

Ronald Grafstrom Oral History Interview

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Interviewed by Chris Hansley

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Hansley: This is the Pritzker Military Library Oral History Program. I am Chris Hansley and today I will be interviewing Ron Grafstrom a Korean Air Force Veteran. Today is September 13th. Ron thank you for coming in today we appreciate you telling us your story. For the record if you could give us your full name, where you were born, when you were born and start a little bit about your childhood?

Grafstrom: My full name is Ronald Martin Grafstrom. The Martin was the doctor that delivered me. I was born in Duluth, Minnesota, on December 28th, 1930 to a single mother. I lived with my grandparents in Duluth and my mother and my uncles came to Chicago because there were no jobs, and it was the beginning of the Depression in 1930.

Hansley: What was it like growing up for those first six years or so in Duluth and then making the transition to Chicago? What was the trip like coming, you had mentioned you were in the backseat of a rumble seat?

Grafstrom: Yes, I don't really remember too much. I do remember all the snow. I was, I believe, I went to kindergarten and I was in first grade. I remember my aunt making me go to school and there was a blizzard outside. I walked about two blocks and I realized that I couldn't see across the street anymore. I turned around and went home. My aunt asked me why? I said school's closed. First lie I can remember in my life.

Hansley: Did you have any military background in your family when you were growing up?

Grafstrom: My mother married in 1942. My step-father then was drafted into the Air Force. He went to Radio School and he became a radioman on a C-47, which is a transport plane in Europe during World War II. My uncle, oldest uncle, was a mechanic, an automobile mechanic and he was put in the tank corps in the 4th Armored Division. That was about two weeks after D-Day he landed in Europe. My youngest uncle was in the Air Force. Actually he was in the National Guard. The National Guard was activated in the 1940's and from there he went into pilot training. In 1942 he was killed when his P-40 went into the Gulf of Mexico. They

really don't know what mechanical problems or pilot problems it was, but he was killed. My step-father and my uncle returned home after the war.

Hansley: That's good to hear. Growing up in Chicago, what neighborhood were you in, what schools did you attend?

Grafstrom: In the early part I lived in the Hyde Park area. We had a couple of apartments that my mother, aunt and uncle lived in. When my mother met my step-father, he said it was too expensive to live there. We moved to 69th and Wentworth. I attended the Yale Elementary School. I'm a member of their Alumni. In fact I'm the treasurer of their Alumni Association. We have a reunion once a year in September. After World War II, my step-father came home and we rented a house because our apartment was too small. I was then 14 years old, my brother was born, while he was overseas, my half-brother. Shortly thereafter we bought a house at 62nd and Tripp. I was in high school, I went to Tilden Tech. I'm a member of the Alumni Association there. I was the treasurer for seven years. For health reasons I dropped that. I graduated high school I went to Wilson Junior College for a couple of semesters. I was working in a lithographing shop as an apprentice photographer when the Korean War broke out. At that time they were drafting people who were 20 years old. On my birthday I went down to the board, and I told my parents this at Christmas, that one of my buddies just got drafted, and I don't know if people know this but your draft number relates to a list, and this guy's number was ahead of mine. So, that meant my name was on the list next, I was going to be drafted in January. My step-father got all excited and he says, "No no, he said you go into the Navy or go into the Air Force." He said, "You don't want to be drafted because if they need infantrymen, you'll be shoved right in the infantry." There's a nice little story there, I went down, went through the physical. There was about I'd say 20 to 25 guys in this room and an officer came in and he said, "Well now we're going to swear you in." He said, "So I want all of you to raise your right hands." He said, "Do you have any questions?" I said, "Yeah I got a question." I said, "When are we going?" He said, "You'll be on the train at five o'clock tonight for Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas." I said, "No, I don't even have a toothbrush with me or change of shorts. And I've got a New Year's Eve party to go to, so I'm going to come back after New Year's." He says, "Wait a minute." All the other guys say, "Yeah, I didn't know that." He says, "Hold on, just hold on." He left the room, he came back. We all got five day passes, to report back January the 2nd. That's when I left for Lackland.

Hansley: When you were at Tilden Tech?

Grafstrom: Yes.

Hansley: Just to back up a little bit. Were you in sports or clubs or anything like that?

Grafstrom: I was too small. I went out for football. I weighed 130 pounds. I'm afraid I just didn't make it. I have short legs, so I wasn't fast enough to run track. I can't, but I like sports. I joined the high school newspaper, The Tilden Tech Times, and I became the sports editor.

Hansley: Did you have any jobs when you were in high school or in college?

Grafstrom: When I was in high school I was a bagboy at the local A&P. I think I made a dollar and a half, working all Saturday morning, which is when most of the people shopped. But that was about it.

Hansley: When you enlisted, were you living at home and what was the reaction of your family when you actually went into the service? Did your step-dad have any special advice for you since he had been in World War II?

Grafstrom: He talked very little about his service. The only thing like I said before, he said, "Do not be drafted, enlist." He was disappointed that I didn't go into the Navy. He said, "Because that would be your safest bet." I said I didn't like their uniforms; I like the Air Force better. I enlisted in the Air Force.

Hansley: Do you recall those first days when you got to Lackland?

Grafstrom: Yes, at that time, the U.S. was gearing up for another major war. More guys were coming into the service than they had capacity to handle. All the barracks were full when we arrived at Lackland. We pitched tents, we had ah let's say, about 10-man tents, you say well you're down in Texas, this is January now. This one night it rained heavy and we got up in the morning and you knock on the canvas, it was knocking on a wall because it was all frozen. It was cold. You had five blankets, but it was still cold.

Hansley: Because you were 20, which was a little older than probably most of the enlistees or the draftees, were you treated more like an older brother or were you still just considered one of the guys?

Grafstrom: We were all about the same age. We were all about 20 years old. As I said earlier, that's what they were drafting. They were drafting 20 year olds. I was just one of the guys.

Hansley: Because you enlisted were you, was it mixed, enlistees and draftees for training? Or were they separated?

Grafstrom: There were no draftees in the Air Force. All draftees went in the Marines or the Army at that time.

Hansley: What kind of training did you receive? What was your Military Occupation Specialty that they gave you during boot?

Grafstrom: That's kind of interesting, after basic training a train load of us went to Lowry Field in Colorado, Denver, Colorado, beautiful place, beautiful base. They herded us into a hanger, and they announced over a loudspeaker that we were going to be a medic, an MP, a clerk, a cook or a truck driver. They needed people to run the base, permanent party. Again like I said, the Air Force and all of the other branches of service were gearing up for the Korean War. The South Koreans were losing in the war very badly and we had no combat troops. Now that's what we were doing, was getting ready to deploy to Korea. But they needed people to train the people. I thought the only category I thought I could really fit into was clerical. I stood in line for the clerical. They said "Yeah, okay." I was shipped to the squadron, there was about five of us, and I was made the mail clerk. Which, I hated with a passion. I was all by myself and I was in a cage. If you imagine all the little mail slots, and it surrounded you, and I was sitting inside with nobody but myself. Nobody else was allowed in there but me. Nobody could mess with the mail.

Hansley: In your paperwork, you also mentioned welding. When did that happen?

Grafstrom: Well, I found out from a guy that one of the rules that the Air Force had was, that everybody that went into the service, was that everyone was entitled to go to a school. Hating being the mail clerk as much as I did, I went up to my First Sergeant and told him I wanted to go to school. Once a month I did this for six months, until finally he said "Alright, alright." They sent me up to Group Headquarters. I went up there and talked to a guy and he said, "Well, where do you want to go, what kind of school do you want to go to?" I said, "Well what have you got at Chanute Air Force Base in Southern Illinois?" He said, "We've got a machinist school and we've got a welding school." I said, "Sign we up for welding." I thought that would be pretty neat to be a welder. I then shipped to temporary duty to Chanute Field and went through six months of schooling. Of course the reason for going to Chanute Field was so that I was 150 miles from home. I could come home every weekend. I got home and bought myself a '42 Chevy from a mechanic that my mother's insurance man knew and I used it for a cab. I would charge you two bucks up, two bucks back, four bucks round trip. I would take five guys with me.

Hansley: That sounds very entrepreneurial.

Grafstrom: Right (Laughing).

Hansley: How many times were you able to take weekend leave like that when you were down at Chanute?

Grafstrom: It was not lots of rides let's say. I had a 50 mile radius and Chicago was not within that radius. I never got caught. I never did anything wrong. Didn't get caught speeding, anything like that. I got away with it.

Hansley: After Chanute, where did you go?

Grafstrom: I went back to Denver and I was assigned to a welding shop there on the line. Me and the guy who ran the shop, didn't quite get along, he was a civilian. I went home to get married in July of 1952. When I got home from my honeymoon, there was a telegram waiting for me saying my 10 day leave was extended to 30 and I was being shipped to FEAF – Far East Air Force. They didn't say you're going to Japan, you're going to Korea, you're going to China, they just said FEAF – Far East Air Force. That extended my leave and I went back.

Hansley: When were you sent to Korea?

Grafstrom: That telegram that I mentioned, my mother got all upset and I said, "Mom this is the way goes." I said, "I'll probably get stationed in Japan." Hopefully she didn't get too upset. I went back to Denver; left my wife in Chicago, went back to Denver, and then went to Camp Stoneman, in Pittsburgh, California. Pittsburgh, California is just outside of San Francisco. San Francisco is on the west side of the mountain and Pittsburgh is on the east side of the mountains. That's when I got processed to go overseas.

Hansley: When you went overseas you had three air bases you had indicated on your paperwork. If you could tell me a little bit about each one of them, and the transition, going from one base to another and what you did at each? Let's start off with I believe you said, Kunsan was your first?

Grafstrom: Kunsan. We went by ship to Yokohama to Itazuke Air Force Base and then they flew us to by C-47s to the various bases that we were assigned to, and I got off at Kunsan or K8 as they called it, all of the air fields were numbered. When they found out that I was a welder, they said they had no welding equipment there for me and that I should do some other job. I said I was a senior clerk and they said, "Well okay." They sent me to the engineering section of the 428th Fighter Bomber Squadron. My job was really keeping a little history on every air plane; there are 25 in the squadron. The main job was, up on one wall was a, looked like a flowchart, every plane was numbered down, then coming out was hours. Every day I would get the missions, how long the plane flew, and I would fill out this flowchart. When it got to 50 hours, then the plane was taken to a small hanger and it was given a 50 hour inspection, brought on the line. When it got up to 100 hours, it was flown to Japan. There it took a major overhaul. It then was brought back and I had to erase everything and start all over again. That's basically what I did, and a few other minor chores that I really don't remember. There again is another story. I was sitting in there and the Inspector General came around to all of the people, allegedly once a year you are entitled to talk to an Inspector General. He's not a General by the way. This guy happened to be a Chief Warrant Officer. People came in with their gripes and they talked to them. He looked over at me when it was all over with and he said, "Corporal, call me a jeep." We had

taxi jeeps. We didn't have enough jeeps for everybody to have their own. What we had was a taxi cab service. "Call me a taxi jeep," he said. I said, "Hey by the way, somebody told me that once you go to school in the Air Force, it's a rule that you must work in that specific job category for a year." He says, "Yeah." I said, "I got out of school in July or June, and this is September." I said, "Why ain't I working in my career field?" He wrote my name down and two weeks later I was in Japan, at Itazuke Air Force Base, J35, working in the welding shop. I stayed there for a while and all of a sudden the shop became overrun with guys. There were too many people with this welding job description coming over. They looked around and they said, "Grafstrom you're going back to Korea. Only you're going to K2 this time." Taegu. I get over to Taegu, and they said, "Well we've got no welders here." I said, "I know that, they told me that in Kunsan." I said, "But I am a senior clerk." I went down; they sent me down to the armament shop. The armament shop had a fully qualified armorer doing the paperwork. He just loved to see me. Because he now he had to go out in the cold and service the air planes. I got to sit in the office by the stove and do all the reports. We had a daily report that all the bombs we dropped, we had to tell them up at Group Headquarters. I had a report and memorize secret codes and this sort of thing. I typed up a report every day and brought it up to Group Headquarters. When it got to be warm out I said to the officer that ran the shop, a 2nd Lieutenant, I said, "You know, we got to start training somebody, because I'm going to be going home in a couple of months." "Yeah," he said. I said, "You know, it takes time too." I laid it on thick. We got a guy that we thought was kind of bright, but he wasn't. We got him to start memorizing the codes. I went out and I was driving a weapons carrier. Now this was an F-84 squadron. They had four .50 cal machine guns in the nose and one in each wing. Each had ammo cans that held 300 rounds of ammunition, .50 cal. When they were in strafing, well they'd use up, then they'd need somebody to load these cans onto a truck and bring them out to the flight line. I'd bring the empties back to the shop and we'd link them all up again, because they came in boxes of 105 rounds apiece. At any rate, did that for a while. The guy who drove the bomb truck, I never thought I'd be able to drive a truck that big, he got sick, spent a couple of weeks in the hospital. I don't remember what the heck he had, but I drove the bomb truck for a while. Big one! Big thing had three trailers on the back. You'd go out to the dump and the bomb dump would load these three trailers. I'd haul them back to the flight line. Another truck, heavy truck that we had, had a cherry picker, a little crane on the front and it could pick them up and put them on dollies. The dollies would go. They'd lift them up and put them under the wings of the F-84s. Of course they weren't fused. After we had all the planes loaded, then the guys would come, the technicians, would come and put the fuses in. One day, the guy that slept next to me, and the guy two bunks down, were putting a fuse in and it was defective and it blew up. That was the end of them. Arland Morgan and Robert Moore, I remember them to this day, it was real sad day we had.

Hansley: What was the reaction of everyone on the base to that?

Grafstrom: The missions for that day were shut down. I really don't know, unless they transferred it to some other squadrons at other bases, but all of our's on that base that day were shut down. No flying!

Hansley: When you were at any of your bases, did you ever feel that you were in danger from attack from the enemy?

Grafstrom: No, most of those bases, if you look on a map, you'll find they are about 100 miles from the front. The only time was right near the end when the President of South Korea, Syngman Rhee, opened up the prison gates and let everybody out. Now, they were in negotiations to have a cease fire, which is still in effect today. I don't know if you know, that there is no treaty, peace treaty, we are still in just an armament, armistice mode. But he released all of these prisoners, now a lot of them, North Korean guys wanted to stay in South Korea, but of course there were some diehard Communists. Now they are sunning around South Korea. We were all put on guard duty. Prior to that, the South Korean soldiers that came out of the line, their R & R was guarding American bases. Now we also joined them in guarding. At night you would hear a couple of rifle shots every once in a while, gun shots. You heard about the jeep that got a bullet through the windshield, or truck that got hit or something like that. I don't remember of hearing of anybody being killed or wounded.

Hansley: When you were on guard duty with the South Korean soldiers, what was your reaction to them? Basically meaning do you feel that they were fighting for their country or were they leaving it up to the United States to fight for them?

Grafstrom: I don't know, because I didn't speak Korean or Japanese which is what they spoke and they didn't speak English, very few of them. I would go on patrol, in a jeep, and there would be a Korean driver and a Korean officer in the front, and I was in the back with a sub-machine gun. They would talk, I did know what they were saying, I never really had a one-on-one conversation with an average soldier, like I was, just an average Air Force guy. I really don't know what they had, except that what I have read since then, that these guys never wanted to go back. Most of them never wanted to go back. The head of the negotiating team from the North Koreans was incensed that they let all these guys go, because he wanted them back. I read afterwards that there [were] also Chinese soldiers taken captive. That after the armistice was signed, 100 Chinese soldiers went to Formosa. They didn't go back to communist China. Just like some of the North Koreans did not want to go back to North Korea. They saw how good it was in the south. We forced them too. I sort of digressed there but, at any rate that was the only time that we really had any scare about enemy in our midst, otherwise they were 100 miles north.

Hansley: At your three postings, did you have any contact with post commanders or guest military that may have been a higher rank or politicians?

Grafstrom: No I didn't. It's like people said, "What'd you think when they replaced Mac Arthur and brought in Ridgeway?" I say, "I never saw either one of these guys. They didn't mean anything to me." What you're interested in is the guy who's ordering you around. That was when I was in Taegu, and I was in that shop, it was the 2nd Lieutenant that sat next to me. He was the guy, didn't even know or meet the squadron commander or the group commander or the base commander. You don't do that. Yes, I saw pilots. Pilots I considered, they were sort of like me and the rest of the guys. We were the workers that ran the war so to speak. There were a lot of nice guys and there [were] guys that would fly off and never come back. I think in my time we lost five planes. When I was at Taegu, one guy was a very nice guy. As a matter of fact I was there when he got in the plane for his last mission, and that really bothered me.

Hansley: Ron could you please tell us a little bit more about this pilot?

Grafstrom: This fella, I can't really remember his last name, his first name was Guy. I remember that. He was a very nice guy. We had over 60 pilots in the squadron and there are only 25 planes. Everybody didn't have their own plane. You see movies where the guy's got his name on the side and all that. At any rate, when all pilots were assigned to a certain plane and when they were the oldest pilot there, had the most missions, then they got to name the plane. This fellow, Guy came down and was talking to a crew chef, and the crew chef said he was scraping off the old guy's name and he said, "What name do you want to put on there?" He said, "Your wife, your Mother, or somebody?" "Nah, nah," he said, "Nah don't do any of that." He said, "Why don't you put your wife's name on there or something, or your kids?" He said, "Well my wife just had a baby. I'll put my daughter's name on there." The plane was called *The Girl Pat* number 304. That was a week or two later and we're down there and I was driving the bomb truck and we're loading bombs on the planes and we were all set, everything was ready to go. Planes were fired-up and they would bring out the pilots, they were on a flat-bed trailer, picture that. The guy's sitting all around the perimeter of it. He'd jump off, again this guy was standing there, getting his stuff together and we were talking, as best we could with all that noise. He crawled up there and got in the plane and took off. They said he went in, he was the third plane in on the target, and got a direct hit. A direct hit, the plane exploded in a million pieces. Unbelievable! The crew chef and I were flabbergasted. I knew the crew chef. All the planes came back from the mission, and he and I sat out there for couple hours. Then I said, "Bill, you got to go back." "Well," he says, "You never know maybe." I said "Bill, the man told you, took a direct hit, exploded in a million pieces." "Yeah, I know. I'm gonna sit here a while." I left him there after couple hours and went back to the hut. That's what war is.

Hansley: Which base was this at?

Grafstrom: This was at Taegu, K-2.

Hansley: Now for a little happier time. During your down time when you were at these bases, what did you do for down time?

Grafstrom: In Japan I went to the service club. They had a very nice one there and I got to be pretty good at ping pong. I like shooting pool, but there were so many sharks there. You just couldn't get a table. I did rather well playing ping pong. In Korea, there were no facilities. Yes, there as an NCO club, I could go down there and get a couple of beers at night but that was about it. That was the only thing you could do. When it rained, of course there was no flying. Some of the guys, not me, they built kites. They would get a jeep and they would go out in the rain, and try to get that thing to fly. I said, "You guys are stupider that I thought." I said, "How do you get a wet kite to fly?" But it was something. That's essentially what we did. Was just something, or play cards. Lot of card playing, but I'm not a gambler, so I didn't play that much.

Hansley: When you were overseas, were you able to take any leave? Where did you go?

Grafstrom: I got one R & R and I went to Tokyo. [I] was able to call my wife from Tokyo and tell her about when I would be coming home. I talked to my mother, and talked to my wife.

Hansley: Did you write home a lot? If you did, were your letters different to different people? Did you not tell your mom and your wife things that maybe you might've written to your step-dad about?

Grafstrom: No, I would think they were mostly - it's a very dull time. The exciting times that you see in the movies, are few and far between. It's mostly the dull drudgery and how many times can you say, "I got up six o'clock and went to breakfast and." You just can't. It was very hard writing letters, because there was nothing to put in there when you were in Korea. There was nothing that you did.

Hansley: When was your tour of duty over in Korea?

Grafstrom: That's an interesting story. That's another story. If I can backtrack for a minute, my buddies used to hang out a tavern on 63rd Street in Chicago. The guys I played ball with, they were all older than me. They had been drafted and gone and come back. When I was going overseas I was home, I stopped in at the tavern told them, "I'm going to go over there and finish it. You guys didn't do the job so I did." July the 28th 1953 the Armistice was signed. That is the day I rotated home. I went to base operations, I was sitting on my duffle bag, officer walked in, and someone said, "The ceasefire is at 10 o'clock tonight and there will be an Armistice." Everybody said, "Great." I said, "Is that going to slow down rotation?" "Oh no, no," he said, "You guys are going to go to Japan and go home just like normal." "Fantastic." This gave me the right to go home and go to the local tavern, where my buddies hung out. I said, "See I told ya, they sent me over to end the war."

Hansley: According to your paperwork, you were in for eight years. When did you reenlist?

Grafstrom: I didn't reenlist. I came home and then was sent to Randolph Field. When I was down at Randolph, I again was put in a welding shop. The shop that I was in had all of the basic sheet metal workers, welders, machinists, painters and what we did was built mock-ups for schools. Someone would say, "Show me an airplane with some wiring." We would do that. I built an airplane out of garbage cans for the fire department. They had little containers in there, and they would fill that up with jet fuel, and they would set it on fire and then the firemen would come in and put the fire out. We had a beer party there one night and the commanding officer came over and sat down. He said, "You're new here let me talk to you." I was talking to him and he said, "You're just home from Korea? You've been there?" I said, "Yes, I spent a year there." He said, "You're entitled to get out early." He said, "Didn't anybody tell you that?" I said, "No." I said, "This all must have gone on when I was in the process of coming home." He said, "Report to the orderly room tomorrow morning." I went up there the next morning. They looked at my service record and said, "You can get out." I served 2 years 10 months and 27 days active duty. After that, I was discharged, I believe it was November. I was released from active duty on November 27th of 1953. However, in order to get that early out I had to take an additional four years Reserve, Inactive Reserve. That put me up to 1958.

Hansley: Ron, would you please tell us about your trip home from Korea?

Grafstrom: We were picked up from the base in Teague by a C-124 Mars plane. I know you don't realize what that is but I'm sure you've seen pictures of planes were there's two doors in the front and a ramp comes down and they drive tanks and all that up. This plane flew to all the bases in Korea picking-up guys, and then bringing them to Tachikawa Air Force Base outside of Tokyo. There we were processed and waited for a ship. After three or four days we were put on a train down to Yokohama Harbor and put on the *USS General Sultan*, and that was the final ship, for 10 days. Then we went home.

Hansley: What port did you come into?

Grafstrom: Again, I came in at San Francisco. Now the Air Force had opened an air base called Park, Park Air Force Base outside of San Francisco. The Air Force guys were sent there and processed and then we were released on 30 days furlough to go home. I went to downtown San Francisco and signed up with TWA, at that time they didn't have airplanes that flew that far. I flew to Kansas City, and then got another plane in Kansas City to Chicago, Midway Airport, which was the only airport in Chicago at that time. My parents lived about half a mile east of Midway. I was home.

Hansley: Once you got back home, what did you do after the deployment? Did you start work right away or did you take a little bit of time off to get used to being a civilian again?

Grafstrom: My wife went back and lived with her parents. The two of us had to find an apartment. I had to find a job, I think she quit her job for some reason, and I don't remember. She had to find a job, so we were bouncing around. We finally found an apartment up in Logan Square in Chicago. It was near where her parents lived. I was at my mother's for Thanksgiving, my wife and I, were there and I ran across a cousin of mine. He said, "What are you doing Ron?" I said, "Well nothing." I said, "Maybe I'll go to school and do body and fender work, you know, fix cars." He said, "Oh, I work in an accounting office, in the stock yards." He said, "We're going to have an opening." He said, "Would you want to go there?" I said, "Well I really don't know about that," My mother said, "Ronald why don't you go down there and do the interview anyway." I said alright to her. I went out and bought a suit and put on a white shirt and tie, and I went down to this place and I said, "I don't want to work in the stock yards. The smell is something awful." Believe me it is! I interviewed and got the job. Twelve years later I was running the payroll department. I signed up for night school and graduated from college, going to school at night in 1965. It took me a long time, but what can I say.

Hansley: What school did you go to?

Grafstrom: Wilson Junior College and the Chicago Junior College system, is what I went through.

Hansley: Did you stay with the same employer and who was that?

Grafstrom: The New York Central, if you remember that old railroad, they owned two railroads. Of the two railroads they owned, was the Indiana Harbor Belt and the Chicago River and Indiana Railroads that you probably never heard of. They were switching lines in the Chicago area. They did all the accounting in a one story office building in the middle of the stockyards. I stayed with them for 12 years and after I graduated they said they could promote me into management but they had no openings. I said, "Okay, I guess I have to go someplace else." I went and for a brief time I was in show business. I ran a payroll department at a place that made TV commercials, slide films for schools, and promotional stuff. Then I got a call from a guy, and they said they needed a guy at the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad in Chicago Heights. I lived in Harvey at the time. I said, "Man that's great." I didn't want to come down into Chicago. I went out there and I worked there for two and one half years. That railroad was bought by the Missouri Pacific. I was out of a job again. I put out some resumes and the railroad owned by U.S. Steel, the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern, based in Joliet, Illinois, they gave me a job. A couple of years later I was the Assistant Manager of Accounting. I stayed there until I retired.

Hansley: Ron, when you went back to school, back to Wilson, did you use the G.I. Bill or anything that the government provided to help with schooling?

Grafstrom: No, I did not, because, if you lived in Chicago and you went to their Junior College, the classes were only five bucks. I would take two classes a semester, so it was \$10 plus my books. How could I do any better than that?

Hansley: It was good that Chicago did that. Did they do that specifically for the G.I.s or was this in general for the student body?

Grafstrom: No, I think that was for anybody could do that. Anybody could get that at that time.

Hansley: Are you involved in any veteran organizations?

Grafstrom: I was. Korean War Veterans Chapter 23 out of Tinley Park. I was the Treasurer and Newsletter Editor for about seven years. Health has made me drop these things, these activities. My kids said they'd disown me if I didn't quit. I guess I have to quit.

Hansley: But you're still a member of the organization.

Grafstrom: I'm still a member, right.

Hansley: Were you involved in any other Veteran's organizations like the American Legion, VFW or something with one of your military troops?

Grafstrom: On rare occasions I go to, I'm a lifetime member of the VFW Chapter 2791 in Tinley Park. I occasionally go to meetings there. I'm a regular member in the American Legion in Park Forest 1198. I occasionally go to one of their meetings. The 58th Fighter Bomber Wing, Fighter Bomber Group was the group that had the 310th Fighter Bomber Squadron that I was in at Teague, Korea. They were formed by a World War Two pilot. The 58th was formed originally in World War Two and the pilots flew P-47s and they were originally stationed in New Guinea and as the war progressed they moved further and further north eventually ending up in the Philippines and then Okinawa, and then the war, was over. All of these guys came home and said, "Gee it was fun to fly. Maybe we should join the Reserves." That was great, because now Korea came and they were all reactivated. Made active duty, took their then P-51s to Japan and then eventually we switched over to F-84s. The group is a mixture of Korean and World War Two Veterans. The World War Two veterans are getting to be few and far between unfortunately, which is another little story I'd like to tell you about a friend of mine. His name was Marty Jackson. He was one of those P-47 pilots in World War Two. He graduated from high school on the West Side of Chicago. I don't remember the name of the school, but he graduated in 1938. Of course we were then coming out of the Depression. Jobs were very hard to get. He was able to

secure a job at the Morrison Hotel as a bellhop. All bellhops had numbers. They had a big button on their chest and his was 35. He would tell this story all the time that he enlisted in the Army when they first were calling up people before World War Two. He got into pilot training and blah, blah. When the war was over he came back home and he said, "I didn't want to be in Chicago anymore, I'm going to go to California." He went to California and he utilized the GI Bill to become a lawyer. Set up a law firm, him and two or three other guys. They were so successful, they bought a bank. They were going through the bank and the manager was introducing him to all the people around and came up to this one lady and said, "Here's the smartest person in the bank. She's our note teller." If you don't know what a note teller is, back in the '20s and '30s, when you bought a house and you borrowed money from the bank, you went to the bank once a month to make your note payment. She kept track of all these, mortgages now we call them, he said, "So I married her. She's the smartest one there, I married her." He said more than once when he was in the courthouse in L.A., people would walk-up to him and say "Hey 35! I remember you! What are you doing out here?" He said, "I don't know, all these guys expect me to remember them, but they remembered me as a bellhop in Chicago, I was number 35." When we go to these reunions, he always tries to get a hold of me, because he wants to talk about Chicago. He just loved Chicago. The longer he's away the more he loved Chicago. The last reunion I was at was at Dayton, Ohio, at the Air Force Museum. We were at a hotel downtown, and you give your car to a carhop, and they park it. Well, he was there with his wife and daughter, I came down with my suitcase, and we were standing there talking. He's shaking my hand, "Ron, I can't tell you how much it means to me to talk to you." He wouldn't let me go. He throws his arms around me, "Oh, it's so wonderful to talk to you about good old days in Chicago." Poor son-of-a-gun he died last year.

Hansley: That's a shame.

Grafstrom: Yes that is. He was a wonderful, wonderful guy.

Hansley: With all of your experiences, what do you think the younger generations could take away from them?

Grafstrom: War is hell! A famous man once said that, I got to say that. It's a year or two or three out of my life, and you see things you never saw before and you never want to see. It's just hell! Do everything you can to stay out of it. Stay away from it and keep your country and loved ones out of it.

Hansley: Where and when did you meet your wife? You said you got married while you were on active duty.

Grafstrom: I met her about a year before I went into the service. Went on a double date, blind date with a guy I worked with. Met her and started dating her. Got engaged, I'm trying to think if I was in the service or not. I think I was in the service at the time

we got engaged. We decided to get married in '52. Which we did, July of '52, had four kids, one boy and three girls.

Hansley: When you were in the service, did you experience or miss any major events in your life during that time? Say, maybe a major birthday, death of a loved one, maybe the birth of one of your children, anything like that?

Grafstrom: No, but what I did miss, my youngest sister was born when I was just out of basic training. I just came out of basic training and went to Lowry. I asked when I came into that squadron, where I was the mail clerk, I said, "I would appreciate a three day pass when my mother delivers, [and] she was pregnant at the time; so they did. They granted me a three day furlough. I hopped a train, and went home, and saw everybody at that time.

Hansley: Have you gone back to South Korea? If you have, what was your reaction to what the country has turned into?

Grafstrom: No, I have not gone back. I'm told by those who have gone that it's very nice. It's kind of expensive to do and at this point in my life I can't really afford too, to do it. People ask me about, "What was it like in Japan, what was it like in Korea?" I say, "Well, you know how things were in the 1950s in America?" I say, "We got to Japan and it was a step down. It's like being in the '30s. And when you got to Korea you took another step down." You'd have to look into the history of Korea to see what they went through under Japanese occupation, for 40 years. To realize, these people were living in mud huts, they were cooking over open fires and they were slaves to the Japanese. We got there, what five years later, six years later? The country really hadn't built up very much anymore. It was still a horse and buggy community. I remember Kunsan. We could see from the base, you could see the town out there. They were living in these hovels, with fires out in front of the front door. It was very different, and then what is was here in the United States.

Hansley: Is there anything else that you want to discuss, that you want to add on the basis of maybe I didn't ask you?

Grafstrom: No, I think you did a very good job.

Hansley: Thank you. I do have one last question for you. What would your definition of a Citizen Soldier be, and what part of that would be you?

Grafstrom: Well I consider myself a Citizen Soldier. There're people who want to fight for their country. No more than the Minutemen and the Revolutionary War, you just drop what you're doing and you fight for your country. It's not something you want do, but I think it's in the case something you have to do. I hope that answers your question.

Hansley: Yes it does. Ron, thank you very much, Pritzker Library thanks you for coming in and telling your story today, and that you're willing to share it with generations to come. Thank you.

Grafstrom: Thank you for having me.

Hansley: You're welcome.