

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
CHESTER KESY
Forward Observer, Army, Korean War
2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Kesy, Chester, (1919-2002). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecording (ca. 59 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Chester “Chet” Kesy, a Knowlton, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the Army at the end of World War II and during the Korean War. Kesy talks about being drafted in 1945, arriving in the Philippines as the war ended, and passing through a typhoon on the way to Japan for the occupation. While in Japan, he discusses boxing with the Japanese boxing team and learning Judo from a Japanese police school. Transferred to the 7th Infantry Division, Kesy talks about the “rude awakening” the U.S. troops got after the Korean War started. He talks about participating in the Inchon invasion, taking prisoners, and moving into North Korea. He details being attacked near a village and, after the battle, finding the bodies of the villagers stacked outside the town. Kesy states the patrolmen who were sent out that night were captured and later found shot dead with their hands tied behind their backs. He talks about building foxholes with rocks dislodged by aerial bombs, combat against the North Koreans during “bonsai attacks”, and getting in trouble after his Korean aide kicked a dud hand grenade. Kesy portrays the deadliness of the UN Turkish troops, rumors of going home before Christmas and of Chinese involvement, and casualties caused by vehicle accidents on mountain passes and by booby-trapped straw stacks. He tells of facing comparatively little resistance on his way to Hungnam and seeing the engineers blow up the harbor after the evacuation. Sent to a hospital in Japan due to frozen feet, he tells of his three months of recovery before returning to his unit as a chief of fire and battery. Kesy explains his duty as a forward observer for A Battery and the dangers of the job. He relates several close calls he had during combat. He characterizes his two Korean aides and mentions being able to communicate to them in Japanese. Kesy comments on establishing a base point for artillery, being targeted by the enemy for carrying a radio, terrain in Korea, and briefly crossing the Yalu River against orders so he’d be able to say he’d been in China. He talks about artillery action and eating Thanksgiving Dinner before being pushed out of North Korea. Kesy mentions inadequate equipment for the cold weather, finding men frozen to death, and being attacked primarily at night. He touches on feeling that the Korean War was forgotten by the American public and relates his duties as a first sergeant at a basic training camp at Fort Carson (Colorado). Kesy reflects on planning on a career in the military but changing his mind after the Korean War.

Biographical Sketch:

Kesy (b.1927) served in the Army from 1945 to 1952. After the war he worked as a pipe fitter, raised a family with his wife, Joyce, and eventually settled in Mosinee (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

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Context Note:

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Related Materials Note:

Photographs of this narrator's military service can be found in Wisconsin Public Television. Wisconsin Korean War Stories records (VWM Mss 1389).

Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, September 23, 2004

Transcribed by WPT staff, n.d.

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Transcribed Interview:

Mik: Right at the very beginning, I know you were initially in World War II, right?

Chet: Well, the end of the Second World War.

Mik: So tell me where you were and how you first got involved in the military.

Chet: Well, I was drafted in the Second World War and I finished my basic training in July of 1945, and then they sent me to the Philippine Islands. And when I got to the Philippine Islands, that's when the war ended. But there was still plenty of hostility going on there, because the Japanese didn't know the war was over. So we were still getting shot at. And then they loaded us on board ships for the occupation of Japan, and in 1945 we hit that typhoon off of Okinawa, and I don't know how many of the ships went down. The ship I was on, the front end of it was torn off, and I think eight soldiers got killed.

Mik: Got washed off, overboard?

Chet: Washed overboard. And ah, I was so sea sick, I didn't care if it sank or not [laughs]. And then I was in the occupation Army of occupation of Japan almost from day one till the Korean War. And while I was in Japan, I did a lot of boxing. I was a boxer, and also took up the martial arts; I'm a black belt in the martial arts too.

Mik: Tell me about the boxing.

Chet: I mostly trained--I was in a very small--I was in military government and this town I was in, they had a Japanese boxing team there, and I used to box with these Japanese and Japanese boxing team. We had a guy there, this Japanese guy's name was Piston Horaguchi. He was a hell of a boxer, he was--probably could've been a world champion. But he was during the war so he never got a chance, but he was a very good boxer. And ah, I boxed in the Far East for my championship too, but I lost out to a guy that went to the 1948 Olympics. I had a lot of fights. I had, I think, about eighty-five fights. I lost two. I had a guy that wanted me to train to be a professional, but I was gonna make the Army my career. And then when the Korean War started, and when I--in 1950, military government quit teaching the Japanese our way of government. We had them trained already. So then they sent me to a line outfit, and I went to the 7th Division. Well--

Mik: Before you get to that, tell me about the martial arts training.

Chet: I went to a Japanese police school. I went from 1945 to 1950. I went two and a half hours every night. And ah, my instructor was an eighth degree black belt, and he told me I was the best student he ever had. While I was in the military government, I could speak Japanese almost perfect, I could at that time. Now I'm forgetting it because I don't have people to talk to, but I could speak Japanese really good. So he liked me,

because I could talk to him. And he used to invite me to his house, and he treated me like I was his son. He was a sixty-three year old man, and boy, I'll tell you, he was just a fantastic in the martial arts.

Mik: What kind was it? Was it judo or?

Chet: Judo, yup. Japanese style judo.

Mik: Did you have any interest in that before you got to Japan?

Chet: No, nope, never did. I was a farm boy and I was always really very strong. When I first went to judo, I had the idea that I could throw these little Japs all over the place. But they use your strength against you. That's the art of judo. And ah, this instructor I had though, he was so fantastic and you wouldn't believe that a guy could do things that he could do. He had calluses built up on the sides of his feet that were about inch thick. And when he'd kick you in the leg, it'd knock you down, you thought somebody was driving a spike through your leg. And one thing in--it's a little different over here when you train for judo or karate. There it's almost like a religion. You never say anything hurts you, no matter if they broke your leg, you don't say it hurts you. And you do a lot meditating before you start. They don't do that over here. But it's almost like a religion.

Mik: I think some do it over here.

Chet: Huh?

Mik: I think some of them do it over here.

Chet: Well—

Mik: The ones who do it the right way.

Chet: Yeah, they probably do, they probably do.

Mik: So how old were you?

Chet: How old am I?

Mik: Were you then?

Chet: Oh, I was eighteen years old.

Mik: And you were getting beat up by a sixty-five-year-old man?

Chet: Yeah, yeah, oh they could throw you around like you was nothing. But I got to be good at it too.

Mik: Okay, so then you transferred to the 7th Division, to a line company. That means you're in the infantry?

Chet: No, I got sent to an artillery outfit. At that time I was a staff sergeant. And ah, well, I wasn't in that outfit very long, when the Korean War started.

Mik: Did you have any idea it was coming?

Chet: No, none, none whatsoever. No idea at all. And ah, when the Korean War started, they took a lot of our guys out of the 7th Division, and sent them to the 24th Division and the 25th Division, cause they were the first ones to go back into Korea. And a lot of these line outfits at that time, they wasn't at full strength. So they used a lot of our guys to fill in. But I was one of the guys that they kept. Most of the guys that went to the 24th and 25th never made it. I heard about a lot of 'em, and most of 'em got killed at Taegu, Korea. And actually at that time, we wasn't very well trained. The occupation was a pretty easy life. You didn't really do a lot, even a line outfit didn't do a lot of training. So, we got a rude awakening when we got there.

Mik: And when did you get there?

Chet: I don't remember the exact date, but when they loaded us aboard ships, we got a lot of guys from the states that filled in for the guys that left our outfit, to fill it in. They load us aboard ships and we were aboard a ship for I think about thirty days before we made the Inchon invasion. And then we made the Inchon invasion; the Marines went towards Seoul and we went towards a town called Yeongdeungpo [?]. Was just a small town, but we were taking awful lot of prisoners. That when we made that invasion, then the guys at Taegu and up the [unintelligible], they released a lot of them to come and help 'em fight at Seoul. And we were taking them because they were running right into our lines. And so we started taking a lot of prisoners there, and then they loaded us aboard ships again, and we went back to Pusan. From Pusan we got aboard ships again, and we made a landing way up in North Korea in a place called Iwan[?]. Never even had a shot fired at us. It was the most beautiful beach I ever seen in my life. I don't think Miami Beach was as pretty as that was. It was a beautiful sand beach. Well, they loaded us aboard trucks there and we started out way up in North Korea, and as we were going through these little towns, there's kids out there with little American flags waving at us, and you'd think there was nothing going on anymore. Well, that night we hit a town, and me, and a lieutenant, and a radio sergeant, and we always had two Koreans with us. We used them for carrying stuff, and we went up to a dry river bed. And we made our little camp there that night, we [unintelligible]. At about 9:00 o'clock that night, a lieutenant from the infantry come, and he said, "You guys better come back, and move back to where we are." So we did, we loaded up our stuff and moved back to where they were. And it's a good thing we did, because about 5:00 o'clock that morning, the Koreans came down that river bed, and they hit us, they really hit us. And we would've been

the first ones they hit and we would've been all dead. No doubt about it. And even the artillery was firing direct fire into 'em and ah--then ah-- I walked back into the town later on, after we chased the Koreans back a little bit, and they had a school house there and they were making a hospital for the guys that got wounded. They were using this old school house for operating room and stuff like that, and ah--I went back there and looked around to see what was going on, and I come out of this little town and I made a little corner and I seen something piled up. I thought it was rice straw, I walked over to it, and here it was ah--these North Koreans killed the whole town. They had them piled up stacked like a straw stack. Must've been, I would say, from three to five hundred people. Ah, men, women, children, all stacked up like, just like it was straw stack. All dead, there was--all the bodies were already froze. It must've happened a few days before. And ah, that night the infantry sent out some patrols and ah, the guys never came back. Twelve guys. I kinda remember who, it was ten or twelve. But ah, they never came back. And the next day we made a push, and we found all of 'em with their hands tied behind their back with barb wire and they were all shot behind the ear. Some how or another, the Koreans caught 'em that night. And then things lightened up a little bit. And we moved maybe ten miles further and we came to a--like it was a big valley, biggest valley I ever seen in Korea, because most of it's all mountain after mountain after mountain. We kinda stayed there for, I think about two days, and nothing seemed to be happening. Across this valley then there was a real swift running river. Not very big, it was oh, maybe twenty feet across or so. But real swift running. And it was cold, getting cold already, but it wasn't froze over because it was so swift running. And then there was a hill, a big hill on the other side of this valley. Well, the planes came in to bomb and scrafe [strafe] this hill, and we threw all kinds of artillery on it and everything else. We went across this valley, and we start taking that hill, and they popped out of the ground like ants and ah--well, we fought all that day, and we did take that hill that afternoon. The company commander I was with got the Congressional Medal of Honor. And just down the line from us, a guy from Rhineland, his name is Sergeant Engman, he got the Congressional Medal of Honor. And we took that hill that night and it really got cold that night, very, very cold. And we tried digging a foxhole with nothing but rock. But it was lucky that when the planes went over that day, they did that bomb and scrafing [strafing] and we threw the artillery, it made a lot of hills and it made a lot of rocks come out of the ground. So me, and the radio sergeant, and this lieutenant I was with, he was the field forward observer, we made a foxholes out of rocks, we just piled rocks around us. And that night we got hit by banzai attacks. They don't say banzai in Korea, they say "monzai." They're really demoralizing at night when they start yelling, and hollering, and blowing whistles, and bugles, and everything else, and it was a lot of hand-to-hand fighting that night. In the morning, there probably was five or six hundred laying dead on the hill. Lot of Americans, lot of GIs got killed too. And some of 'em came right up to our foxhole and we shot 'em with forty-fives, and ah--when we were going off the hill next morning, we went diagonally off the hill. And we--they just melted away, there was nobody shooting at us or anything then. And ah, it was a hand grenade that didn't go off that was a Korean hand grenade, it was like a potato masher hand grenade. And not thinking, one of these Korean that we

had with us, went and give it a kick. It coulda went off, but it was lucky it didn't go off. And the captain from the infantry, he really did a lot hollering at me because I was supposed to tell him not to do that, but I couldn't of stopped him, no how. And then we moved pretty well, easily from there.

Mik: That attack, was that all just North Koreans?

Chet: What?

Mik: That was all North Koreans?

Chet: Yeah, that was still all North Koreans. And we moved on probably another five miles again. Then we got hit again; they reorganized and they hit us again, and they wasn't so well organized at that time. We pushed through 'em pretty easy. And we were going through some hills, and we run into part of the 2nd Infantry Division. And that's the only place I seen any of them, but we had Turkish soldiers with us, with the 7th Division. They were assigned to the 7th Division. Most fantastic fighters you ever seen in your life. They were great. They was suppose to be the elite of the Turkish Army, and they were really good. They were mountain fighters and they were good. Really good. When they pulled out a knife, there was gonna be a dead man there, I can guarantee it. And we fought oh, maybe about two weeks more, and we made our way to the Chinese border, or on the Yalu River in a town called Hyesanjin [?]. And there we were. We thought the war was over, everybody said "Oh, you're gonna be home by Christmas." But, ah, we start hearing rumors of Chinese within OR [?]. And they were seeing Chinese troops, and, well we wasn't getting the news too good because there was no way to get it. They was hitting the 2nd Division, I guess, and 1st Cav. All of a sudden the lieutenant comes to me and he said, "Hey, we're gonna load up, we're gonna go back. They claimed the Chinese are into the war." So we loaded up our stuff and we started back, and I wanna tell yah, these roads that they had over in North Korea, they was just dug out in the sides of these mountains. There wasn't room for much, for big trucks or anything like that. And it was getting cold, and it was snowy, and it was slippery. Some of these trucks went over these roads and down. Plus some of 'em were two, three hundred feet down, straight down, there was nothing to stop yah. The only stop you got was when you hit the bottom of it. So we had a few guys lost that way. Well, I wanna tell yah something else. When we were way up in North Korea, they knew that the GIs was grabbing these ah, rice straw, and we'd lot of times line our foxholes with 'em to keep a little warmer, or we'd use 'em to build a fire. And these Koreans knew that. What they was doing is they'd go in these straw stacks, and they'd put a hand grenade in there, and they tie it to these bales of straw, and when a GI would grab this straw to--he'd pull the pin on the grenade and they'd go off, so we lost quite a few guys that way too. And on our way back from Hyesanjin we were going to a place called Hungnam. That's where they were gonna evacuate us outta there, but we was pretty lucky, we didn't get hit much by the Chinese. They hit some of the trucks but our, ah-- another outfitted of the 7th Division was up at the Chosin Reservoir. They lost pretty near every man in the whole regiment. A regiment is

about 5,000 men. They lost over 3,000. And that's where the Marines and the 7th Division fought, at Chosin Reservoir. I wasn't at Chosin Reservoir, we went--we were lucky, we got by. We got into, I kinda remember it was Hamhung or Hungnam. That's where they were gonna evacuate us from. And ah, these Turks--we left the Turks up there, they said they won't retreat. Three days later, the Turks come back into the Hungnam carrying every one of their dead and they--I don't know how they did it, I think they were fantastic fighters, because they was fighting the whole Chinese Army up there. And they carried every one of their dead out. And then they brought these LSTs [Landing Ship Tank] in there to haul us out of Hungnam. The Battleship Wisconsin, and a whole bunch of battleships is keeping the Chinese off 'til we got organized and loaded up on these LSTs. The Army engineers wired up the whole harbor there with TNT, and stuff like that. When we were about a mile out to sea, evacuating, I think it's Hamnung, the engineers blew up the harbor, and it was a fantastic sight to see, I'll tell you. They just blew up--that that whole harbor was blowed to smithereens. And we ended up back in Pusan. I ended up back in a hospital. I had frozen feet, so they send me to Japan back to the hospital. And I spent about, I would say, three months in a hospital. I spent about six to eight hours a day sitting in whirlpool by the baths. And my feet came out pretty good, otherwise they were gonna cut 'em off. So, when that—I coulda come back to the states. I said, "No, I wanna go back to the--where the guys are." So I went back to my outfit back in Korea, but they didn't send me up on as a forward observer no more. I stayed with the guns. I was a Chief of Fire and Battery, which--I lay the guns, tell 'em which gun has to be set in a position way. That was my job. And also assigned the guys, I'll also--when I was up at the Chinese border, I made another rank, I was--made me Sergeant 1st Class. So I did that till I was--time for me to come home. And we was really killing a lot of Chinese then. I mean, there was no end to 'em. I mean, I heard a rumor that the Chinese lost over two million men in the Korean War. Men didn't mean nothing to them, they'd run you out of ammunition is what they'd do. They just kept coming, and coming, and coming, 'til you didn't have no ammunition left. You better start going the other way. You didn't have a chance. But that's pretty much my story.

Mik: Tell me what it means to be a Forward Observer?

Chet: It's a kind of a thrilling job really. I mean, because you see everything that's really going on. You're the head guy up there, you--it's a very dangerous job. Probably the most dangerous job of any job, especially in the Korean War, because you'd take a hill and you'd get kicked off of it. They counter attack, they'd kick you off of it, and you had to be the last man, you had to be the last one up there because when the infantry retreated, you had to be there to cover the retreat with artillery shells. And then you better start running, cause you were the last one off of it. We lost a lot of [unintelligible], most of the forward observers from the 49th Field Artillery that I was in, was taken prisoners. I was one of the few that wasn't taken prisoner.

Mik: Did you have any close calls?

Chet: Huh, lots of close calls, lots of 'em. I had a--one time up in North Korea, I was checking my communications wires back to the fire direction center and ah, I walked into a North Korean. He opened up on me with a burp gun. I don't know how he didn't hit me. I jumped into the brush, and he was maybe fifty feet from me. He never hit me. Ah, infantry guy seen him when he shot at me, and he killed him. Another time, ah, artillery shell came in, a mortar shell came in from--they had big mortars, 120 mm mortars, and it landed maybe five feet from the radio corporal, and I was in the same foxhole. It landed five feet from our foxhole and it was a dud, never went off. Real lucky. The other time, we were in a kind of a rear area, and I just got done taking a--well, they fed us some food and stuff like that that night, they gave us warm food for a change. Otherwise we ate C-rations and--we was kinda pulled back off the main lines, and I was supposed to be kind of like a rest area. And I laid out my sleeping bag, took a lil--took my--you didn't have no way to take a bath. You filled up your steel helmet and took a sponge bath and--I laid out my sleeping bag and a Korean we had with us, I was talking to him, and I told him to get up off of my sleeping bag cause I'm gonna lay down. And some guerilla come through, and he threw a hand grenade, and it landed right by my sleeping bag, it blew this Korean's jaw off, and I was standing right by him and I never got hit with a piece of scrap. It was a truck in back of me was full of holes. Amazing. I don't know what happened, I never got hit. I thought I got hit because it threw a lot of sand against--I was bare from the waist up cause I just got done taking a sponge bath. And a lot of sand hit me and it stung like a hundred bees stinging me, but not a piece of shrapnel hit me. That was some of the close calls I had. And I had a lot of close calls in combat—[End of Tape WCKOR051].

Mik: Well you had just finished close calls as a forward observer and you were going to tell us close calls, I think.

Chet: Oh, in infantry.

Mik: Infantry.

Chet: I had a lot of close calls, though. I was shot at a lot, because they really always try to knock off the forward observer because you carry a big radio. And they know what the radio is for, that's to call in artillery. So they was always shooting at us. Always shooting at us.

Mik: Was it just two of you?

Chet: No, there was a lieutenant, and I was a recon sergeant, and then we had a radio operator. Then we had these two Koreans with us that a lot of times did help us carry, like our sleeping bags, and ammunition, and stuff like that. These two Koreans we had with us, we called them Mutt and Jeff. One of them was a real big guy and one was a real small guy. They were pretty fearless. They were pretty damn good. I admired them. But they was in [?] a Japanese Army. You know at one time, a lot of people don't know this, when were there in Korea during the

Korean War, all the Koreans spoke Japanese, because at one time all the Koreans had to learn Japanese in school. And Japan occupied Korea for fifty years. So today, their young people don't speak Japanese, but at that time all the Koreans spoke Japanese.

Mik: So you could speak to all the Koreans?

Chet: I could speak Japanese, pretty, ah--I wouldn't say--right, pretty good. I didn't have no trouble. They enjoyed me because I was one of the only two GIs that really talked Japanese.

Mik: When you would set up your forward position, how long would you be there?

Chet: Sometimes not very long at all. But you always had a sight in your--you called back to the artillery and we had what they'd call a base point. We'd find something like maybe a lone tree, or something like that. We'd use that as a base point and we'd roll in the artillery from that. If the first rounds was a little short, we'd say, "Up fifty." And if it would land in a base point, then we knew from there how to call in the artillery from there. So if they start coming in from where our base point was, we'd just say, "Fifty; from base point, fifty yards, up fifty," and we'd tow it right in to 'em. And then the artillery a lot of times, at we had what they call a variable time shell. And the artillery throwed in at night ah-- a real lot over our lines into their lines. This variable time, if it was like a tank or something there, it would set that fuse off. Right over the top of the tank, because any metal or anything, that would set it off.

Mik: When you had to pull out quickly, you had to carry that radio and --?

Chet: Oh, yeah, you never left your radio. That was your lifeline. The radio was your lifeline. Yeah. You always--you carried everything there. Two things that you really carried, you never would leave, was your radio and your sleeping bag, cause it was awful cold there. A lot of guys who wish for what they call a million dollar wound, that just get hit, and they pull you back and you didn't have to fight no more. But I didn't wanna get hit. But I was always in real fantastic shape, and I could go up and down them hills carrying that radio and stuff pretty damn good. There wasn't many guys that could do it, that could keep up with me. Well, I always kept myself in good--it was from boxing and the martial arts and stuff like that. I kept in very good shape.

Mik: Did the radio break down, or was it all one piece?

Chet: It's kind of a two piece. One part of it has your batteries and stuff in it. The other part is the mechanical part of it. But it's all carried on a pack board. It was about 125 pounds. They probably got a lot better stuff than that now. But at that time, it was a wonderful radio, and we had a wonderful radio operator. He could fix that radio in no time flat. He was very good at it.

Mik: Hard to hide?

Chet: Huh?

Mik: Hard to hide?

Chet: Hard to hide, yeah it is. Yeah it was. The guy that was carrying it, he got shot at the most. And going up and down them hills, I was probably in the best shape, so I was probably carrying it the most.

Mik: So you were shot at the most?

Chet: I was shot at the most. Like I say, I was very lucky.

Mik: So what's that sound like when you're being shot at?

Chet: I'll tell you what it sounds like exactly. If you hold up a newspaper, and clicked you finger against it real hard, when you hear that clicking, you know they were coming very close to you.

Mik: So it's a snap like--?

Chet: Snap, what it is, just a snap. It sounds just exactly, you just take a piece of newspaper and hit it with your finger. That's exactly what it sounds like.

Mik: And then you moved faster, or get to cover?

Chet: You move or you hit the ground. Yeah.

Mik: So did you get tired of going up and down hills?

Chet: Get what?

Mik: Get tired of going up and down hills?

Chet: Well, it is very boring, I'll tell you that. It was--especially when you're getting shot at and stuff [unintelligible], but I mean, it's really, really a hilly country. South Korea isn't as hilly as North Korea. North Korea's nothing but mountains. And North Korea is beautiful. Some beautiful, beautiful scenery in North Korea. A lot prettier than South Korea. South Korea's more agricultural, where North Korea was more industrial. In fact we were digging a fox hole on a hill one time, and then we dug down maybe, eight inches and we hit coal. Black coal. Said that's close to the top of the ground.

Mik: Was it winter?

Chet: It was winter. It was winter.

Mik: Could you burn that coal?

Chet: Yeah, it was winter, but you didn't want to light a fire and make smoke. They start throwing mortars on yah. No, you try to keep as secret as you could, actually.

Mik: Did they have artillery?

Chet: Yeah, they had artillery. A lot of ours that they captured. They threw a lot artillery too. Not--now they would--it was fantastic what mortars--they were very good with mortars.

Mik: Did they try to hit you with mortars when you were in your observation post?

Chet: Oh, yeah, yeah. We got mortared a lot of times.

Mik: What do you do when that happens?

Chet: Oh, you get further down in your foxhole. You get further down, you'd be surprised how far down in there you can go when they start shooting' at yah.

Mik: What's it feel like to have frozen feet?

Chet: Actually, when they're first getting cold, feels real bad. But once they're frozen, it's almost like you're walking on sticks. There's hardly no feeling.

Mik: How long were they like that before you were evacuated?

Chet: Not too long, no, not too long. When we got back from Hungnam and we went back to Pusan, they put me on a ship and sent--oh, airplane. I got ship back on a airplane. And I went to Kyushu Island, a big hospital there. Real nice hospital. They did a good job on me. I'm walking today. My feet bothered me for oh, quite sometime after I got out of service. I'd take a shower, when I'd wipe between my toes, I could pretty near wipe the meat right off, down to the bone. But today, you'd never know that I ever had frozen feet. I'm a big walker, I walk three, four miles a day.

Mik: Are they more tender in the winter, you think; do they get cold faster?

Chet: My feet get cold pretty easily, yeah. That they do.

Mik: When you were first heading north into North Korea, what were you carrying in terms of artillery? Were they 105s or--?

Chet: 105s, yeah, we had all 105s.

Mik: And how many and what did you carry them with?

Chet: Oh, they were pulled behind the truck. They were pulled behind the truck. As ah--there's six guns in a battery. And ah, a battery would take care of a battalion of infantry. A Battery would take one battalion, B Battery would take another battalion, C Battery take another battalion. And well, each one of 'em had a forward observer for each A Battery, B Battery, and C Battery. And they had the same amount of men as my forward observer team. But our B Battery forward observer team was all taken prisoners of war. I tried to inquire, only one I know that ever made it back. A lot of people don't know this, but there's still 8,000 prisoners of war from the Korean War that never returned. There was probably 4,000 from the Vietnamese War. But twice as many from the Korean War.

Mik: Did you get to the island with all six of your 105s?

Chet: The 105s I don't think ever got that far. Maybe six miles, got close to it. But the infantry--I never was with the guns. I always stayed with the infantry.

Mik: And they had a range of six, I mean--?

Chet: About six miles. They might have been five miles away, but they were set up ready to fire. But we had orders to make sure no shells go into China. And the Yalu River where I was, was probably about as wide as this room. That way, not this way. It was maybe twenty-five, thirty feet across. One night the radio started to, and I slid across the river just to say that we were in China. So--which we weren't supposed to do. [Laughs]. But I can say I was in China. Bout five feet probably.

Mik: That's funny, you did that just so you could say you--.

Chet: Just so I could say I was in China.

Mik: Did you swim it?

Chet: What?

Mik: Did you swim it or--?

Chet: No, it was froze.

Mik: Oh, it was froze.

Chet: It was froze over, yeah, yeah. And ah, I was talking to another guy that was further down from where I was in Hyesanjin [?], there was a big mountain in front of us. Big hill, it was right on the other side of the Yalu, maybe you could walk twenty feet and this big mountain started. So, we couldn't really see anything into China, just

this mountain, but further over were where C Battery was--I heard from a guy, he said that he could see the Chinese training over there. But we didn't know that the Chinese was in a war yet. He said he could see all kinds of 'em over there training.

Mik: Now when they came over, when they invaded, could you hear that? Could you see the fire at night or anything?

Chet: No, they never hit us. They hit further over towards the Chosin Reservoir.

Mik: And that was far enough away from you that you--?

Chet: Yeah, we never heard anything. But we did get hit by some of 'em when we were going back to Hungnam.

Mik: Did you get back with your whole battery?

Chet: Yeah.

Mik: Yours weren't any that went off to the side of the mountain?

Chet: No, no, our whole battery made it back. Some of the infantry trucks went off.

Mik: What you talked about in that first attack, when you were actually shooting the artillery point blank?

Chet: Yeah.

Mik: Does that happen any other time?

Chet: Oh, that happens a real lot over in Korea. Real lot. Yeah, it--especially with the Chinese, because there was so many of them that a lot of times, they'd push right through the infantry, and they'd come back and even get back as far as the guns and the artillery. One time, A Battery, the battery I was in--when I was in a hospital at, when this happened. But when I came back, they told us they were gonna pull back, and the Chinese came and they were shooting 'em right off the guns. They had their guns hooked up on the trucks ready to pull, move back, and the Chinese broke through, and they was climbing right on top of the guns and they were shooting them off the trucks and off the guns and--but I wasn't there when that happened.

Mik: Yeah, we interviewed a Marine tanker. They would lock down and the other tanks would have to clear them off of their tank. They'd just be over run.

Chet: Yeah, that [unintelligible]. They'd overwhelm yah.

Mik: Did you ever think you were really in trouble?

- Chet: Oh yeah, lots of times. I never thought I'd make it out, never, never. No, I thought that was it for me.
- Mik: Did you ever have occasion to make use of your martial arts training? Were you ever in hand to hand where that came into play?
- Chet: Never.
- Mik: Good.
- Chet: Never used it on anybody. Not that I forgot it, I still know it real good.
- Mik: And you didn't even use it on any of the people in your own?
- Chet: What?
- Mik: Did you ever use it on any of the people in your own company?
- Chet: No, never did, no, never did. Only time I ever used it is in training. I never had to. I was a good enough boxer, I didn't have to; nobody ever monkeyed with me, very few people ever monkeyed with me. When I was sixty-two years-old, I was still benching 370 pounds. I don't do it anymore, because I kinda gave up on it, but I was pretty damn--pretty powerful guy. In fact, I use to go to the fitness center in Wausau and I use to work out with guys that went to D.C. Everest--football players, they couldn't believe me. They'd ask, "Well, how old are you?" "Sixty-two." "Well, I wouldn't wanna run into you," [laughs].
- Mik: Doug, do you remember that Thanksgiving dinner you had up on the--?
- Chet: Yeah.
- Mik: Tell me about that.
- Chet: They was telling us, "Hey the war is over, you're gonna be home by Christmas," and were, "All the turkey you could eat and stuffing." It was great, after eating C-rations all the way up there. Never figured it was gonna--that was the last good meal we were ever gonna have in a long time.
- Mik: How soon after that was it that they came over?
- Chet: They what?
- Mik: How soon after that meal was it that the Chinese came in?
- Chet: I think right after Thanksgiving. We left probably a day or so after that. Then the General started, through the radio, getting calls that the Chinese was in the war.

And he decided we better get back outta there. So--cause where we were was real, real vulnerable. Because, hell, we was only one division sitting up there all by ourselves.

Mik: How did you get you feet frozen? Was it because you were on a forced march or were you--?

Chet: No, it was just that cold. We didn't have to--we had very, very poor equipment in the Korean War. We shouldn't ever had been in that war with the equipment we had.

Mik: Did a lot of guys in your--?

Chet: Oh, we had a lot of guys froze. We had guys freeze to death. We had eight guys freeze to death one time. Found 'em in a foxhole dead, froze to death. Was hard to keep warm. No place to go when you're out there twenty-four hours a day, you have no place to go to get warm.

Mik: Did you have any trouble at night with infiltrators or anything like that?

Chet: Oh yeah, the North Koreans and the Chinese both were great night fighters. Most of the fighting would go on at night. Very--not that much in the daytime.

Mik: Did you travel in the daytime?

Chet: Well, most of the time. That's when we'd move.

Mik: You'd move in the daytime and then set up at night?

Chet: Dig in at night, yeah.

Mik: And then they'd hit you at night?

Chet: They'd hit us at night. Blowing bugles, and whistles, and hollering, screaming.

Mik: So not only are you cold, but you can't get up and move around, because they're out there?

Chet: Yeah.

Mik: Those must have been long nights?

Chet: They were long nights. They were long nights. We did a lot of nights you didn't get much sleep, I'll tell you that. Yeah, it was hard.

- Mik: Did you feel when you got back that people weren't really paying attention to that war?
- Chet: Oh yeah. They didn't. It's the most forgotten war of any of 'em. The Vietnamese War, these guys did a lot of hollering and made sure that everybody would remember them, but you don't hear nothing how about the Korean War. Very little. And, like I say, there's still 8,000 prisoners that are unaccounted for. 56,000 dead. The Vietnamese War, it lasted ten years and there was only 58,000 dead. So a lot of people don't realize how bad the Korean War was. It was a terrible war.
- Mik: How about at the time? Did you feel people back weren't paying much attention?
- Chet: Not at all, they didn't pay no attention at all. Not at all.
- Mik: Guys kinda resent going through what you went through and not have anybody even acknowledge that, huh?
- Chet: Yeah, yeah. I was a first sergeant of a basic training camp at Fort Carson in Colorado when I came back from the Korean War. And ah, we had--well there was a lot of old Second World War soldiers and stuff there that when you had mentioned the Korean War, they said, "Oh, it ain't nothing." They wasn't there yet. But I enjoyed my time when I came back when I was giving basic training, because the battery I had in Fort Carson, Colorado, there was eight artillery battalions there and my battery won every A plus in battery test that there was. We won everything. So I had trained some really good guys. And I was really proud of that.
- Mik: So what knowledge did you impart to them? How did you train them to be so good?
- Chet: Well, I just really took interest in it. I wanted them to be, when they went over there, that they knew what they were doing. Not a bunch of guys that, like walk off the farm, and--when you're in combat, you better know what you're doing, if you wanna live.
- Mik: Did you find your battery pretty dependable when you were a forward observer? Could you count on them?
- Chet: Oh, yeah. We had a pretty good battery. It was about as good as any of 'em over there, I'd think. They were very good at what they were doing.
- Mik: So they probably saved a lot of people's lives when--?
- Chet: Oh yeah. Oh, you betcha. The artillery was a godsend for the infantry. Yeah, it was very good.
- Mik: A godsend for the infantry and anybody who happened to be with the infantry.

- Chet: Right.
- Mik: Like a forward observer?
- Chet: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's true [laughs].
- Mik: Did you ever have anybody that when you got back to the battery you had to give 'em hell because they did something wrong?
- Chet: No, no I didn't, nuh-uh--no. [Pause] My battery commander that was--he was a lieutenant and he was a West Point officer, and just lately I heard that he got killed in the Vietnamese War. And he went all through the Korean War and then he got killed in Vietnam.
- Mik: Now did you say when you were in Japan, did you say you were planning to make a career of the military?
- Chet: Oh, yeah, I planned on staying in there.
- Mik: And Korea changed your mind?
- Chet: Korea changed my mind. Yeah, definitely changed my mind.
- Mik: So how long were you in after you got back?
- Chet: I must've been in about a year. Yeah, it wasn't about--yeah, I would say one year. I thought about re-enlisting, but I would've probably ended up in Vietnam yet too. My brother went through the Second World War, right from the beginning; he had forty-three months over seas in the Second World War. He went through Korea and he went through Vietnam. He retired from the service.
- Mik: Did you ever run into him in Korea?
- Chet: No. He went to Korea after I came back. He was in the later part of it.
- Mik: What did you think about the later part of it when they were stuck on the 38th Parallel?
- Chet: Well, it was really a tough part of the war. There was a lot of people getting killed then too. A real lot of 'em. And ah, because each one wanted to have a little bit more to ground, where they were gonna lay it out, yah know. But I think the Chinese won the negotiations. We were just sick of--just let it go, I think. But the war never really ended. It hasn't ended yet.
- Mik: Yup, there's still a DMZ over there.

Chet: That's right. That's right.

Mik: Have you ever had any desire to go back?

Chet: Not at all. I would go back to Japan tomorrow if I got a chance to go back, but not Korea. I'm not even interested in going back. I seen all of Korea I ever wanna see.

Mik: Well, thank you for sharing your story with us.

Chet: You bet.

Mik: And thank you for your service.

Chet: Okay.

[End of Interview]