

30 DAYS OF HONOR ★ *A Salute to Local Vets*

'You don't get a lot of breaks'

Serving in Korean War meant being on guard 24/7, veteran Richard Ashenbrener says

By Dan Richter

For Gannett Central Wisconsin Media

Wisconsin Rapids resident Richard Ashenbrener was stationed in Japan, serving during the Allied occupation, when the Korean War broke out.

"I knew the war had started because our first lieutenant got everyone together and said, 'If there are any guys here who aren't 21 years old, you will be tomorrow,'" said Ashenbrener, 83. "Since we were in Japan, we were the first ones to get to Korea after the war started."

Ashenbrener recently discussed his years in the Army, his civilian life after and the Never Forgotten Honor Flight trip he took to Washington, D.C., last year.

Q: What did you do in the service and where were you stationed?

A: I was in the artillery and worked with the forward observer. He was up with the infantry observing where our shells would land and would call me. I'd alert the guns and tell them where he wanted them to shoot. Sometimes the whole battery, with six guns to a battery, would fire at a time. I was stationed mostly on the west coast of Korea.

Q: What is your most enduring memory from your time in the service?

A: One day when I was in Korea, the Chinese came in and were on the Yalu River. I got a call from the forward observer and he said, "We had our eye on 40,000 Chinese and we don't know where they are anymore. Get off the mountain." We pulled off, but the mountain passes were icy and I didn't know if we'd make it down the pass. We drove all night and would fire all day long. We did that for a week.

Q: What do you most want people to know about the conflict in which you served?

A: In the service, you make friends with people that work alongside you. You get to know their families and they get to know yours. Despite that, it felt so good to get home; I just couldn't believe it. When you're in a country where there's a war going on, you're on 24/7. You don't get a lot of breaks. You might pick up a few hours of sleep each night, but you're on guard and watching all the time.

Q: Tell us about your life after the service and how your time in the military affected your civilian life.

A: About a week after I came back on leave, I went to a ballgame with a buddy of mine, and that's where I met my wife. We picked up an old car in Colorado, threw our stuff in, and drove here. I got a job in the mill in Rapids for a little bit and then started working for a company that put in heating and cooling. I started my own business in 1956, Ashenbrener Heating, and did heating, cooling and wiring. I like what I'm doing and still have the business today.

Q: What did going on the Honor Flight mean to you?

A: It was a beautiful thing. It brought tears to your eyes because in the military, you're kind of forgotten. Then all of a sudden everyone wants to come up and hug you. The trip made me want to go back to Korea and do it all over again. I really enjoyed everything.

ABOUT RICHARD ASHENBRENER

Age: 83
Residence: Wisconsin Rapids
Conflict involved in: Korean War
Military branch: United States Army
Years of service: 1948 to 1952
Rank upon discharge: Corporal



A photo of Korean War veteran Richard Ashenbrener after serving in the war.



MEGAN MCCORMICK/GANNETT CENTRAL WISCONSIN MEDIA

Korean War veteran Richard Ashenbrener poses at his home in Wisconsin Rapids.

A FLIGHT TO NEVER FORGET

The Central Wisconsin chapter of Never Forgotten Honor Flight celebrates its fifth anniversary this spring. Since April 2010, the Honor Flight program has taken more than 1,700 veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam from Central Wisconsin Airport to Washington, D.C., to view the memorials built in honor of their service.

30 Days of Honor is a project of Gannett Central Wisconsin Media to profile veterans who have taken an Honor Flight, or are scheduled, and to encourage more veterans to do so. Profiles will appear each day April 26 through Memorial Day.

Veterans may apply for a free Honor Flight (or loved ones may apply for them) by filling out an application. The only qualification for a veteran to take an Honor Flight is to have served in any branch of the U.S. military during the periods of World War II, the Korean War or Vietnam War. Veterans do not have to have been in combat. The applications and more information are available at <http://www.neverforgottenhonorflight.org>



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