

Rescue work while stationed at a M.A.S.H. unit

RK: What happened then is, it was - after we did the atomic bomb testing, the war broke out in Korea. And so they sent me to Korea as a helicopter pilot. And I was in Korea for nine months. During, really, the heat of the flying thing, matter of fact, the war was over the day I left. They signed the peace treaty and I went home. So I had nine months in there. And we used helicopters to save the fighter pilots. I don't know if you've ever heard of Big Alley, it was the big fighter thing of - the first jet fighters of the world was in the Korean War. And our job was to fish them out of the Yellow Sea when they got shot down, and get shot down behind enemy lines where you would pick 'em up.

And we also were stationed at a M.A.S.H. hospital. Have you ever heard of a M.A.S.H. hospital? Well, it was a Korean War hospital that they moved as the tide moved. Not tide-tide, I meant in the war tide. As the war moved around the M.A.S.H., which is - the name of M.A.S.H. is the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital - and they moved to keep up with where the battles were. And so I served with them for about eight months, nine months, and it was great, because I saved 68 lives in the Korean War by picking them up out of the Yellow Sea, or snatching them out of the battlefield and bringing them into the hospital, the M.A.S.H. hospital. These were wounded people. Now, the pilots had bailed out, I'd just fish them out of the sea, and I'd take them back to the unit. But the soldiers that were shot on the battlefield, I'd go up on the battlefield and snatch them up and bring them back to the M.A.S.H., and put them in the M.A.S.H., and I saved their lives. Most of them. Most of them, I saved their lives.

And you've not seen M.A.S.H. though, you're not familiar with it? Anyway, there was one famous doctor called Hawkeye in the M.A.S.H., and he's still around, and he and I swap stories every once in a while, on the telephone. Great guy. Great guy, and he saved thousands of lives.

DS: So he was one of the top surgeons in those M.A.S.H. units, right?

RK: Yes he was. He was a great guy. Fine surgeon, great guy.

DS: But it was interesting to go, for you, from that role to saving lives with the helicopters in the next war.

RK: It sure was a twist - you're right, Dave. As a matter of fact, it was interesting, because I was used to blasting whatever got in front of me, with my guns. And then over in Korea, I didn't have no guns. And they were shooting at me [Laughs]. But! It was great duty. It's really satisfying to save peoples' lives. And these were people who were desperately in need of - they were either wounded, or they would be dead, if I didn't save them. So, that was great duty.