I paid for gas.

MR: Would you go on dates to like the diner in Highlands?

ET: Yes, yes, we did. And there was a little Italian place there. We used to go quite often. Also, we would go on boat rides a couple of times.

MR: To Manhattan?

ET: No, no, we would rent a boat down here. With an engine. We did that a few times.

MR: Did you ever go fishing while you were out here?

ET: No, didn't go fishing. We didn't have the time.

MR: Did you ever go to the beach?

ET: I can't recall ever going, we were real busy all the time. We were really active, and short on people too because Korea was going on. We managed a few dates together before I went overseas. And we went down to Highlands to one of those Italian places.

MR: Did you ever go to the theater and watch movies?

ET: Yeah. 25 cents. I believe it was.

MR: Were there still any dances going on out here? Or was it small at that point?

ET: I don't remember anything like that at the time. The only thing I remember was the bowling on Monday or Tuesday night. That's all I remember. They wanted us to join the bowling alley since the ladies were bowling and they had no one to bowl with. So they encouraged us to go out and do some bowling. There were many young ladies and that's how I met her.

MR: How many people do you think were stationed out here at that time? Because it was post World War II and before Korea.

ET: I would say not more than about 150 or so. I doubt if we had 150 people.

MR: Was the Disciplinary Barrack still here or was that closed up?

ET: I don't remember that.

MR: Okay there was a prison here for soldiers returning from World War II.

ET: Yeah I was surprised to see that. I don't remember anyone being in there. I didn't even know they had a prison out here. Until one time I came down and I heard about it. No one that I ever knew was in the prison or anything like that. They really kept us busy, especially running a radio station 24 hours a day. We were busy. We didn't have much time to play around or do anything. We were lucky to get a few hours off here and there.

MR: Did you ever know any people that worked at the Coast Guard Station?

ET: No, I didn't. The only thing I can say is after I worked in Fort Monmouth there was a two-star General that had a boat out here and was an engineer. They wanted to know if I had some radar experience. I did, so I came out from Fort Monmouth I was sent out to work on the Service's radar. The general out there was the one in charge of the radar at that time and had a background in radar repair from working on radars for about two or three years out at Fort Monmouth.

MR: Did you attend religious services here?

ET: Yes, I did. I went to a church in Red Bank. In fact, I'm still a member of the King of Kings Church in Middletown.

MR: Did you know of any servants or anything living with the officers?

ET: No.

MR: But there were quite a few civilian women working here?

ET: Yeah, also men. They were maintaining these buildings and things like that. They had contractors, contracts were given out to civilian forces out here to maintain the area. Because that was not our job. Our job was not to protect New York City. My job was strictly communications.

MR: Do you remember a barber shop?

ET: Yeah, I remember, we had to get haircuts.

MR: Was that in the same building as the bowling alley was in or the PX?

ET: No, I don't remember.

MR: Do you remember the tailor shop?

ET: No, we used to wear fatigues as our army uniforms. I don't remember that either. Was there a tailor shop out.

MR: Yes, there was. Was this a fun or boring place to be working?

ET: It was educational. Coming from Watertown, New York, you didn't have a chance to see the ocean. But it was fun. You know to look out on the ocean and see the big ships go by. I enjoyed that while I was stationed here. We used to monitor the ships too, sometimes. We'd have a lot of traffic as the ships were coming into New York Harbor because they all had to check in.

MR: So you would do that with all the ships that came in?

ET: Yes, all the ships coming in. As they would have to get the okay from us. We had the radar station. Well after that they had the missile base set up. Prior to that, remember they had some blimps from Lakehurst that would go out on patrol and they would check on all the planes and the ships coming into the area. So we were aware of this at all time what was coming to New York harbor.

MR: So you were working in conjunction with both the Navy and the Air Force at the same time?

ET: Yeah we were.

MR: Did you ever go up to the base in Highlands?

ET: Oh yes, they had a radar station up there.

MR: Was that Army or Air Force at the time?

ET: It was both combined. It was a naval headquarters none the less. I spent some time up there too. It was combined, Army Air Force even Marines I've seen out there too. So, we all worked together as a team.

MR: That's good to hear. Is there anything else you would like to say about your time?

ET: Well, I wish I could have stayed longer. I enjoyed the area. It was boating out here and things like that ,but we got shipped out. Whenever the Army tells you to go, you go and that's it.

MR: And what did you end up doing in Korea?

ET: Well, there again I was in communications and then I got shipped over to Okinawa at the Air Base down there. So, it was an Airforce base and also XXX. We protected that area too. But I got involved, more or less, with planes and I learned how to fly. Still a pilot, still flying today.

MR: Sounds good, well thank you very much for doing this interview.

Amendment to interview-

MR: After the interview was over, I learned that Mr. Taper is fluent in German and when he first entered the service he was sent to Germany in 1948 to assist with translations at the Nuremberg trials. He said not with the higher ranking officers, he still helped with official with lower ranks such as Captains and Majors

END OF INTERVIEW