

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

RICHARD J. McCONNELL

Infantry Officer, Army, World War II;
Infantry Officer, Army, Korean War

2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

OH
1034

OH
1034

McConnell, Richard James, (1924-). Oral History Interview, 2004.
Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 51 min.); ½ inch, color.
Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).
Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Richard J. “Jim” McConnell, a Superior, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the Army during the Korean War. McConnell mentions enlisting at age sixteen, serving with the 117th Cavalry in North Africa during World War II, and reenlisting after the war. He talks about occupation duty in Pusan (Korea) and his awareness at that time of conflict with China. After another reenlistment, he speaks of returning to Korea in 1950, traveling to the Manchurian border, and retreating back to Pusan. McConnell discusses being overrun by Chinese troops, witnessing heavy casualties, and covering the retreat of Marines during combat at Chosin Reservoir. He comments on aerial food drops, having inadequate clothing for the cold winter weather, methods for dealing with the cold, and continuing health problems due to frostbite. McConnell talks about his responsibilities as a master sergeant: making sure his men carried enough equipment, ensuring they stayed awake while on guard duty, and helping new replacements separate fact from rumors. He discusses the hilly terrain, traveling on foot, the sounds of being shot at, and close calls during combat. McConnell describes night fighting, use and preparation of foxholes, offensive tactics, being sent to the rear for R&R, limited air support, and the danger of friendly fire when calling for artillery support. He talks about limited correspondence with his wife through the mail, what qualities make a good officer, and feeling lucky that he was never shot. McConnell recalls Christmas dinner in Korea and his squad’s weapons. He touches on his homecoming, being in charge of the machine gun committee at the infantry school at Fort Benning (Georgia), and working on a ski patrol in Colorado.

Biographical Sketch:

McConnell (b.1924) had a career in the Army Reserves and served active duty during World War II and the Korean War. He eventually settled in Superior (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

Cite as: Richard J. McConnell, Interview, conducted November 22, 2004 at Richard I. Bong World War II Heritage Center, Superior, Wisconsin by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Korean War Stories, for Wisconsin Public Television.

Context Note:

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, “Wisconsin Korean War Stories.” Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCKOR081 and WCKOR82.

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).

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.
Transcript reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010
Transcript checked and corrected by Kate Brenner, WVM staff, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, WVM staff, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

NOTE: Jim's wife, Betty, is also in this interview a bit.

Mik: This is just gonna be you telling your story--

Jim: Just me?

Mik: Yup. You won't hear me.

Jim: Maybe it's hear me, you mean-- [laughing]

Mik: No, I mean, they won't hear me--I'll ask questions, but only if I have a question about your story, but otherwise, let's just start at the beginning. You were a World War II vet.

Jim: Yes.

Mik: Tell us a little bit about that.

Jim: Well, I enlisted in '42 and then after basic, well, I went over to North Africa, and sent us all into an infantry pool, you know. It was replacements, and they pulled about six or seven of us out, and they put us in this recon unit. 117th, they called it, and then we made landings in--we had three or four beach landings over there. Don't know where.

Mik: And then when did you get out?

Jim: I get out in ah, '45, and then I re-enlisted again, and then I went back. I was in for two years, 'til '48--'46, '47, part of '48--and then my tour was up, and then when I re-enlisted again, my--I went back there, Korea in '50. Went over--that was the first time I was in Korea, 1950 and I spent a tour over there and came back, I believe it was '56--'54 or something like that.

Mik: The first time--it's wrong--what do you mean?

Betty: Yeah, he was there from--. We got married in '49, and he was back and re-enlisted--he went over there, ah,--

Mik: So he was over there before he got married.

Betty: Yeah.

Mik: So you were over there between the wars?

Jim: Yeah, yeah.

Mik: Where were you, there?

Jim: Where in Korea, you mean? I was in Pusan most of the time. It was just below Seoul there, and uh, I stayed there for two years--we left in '48, and we left from Inchon. That was the only Port--Seoul Port was down further on the opposite side, you know, of Korea peninsula, then we came back again for the--

Mik: But what were you doing there?

Jim: I was in infantry.

Mik: What was your duty like? I mean, there was no fighting going on.

Jim: No, but they had troops there right after the occupation, see—'member, we was part of the occupation of Korea. They had troops all the way up the--some were up in the North Korea--I don't know if there was all the way up to the 38th or not, you know, of course, to the what was that? That 'd be the--wasn't Inchon either--

Mik: The 38th Parallel up there?

Jim: Yeah, well, it was all the way up, just before you go into Manchuria. We was at one side and our Chinese was on the other, and we sat there and the second time I was there, they were gonna send us all the way back to Seoul, you know--

Mik: When you were there the first time, did you think there was gonna be a war?

Jim: Oh, I didn't know much about it, you know. There was peace time tour and we stayed in the field most of the time on problems, you know, but nobody's gonna know there's gonna be one until the Chinese came in, you know. With the intervention of the Chinese, why, we kept pretty good track of that--the Koreans, but there was just too damn many of them--China, when they come in, well, they must of been a billion [laughing]. That's where you come across a creek anyway, you know, so--

Mik: So tell me about going back the second time.

Jim: Well, I think I said, when I come back to Inchon where I left from, the second trip over there, I landed in exactly the same spot. There was electrical pole where I had a bunch of garbage on it, you know, and we went right by that pole going back in as we did going out, until you know, when we left--then of course, it was for the war again you know--so--

Mik: And then what happened when you got back there, after you landed in Inchon?

Jim: Well, we went all the way up to the Manchurian border.

Mik: Well, tell me the details of it, what you remember.

Jim: I don't remember much of it, other than that which--you were traveling along and you're frightened of ghosts, and they'd run you back, and you'd go forward, and you're always inching forwards, you know. Then the middle of the campaign there, you know, this airborne outfit in there, my young brother was in that, 197th, and I met him over there, you know, and--course, every time I get up there, thought I was gonna stay up there a couple of days. And when I got up to visit them the second time, would--they retracted the airborne--that's what they did--they usually dropped me--and then when you got up to where they were at, they retracted the airborne--took 'em back Japan--I guess they went to--so, it was the last I seen of him until after the war, you know--I remember, we kept going up to Manchuria and then the Chinese would run us back to Pusan. That's were they held up, and that's where I left--so, when I left, I left from the same place I started from [laughing]--so we didn't gain nothing actually.

Mik: Where were you when they crossed the Yalu?

Jim: When they crossed the what?

Mik: The river, the Yalu?

Jim: We never crossed it.

Mik: But when the Chinese crossed it--

Jim: Oh, I don't remember that. There was no towns there or nothing, you know.

Mik: Tell me about that though, when the Chinese came in.

Jim: Well, we was all camped, maybe 100 yards off of the river, and then this--all of the sudden, they just came across the creek in droves, you know. You could do nothing but run, because they'd just run right over you--I don't know how hundreds upon hundreds were killed, but that didn't make no difference, you know, cause there was so damn many of them.

Mik: So what was it? Fight and retreat?

Jim: Yeah, we kept trying to retake the ground that we had, you know--and then when they'd get another heavy influx of troops, well, they'd push you back again, you know. Of course, you lost a lot of guys in between. They lost a lot, we lost a lot, you know. That was the only bad part of it. The land wasn't worth shit anyway, so didn't make no difference.

Mik: So what do you remember about those days?

- Jim: I don't remember hardly nothing about 'em. I just remember getting shot at, and I never got hit or nothing, you know. But I seen--lost a lot of good buddies that got hit. I was just fortunate, you know. Make yourself small, get in a hole, but you gotta get out and fight once in a while, so--
- Mik: Did you fight hand to hand?
- Jim: No, we didn't have any, but some of the units on our left side of us say it was part of our re--then they tried to go around, you know, the troops, and they get into some hand and hand combats, some pretty tough stuff. Well, I guess the airborne got quite a bit of it then--
- Mik: How far down did the Chinese push you?
- Jim: All the way back to 38th again. They kept going back and forth and back and forth, and when I left there, we was back on the 38th Parallel. The second tour that I put--the second two years--that year, I guess, it was the second time.
- Mik: Tell me about going in to rescue the Marine Division or the Marine Unit.
- Jim: To what?
- Mik: When you went back up to rescue the Marines?
- Jim: Oh, yeah, one of my units, I think it was one of the first battalion or something of the 32nd, went up to the Chosin Reservoir to dig the Marines out, and of course, they encircled them too, you know. And then they had 'em all pushed up against that reservoir, and we went up there, and we were killing off goddamned Chinese. [laughing] Fast you could see, I mean, to get the troops up, so, you know--and we got--the first ones came through, was the Marines came through first, and then our battalion came through. Then the rest of our division all got together right there and they--this enclosed around again, you know, so they headed back again. [laughs]
- Betty: Food over on the other side--
- Mik: About the food?
- Betty: Yeah, they dropped food down. They went on the Chinese side.
- Mik: Oh, dropping the food. Tell me about dropping the food--
- Jim: Mean the feed, yeah? Well, you couldn't--when you get surrounded, you know, if they can't get into to feed yah, so they called for an air drop, and they'd just throw it down where they think yah are and where you're telling me yah are, but you ain't there, cause they didn't really send the offer there--so, they get more than you get,

you know, you might get breakfast and they probably get supper, you know [laughs]. That's what it amounts to. [laughs]

Mik: Tell me about the cold.

Jim: Well that's the worst part of it, was the cold. Like when we went up into the Chosin there, to dig them troops out, it was over thirty below. I think it was around thirty-two or thirty-three or something like that, but who is going to argue over a couple degree, you know? We knew it was over thirty, so--. You only get so much clothes, you know. Now I know my wife sent me at least one pair of boots. I couldn't even get boots to wear; she mailed me a pair over. But that was the bad part, no getting proper equipment, you know. It wasn't just us. None of the troops had enough of what they needed--

Mik: Did you freeze anything?

Jim: Yeah, I froze my feet and my legs, and they still bother me. I got to go and see the doctor again tomorrow for this one leg--no, I see him today, didn't I? I went and see him today, again. They still bother me up to here [indicates where, but off camera], but my feet, I could hardly walk on 'em, yeah. They hurt just to walk, but I froze them in the Second World War. Then when I went to Korea, I didn't know if I froze one off or--they got cold again, you know, they stayed cold all the time. In fact, I can't go outside in the winter and stay outside. Not for years, I couldn't even hunt, and I love to hunt, and I couldn't even hunt because I couldn't stay out in the cold, you know--

Mik: How do you fight when you're that cold?

Jim: Well, it's either that or you got killed, you don't take--there's no choice, you know. It's a lot better fight in the summertime, when you don't have to wear all them heavy clothes and stuff, but half the time, you don't get winter boots, what'cha call winter boots, you know to keep warm, but you might get regular cut off shoe tops, and they had some canvas on 'em, and to make tops for 'em, you know--but the first boots I had was the ones my wife sent me--

Mik: What do you do to keep from freezing when it's that cold?

Jim: Jump up and down. [laughs] Keep moving. You can't build fires, you know. You can't [unintelligible] if they're hunting for you, you just build a fire and that's all you're doing is telling 'em where you're at, you know, and they need to dig out a sheet of [unintelligible] of what I say in proper artillery--now, in smoke, flames, or anything, you know, so if you build a fire, you got to get away from it, or pretty soon you gonna get a bunch of artillery [laughing] so that runs yah off.

Mik: How do you fire rifles when your hands are that cold?

Jim: That is tough. There's a good question. [laughs] Cause you gotta keep your gloves on. You can't take your gloves off; your fingers will stick to the trigger at 30 some below zero, you know. You've got them heavy gloves on and your hands will sweat, and you take 'em off and you put 'em on a cold trigger, they're gonna freeze there, you know. That's some tough fighting that way. Course, I wouldn't know anyone-- then there was a lot of them that you know--some better than others--better equipped maybe, or something.

Mik: Did you lose a lot of people?

Jim: Yeah, it was ah, let me see, I'd have ta--I was trying to think what grade I was when I was over there during the war. I don't know if I was a--I was a master sergeant most of the time I was in, but I had to be a corporeal sometime, you know, so what-- I actually don't know how many men I had at any one given time--If I had a platoon, you've got around, so--what the hell was that amount to, about thirty or forty G.I.'s, you know, that you've gotta take care of. But I don't remember what I was--and I was up, if I had a company or what--I had a company in Korea, but that was in peacetime, you know, and same way in Europe. I was a first sergeant in Europe, but when I started out like everybody else, I was a private. You know, PFC, and you worked your way up. And it's really hard to tell where you're at, what age you were at, or what rank you were, and when you was at a certain place, yah know, which is [unintelligible] or something--coming to mind--when you had a platoon, where you don't even have to, the whole--[laughs] But, ah--

Mik: How does a sergeant take care of his men? What do you do for them?

Jim: You gotta make sure that they don't freeze, you gotta--some don't have sense enough to keep warm, yah know, they don't wanna their carry their extra clothes, they want to throw 'em away. Then, when they want 'em they're not there, cause you don't stay there--so, what you want to wear tomorrow, you gotta pack, tonight or today, you know, and if you move out, you gotta carry it with yah, if you're in infantry. But you're in an outfit where you got jeeps and trucks, you can always throw your gear on them, you know. But infantry don't have that privilege, to--if you want it, you've got to carry it with you or you ain't gonna have it--[laughing] and I spent most of my time in infantry.

Mik: You traveled on your feet.

Jim: Oh, yeah, yeah. We'd get a ride once in a while, bum a ride on a tank, or--if he'd stop, you know.

Mik: How far could you travel in a day?

Jim: In a day? If you had to walk? Twenty-five, thirty mile, if you didn't hit nothing. But most of the times you were walking, maybe like ten, fifteen mile, cause as far as

you could go, until they either back-up for you get so sufficient forces to pull or push them, you know--

Mik: So, back and forth—

Jim: Up and down.

Mik: You had to go back?

Jim: I don't know how many times I went up close to the Yalu River, and went all the way back to the 38th Parallel, and you get reorganized and get some new bodies, and off you go again, you know.

Mik: Did you feel like you were always going uphill?

Jim: Oh, yeah, yeah, I always walked uphill. [laughing] Put a lot of time and effort.

Mik: What were those mountains like in Korea?

Jim: Pardon?

Mik: What were those mountains like--the mountains?

Jim: Oh, shhhhh, this one here, looked kinda like a small hill and on top of that, you see another one, farther back on top of that, there's another one, that if the farther you go, the higher you got, [laughing] all the way to the Manchurian border, then it kinda leveled out.

Mik: So, you would fight uphill and then go straight down the hill--

Jim: But each time it was going up a little higher cause you was going up another hill, you know. Yeah, you seem to know more about it than I do, was you over there? You just got a bunch of--good group or two of good questions [laughs]

Mik: I just talked to a lot of guys that were over there. Tell me about doing guard duty at night--

Jim: Guard duty?

Mik: At night.

Jim: Well, it's an awful lonely job for a private, you know, but like I say, most of the time I was in Korea, during the war, I had rank, so I didn't have to stand on a post. You know what I mean, like it was froze there, like some of the infantry kids were--. So I used to go out when I had my platoon on guard, I was going out on between each tour, sometimes two or three times, depending on who was one of the young guys.

You know, I'd either make a couple of trips out, or I'd have one of the Inchose make a trip or two in between, you know, so that this kid--you see he wasn't there by himself. You gotta make sure they got enough clothing, that they got that warm stuff on them, you know.

Mik: Do you have to keep 'em awake?

Jim: Oh, yeah, sometimes you do, yeah. Some of 'em will go to sleep.

Mik: So, how did you keep 'em awake?

Jim: Well, I'd wake 'em at night by myself. If I had to wake a guy up in the morning once, the next time, I moved her up behind one of the guns. I was platoon sergeant, I was a machine gunner too in Korea--I moved her over behind one of the guns, and I could hear the minute that guy start to snore, and I'd just take my M1 and aim right by his ear, and I'd put one to him. It was one guy, I just nicked--I didn't mean to hit him, I just nicked him, you know, but I made a believer out of that son of a bitch. [laughs] [unintelligible] But every time the _____ would come in, I used to get a kick out of 'em--they'd uh, [unintelligible] "What's the platoon sergeant doing?" Everyone would go to sleep on that _____--[laughs] That's all--cause he'll blow your head off. [laughing] I never shot nobody for sleeping, but, except, that one that I nicked, you know. [unintelligible] That's a good pop going by your head, you know. [gestures with his right hand, motioning past his right ear] Especially, when you're sitting there and you're half asleep, your head's bobbing, you know. [laughing] It works though, cause that guy will never go to sleep again. [laughs]

Mik: You probably heard a few bullets fly past your head.

Jim: Oh, I heard a lot of 'em, yeah.

Mik: What's that sound like?

Jim: Oh, it's just a popping sound, you know. If it's loud or not depends on how close or how high it is. If it high, there's a "zing," you know. But if they're right by your head, they just make a big pop as you go by. That's how you can tell when they're close, when they snap at you. But them zingers, I never worry about them zingers, cause they're by yah or they've go past yah, once they've popped that's right next to yah, you know--

Mik: Can you get out of the way?

Jim: Well, you'd get your head down, cause the guy's gonna shoot again, you know, if you sit there. [Laughing]

Mik: Did you find that when replacements came in, right away was the most critical time, that that's when they were the most vulnerable, after a while they'd learn a little--?

- Jim: Yeah, definitely, yeah. If they never been in combat before, you don't know what to say, you know, and then you hear a lot. Closer you get up to the front line, the more you hear, naturally, you know--and uh, a young guy, he can't decipher which is fact and which is baloney, you know, until it actually happens to him, and you want to get to him first, or you can't expect, you know, kind of know what's gonna happen, you know.
- Mik: Tell 'em what's going on--
- Jim: Yeah, yeah.
- Mik: What was your closest call?
- Jim: For getting killed, you mean? I don't know, I had a lot of close ones, but popping snaps were sure--got them close, you know, they was really by your ears. But it's hard to tell.
- Betty: [Unintelligible]
- Mik: Oh, is that right, you were standing next to one of your buddies, when he got hit?
- Jim: Oh, yeah, I'm standing right next to my platoon sergeant that got hit. He was kinda funny. I was supposed to go back with him. In fact, I did, the same time you went back for commission. Both of us were supposed to get field commissions. I do--I don't want to go. I'm not gonna go back, cause I don't want to be a second lieutenant. That's just like to me like being a private, all over again, you know. I couldn't see it. [Unintelligible] Templeton was a lot older than I was, maybe, well, not a lot, maybe five years or something like that, but he was a good friend of mine. He was my platoon sergeant at the time, and we stayed up onside the hill and uh, he just came back from uh, what da--hell, he went back for something, he came back to the front line again, and he was standing there and I told him, I said, "Ted, don't walk up there," but he, ah--[pause]--I have no right to talk about him anyway.
- Mik: We'll just leave that aside, we'll forget about that. So, you know, I heard some stories--
- Jim: Pardon.
- Mik: I heard some stories about Tootsie Rolls, up at Chosin.
- Jim: No, I never heard that, no.
- Mik: No? Did you ever know where you were, or was it just one mountain, much like any other, did you have a sense of the geography of the place when you were--

Jim: I didn't.

Mik: Why? I mean, did you ever have a sense of how the war was going, or what was happening elsewhere, or was it just getting through the day?

Jim: No, that just a general idea. You could tell what's going on around you, you know, but I always knew what my units were doing, my company, my battalion--but brigade, you got so many more units and they're spread out so much, you could have heavy fatalities and you wouldn't even know it, you know.

Mik: Did you do much night fighting?

Jim: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Mik: What's that like?

Jim: That's kind worse, kinda funny, the worst is you can't see nobody, you know. If you fire your rifle, why, everybody, the guy over there and the guy over there, they all fire back where they figure that flash is at, so the guys in front of you don't have anything to, don't have to worry about you, because somebody else is shooting at you [laughing] so you don't shoot, unless you have to. Unless you have a good target, you know. I imagine they done the same thing. I don't know.

Mik: Were the Chinese pretty good at coming in at night, when you were on call?

Jim: Oh, yeah, they'd come in, they'd come up the front, and were tied up every night, till they would break through in different places, you know. If they broke through like the next company, then we had to pull our companies back in a flange, in an angle, this one here and the one over there, so that they could bring in another force up and push them back out, so that we could bring the line back up, you know. You just can't stand there, cause if they'd get a hold of that, they gonna get in behind you.

Mik: I heard they made a lot of noise when they were gonna attack.

Jim: Oh yeah, yeah, they banging cymbals and pound on their helmet with a stick or something, you know. They're just trying to scare you, you know, so that you'll jump in your hole and hide.

Mik: Did it work?

Jim: It didn't with me, cause, I used to--I'd jump in my hole, where I'd pick up my M-1 and slap the bayonet on it, and stick it right back into the ground. And one come 'cross my hole, that's what he got--dump him over his shoulder [laughing].

Mik: Did that happen?

- Jim: Oh, yeah, it happened to me couple a times, yeah.
- Mik: What a world.
- Jim: Cause we're own weight, it was your impetus, you know-- you didn't like getting out of the fox hole and jabbing with them--I never done that, but I can look up from a fox hole with a bayonet.
- Mik: Did you have to dig your fox holes?
- Jim: Oh, yeah, yeah, nobody dug your own hole. You had to dig 'em yourself. I used to have the guys in our platoon dig one or two back around behind my CP for one of the officers that would come up. Sometimes the old man would come up and see at night, the company commander, you know. And I always had a hole where you could get into it, cause some of the privates would want to give 'em their hole, you know. Shit, if he'd come up there, let him dig his own, I always said [laughing]. But he was a pretty good guy, so I used to dig an extra hole back there, and he'd make a trip up there usually, practically every night, not every night, but--
- Mik: Why would he come up?
- Jim: Just to see all the troops were at, cause--specially if you got any new ones, you know, then see that you were taking care of 'em, or just weren't leaving them sit and not checking on them, you know. I used to get out of my hole a little, and the length of my platoon, one way the length the other way, make the trip about every two hours, you know. Then the squad ladies, hey, they were dug in behind their squads, hey, I made sure they'd get out and check their own squads, you know, so there's always, always, always checking. And plus the squad leaders see some of them kids, you know, they're not used to sitting up after dark and they'd go to sleep, you know. And so what you gotta do, you got a couple sleeping next to one another and then they had a hole there.
- Mik: What was that talk about the sleeping bags?
- Betty: They didn't have enough sleeping bags.
- Mik: That was you--you didn't have enough sleeping bags?
- Jim: Well, we didn't--most of the time we had enough, but a lot of times we were short, you know.
- Mik: Then what'd yah do?
- Jim: What did we do about it? We can't put two in one sleeping bag, that's for sure, you know. Changed them off, other guy's sleeping, the other guy's sleeping, another one, and that's about all you can do with something like that.

Mik: So, did you go through a lot of attacks?

Jim: Did I go through a lot of them?

Mik: Did they attack you a lot, and then you would go out on patrol or--?

Jim: Oh, yeah, you get attacked every night practically. We called 'em "benzais," you know. They come tooting their horns and beating on their drums, thinking they were scaring yah, you know. But they were good fighters, don't take me wrong, you know. You goof up and they get yah.

Mik: Every night?

Jim: Every night they come out, yeah. We had night patrols, but we never done-- basically, you don't do the night patrol unless you had to, you know, because that's the worst time to fight. At night, you can't see nobody. I'd rather sit in a hole and let 'em come to me, yah know, then I can see two positions that way and two positions the other way, so I watch both ways, plus in front of me, and each guy to your left and right is doing the same thing--that's if he's awake. That's why I used to get out and walk along, make sure the squad leader is doing the same thing, you know. Cause the guy is no good if he's sleeping, he might as well be dead, you know. But the thing is, more other people got killed, you know, they let the gooks that get in behind you, you know. They had a--1st Regiment lost a lot o' guys that way.

Mik: What was it like when you would attack?

Jim: We never attacked them at night.

Mik: In the daytime?

Jim: Daytime, yeah.

Mik: Tell me how you would attack.

Jim: How far what?

Mik: How you would attack? What was that like, to attack?

Jim: Oh, it was attacking a platoon in front basically, and each platoon--always had platoon to your left and a platoon to your right, and they kept one full platoon--one was in reserve all the time, you know. Behind that, it would be one of the officers, so that they could see these reserve would have to be shifted around and you'd keep moving forward, until something stopped you, you know--

Mik: Did you have artillery—[End of Tape WCKOR081]

- Mik: Entire platoon that went to sleep that was wiped out. That right? Was that [unintelligible] or something?
- Betty: Not in your outfit.
- Mik: Not in your outfit.
- Jim: There was outfits that happened. I didn't [unintelligible].
- Mik: That's why it was important to stay awake.
- Jim: Yeah.
- Mik: You always had to be awake. When you say you were attacked every night, how long did that go on--?
- Jim: Being attacked, you mean? Depends on if they push yah or your positions, you gotta move back on lines, everybody else was on line again, or you leave gaps in between, you know, so you don't want to get shoved out of your position, you have to stay there.
- Mik: Otherwise they break through, and come back--
- Jim: Oh, yeah, the--if they can get through, like a company sized unit, or even platoon sized, they come through and then they go up behind, and these other people on your left and right, they're looking this way, you know, they ain't figuring there's gooks behind 'em [laughs] at least coming after 'em--there's a lot of gooks behind 'em, cause they live there. It's their country, you know. But I'm talking about gook soldiers, you know.
- Mik: Could you tell the difference between the Chinese and the North Koreans?
- Jim: No, they're all--they all look alike. Their size is about the same, they look alike, and they dress the same. You don't know if it's a Chinaman or a North Korean or--I couldn't anyway, many as I saw, and seen lots of 'em. I put two tours over there, Korea.
- Mik: Did you see any other of the U.N. forces, or just Americans?
- Jim: No, I seen some other units, too. I forget now which they were, but they weren't by me, but they were--we either passed them by, or they passed us for something, you know. But they has put a different--a few countries represented over there--
- Mik: How long did you have to stay on the line before you got back for a little rest, or a break, or something?

Jim: I don't know, we stayed there 'til they'd pull you out--you know.

Mik: So, would that be a week, a month?

Jim: Oh, shhhhh, that could be months--three months. If you stayed in the same holes, you know, it wasn't too bad, but every time you move, you got to re-dig all them fortifications, you know. That's the bad part of it. It ain't bad living in a hole, cause you get used to it after a while; you get to cut little nickies in the side of the mud where you put the stuff, put your soap and stuff here, and your put your ammo over in this hole, and you know, stuff like that [laughs]. Just like living in a house, you know, and it's mud. [laughs] And you got a top over it of course, you know.

Betty: Company commander come up one time and ordered them to go back.

Mik: Your company commander came up and ordered you to go back?

Jim: Go back where?

Mik: Back of the line?

Jim: Oh, yeah.

Mik: Why did he do that?

Jim: I don't remember, now, what it was--is she doing the talking back there? [squints eyes, leans forward and looks]

Betty: Yeah. [laughs]

Mik: No, I just figured it out. [laughs]

Jim: I thought there was only three of you there. [laughing] What was your question again?

Mik: That your company commander came up and ordered you to go back for a while--

Jim: Oh, to the rear, oh, yeah, yeah. He came up there a couple of times, like I told you, tell you before, he used to come up and visit, you know. And he'd say, when was you back to the company last, back to headquarters last, and I said, "Well, sometime last week." So he wouldn't say nothing, and pretty soon he'd come back there, and he says, "I just came from down there." He says, "And the first sergeant hadn't seen you in a month." He says, [laughing] "You get your butt off the hill, and stay off for a couple days." [laugh] I hated to walk down and all the way back. [laughs]

Mik: And what'd yah do when you were at headquarters?

Jim: Nothing. Was nothing for me to do. They all had their jobs, you know. All I just went back there and sat around and ate three meals a day, which I didn't have up in the front. Ate all I wanted, drank coffee, and shot the shit with the cooks.

Mik: When you were on the line, did you have air support?

Jim: Oh, yeah, yeah. When you call for it, you got it. They were pretty good, but they had to come from Japan, most of 'em, you know. Like when we was back down around Taegu and down in there, we didn't have no air strips, you know. Now they got--hell, they got airstrips all over, they built airstrips everyplace they stop, you know. So generally, it took us a good hour before we got air power, you know. If we needed it bad, we didn't always get it. We had--they finally put in some helicopters back there that they put machine guns on 'em, you know, and hell, they was just sitting back by our motor pool, maybe two miles from where we was at. Hell, they'd pop right up and they'd be up there in a minute, you know. [unintelligible] [laughing] For the first couple times, really paid off, cause they didn't realized that they had them choppers like that, you know. Now they got them all around, and gun ships, and stuff. We never had nothing like that in Korea. Marines were the first thing that had all that fancy stuff, you know. I don't know what the hell they done with it, but--.

Mik: So getting support in a couple of minutes was better than waiting an hour, huh?

Jim: Oh, definitely! A lot times they're right on yah, you know. In the minute you hear them choppers coming for, they head out cause they know that we got machines, so-- [laughing]

Mik: What about artillery? Did you have artillery?

Jim: Oh, yeah, we'd called --trouble with that, you can't call it too close. If it gets you in too close, it starts killing their own people. You don't--there's no way you could know where everybody is at, you know. I mean, you keep track of your own platoon, like me; I knew where all my troops were, and I had met all the platoon sergeants that--but you don't know what the next company down there might be the Marines, them scroungy bastards, you never know what they're doing. Half of 'em are gone, and half are over the hill, and you know, they're scattered all over creation. You don't have no--just like some of them pictures you got, you know, in that book. [laughs] I can always tell the Marines when I look at positions, you know.

Mik: You really liked the Marines?

Jim: Oh, I didn't care for 'em t'all. [laughs]

Mik: How come?

Jim: I don't know, I just--wasn't my kind of soldier.

Mik: They liked you.

Jim: I don't know if they liked me or not. [laughing] I heard that he didn't give a damn anyways, so [laughing]. No, I had my little outfit to keep track of 'em, and that's what I done. Nobody coming in to bother me, unless if the old man comes up, or something, you know. About as long as I was in the military, my wife could tell you this, I never had a platoon leader. I went through two wars, and never had a platoon leader. I can't believe that. When I'd see these Marine units, they got ten men, two officers, ten men, two officers, where in the hell do they come from? We never had any, you know--but I never had a platoon leader. My two tours in Korea, I didn't have any.

Betty: In fact, in Europe he had one of the best tours and uh, his platoon--

Jim: [Raising hand over eyes-looking] What's the information bureau got?

Mik: [Laughter]

Betty: And he got--

Jim: Can't see her.

Mik: She was back in World War II.

Jim: Oh, yeah, she was back there.

Betty: You think so. [Indiscernible]

Mik: Wait, were you able to stay in touch with her at all, during the war?

Jim: Who?

Mik: With your wife? Was there mail? Was there--?

Jim: What were we talking about?

Mik: Korea.

Jim: Well, there wasn't--I doesn't [unintelligible] write letters, you know--

Mik: When you got back to headquarters, did they have mail call up on the line?

Jim: Oh, yeah, we had it on the line, yeah. When they brought the chow up, for the noon meal usually, they brought all the mail up there, cause the mail would get in prior to

12:00 o'clock, you know. If they didn't, we'd have it again. We'd have mail call at supper meal, you know, and you'd bring the mail up, and who brought it up would call it and pass it out, you know.

Mik: And there was always a letter from Betty?

Jim: Oh, no, she never wrote much. Probably got about five letters, from all the time I was over there. [laughing]

Mik: And how many did you get from him?

Betty: About five. [Laughter]

Jim: I wrote a bunch of 'em ahead of time and stamped 'em and everything. [laughing] I never was one much for writing, you know. I'd--what are you gonna tell somebody? Well, here it is, Monday morning, I got my eye shot out twice today [unintelligible]. [laughing] You know, there really ain't a lot of good stuff going on that you want to put in a letter. Course, I'd--I never got hit or nothing, so I was fortunate that way.

Mik: How did you do that?

Jim: I don't know.

Mik: How did you go through all that?

Jim: I just--when I heard 'em zing, and I got in the hole, cause I figured the next one, this guy was gonna readjust a little bit, and he was gonna get me, so I'd dive in the hole somewhere.

Betty: [Unintelligible]

Jim: I lost a lot of good buddies though.

Betty: [Unintelligible]

Jim: Huh?

Betty: [Unintelligible]

Mik: She said your commander said, "Wherever you were going, he was going," cause you were good luck.

Jim: Cause I never got killed. [Laughing] I don't push it. My luck, it ain't hold it over both of us. [laughing]

Betty: [Unintelligible]

Mik: I'm gonna have him tell me about Sparky, cause I'd like to hear about--tell me about Sparky.

Jim: Well, he was just a good first lieutenant. Had a little good buddy, you know.

Mik: What makes a good first lieutenant?

Jim: Pardon?

Mik: What makes a good first lieutenant?

Jim: Knowledge. He knows his job, you know, knows when to chew your ass, knows when not to and--.

Mik: What makes a good sergeant?

Jim: Oh, I don't know if I could tell you that. Shit, I done all I could do just to keep my rank. [laughing] Yeah, but a good sergeant knows his job, knows what he's capable of doing and the people around him can do. There comes a time that you got to know what everybody is able to do, you know, or you're gonna come up short sometime--so you gotta know that stuff ahead of time, you know----

Mik: Tell me about coming home.

Jim: What, to the States? [unintelligible] on the boat or planes, were lucky enough to fly. She flew overseas, I ain't been out of damn old scowl--took me, oh, it must have took me a whole week just to get over to Europe [laughing]. Yeah, some people get to fly. I don't know why. I never did.

Mik: So, you went from Korea back to the States?

Jim: Oh yeah, yeah.

Mik: And then you stayed in the military?

Jim: Well, the Second War, I come back and uh, I got discharged in '45, then I went in again from '46 to '48, then I get out. Then I went back in in 1950, and I stayed in. I figured, hell, I might as well stay in now [unintelligible] [laughing].

Mik: What'd yah do when you got back to the States? Where were you?

Jim: Where was I? God, I don't know. Uh, I know I was in Kentucky a couple different times, Carson and, what it is, put one tour in Benning. I never cared for that, that was too close to Flagpole for me, you know--all the officers in the officer's school, and I did a lot of work on a machine gun. I was in charge of the machine gun

committee at the infantry school, and that was kind a like a prestige job, you know, cause you damn sure better know your job when you was there--

Betty: He was in the ski patrol in Colorado, but I forgot what it was called when he came home. His mother and sister thought he should be bow legged, because he thought he was riding a horse. What was it [unintelligible].

Mik: You were in the ski patrol?

Jim: Ski, yeah, I was in the ski outfit, yeah.

Mik: Was that for World War II? Or was that after?

Jim: No, that was after World War II, yeah. I wasn't anywhere before World War II, I was too young to go in the service, you know, until then, when I went in '42. My buddy, Georgie Boyer, he had to wait for me for sixteen days, I think it was, cause he was just sixteen days older than me, you know. So I finally got my mother to sign for me, and then we both went into together and we got--the first place where we ended up where we got sick, we got spinal meningitis, and he stayed at there, then got shipped overseas, then I never seen him again until after the war.

Mik: Hey, tell me, when you were in Korea in '50, that first going up and down, and all that fighting, do you remember Christmas that year?

Jim: Christmas? Oh, yeah. We had big Christmas down there, brought it up in a bucket, but it was hot. [laughs] Yeah. I went over there in 1950.

Mik: Did you think that was a heck of a place to be celebrating Christmas?

Jim: That wasn't a happy place any time. We got a lot o' good food though, at Christmas time. All the holidays they fed the troops good, you know. Maybe they got in on the mess kit or something out in the field, but it was still hot.

Mik: Do you remember where that Christmas?

Jim: No.

Mik: You were in too many places, and all of 'em under pressure, in and out, just staying alive.

Jim: Yeah, that tends to be quite a bit of a job, you know, after while.

Mik: Do you think--a lot of people didn't seem to pay much attention to that war, or didn't think that that was a good war, did you ever feel like--

Jim: Korea, you mean?

- Mik: Korea, that the job you did wasn't appreciated?
- Jim: I really didn't know. They stuck my ass in there, and I had no choice. That's the way I looked at it, you know. The only comical thing is that when I went back the second time, before I get off the venue craft with the same pole I left in [laughs] left first time--that was kinda comical.
- Mik: But there wasn't very much else comical about it?
- Jim: No, no. There ain't many laugh times, where you call comical, you know. I can't think of anybody who'd enjoy it. You'd have to be little on the nutty side, I think. Course, the Second World War, no easier.
- Mik: What was your weapon?
- Jim: What was my personal weapon, or--? Usually an M-1.
- Mik: And is that what everybody in the squads had, were M-1's?
- Jim: Well, no. Like when I was in the heavy weapons unit, people usually had carbines, cause an M-1--you couldn't handle an M-1 and a machine gun at the same time, so you had a machine gun, but you know--so the gunners had 45s, and the [unintelligible] carbines.
- Mik: So, you were in the heavy weapons unit?
- Jim: Oh, yeah.
- Mik: So, you had mortars, and heavy machine guns, and --
- Jim: Yeah, and during the war, then I have--peace time I had a heavy weapons company. I had mortars, and machine guns, and I was gonna say bazookas, they weren't bazookas, recoilless rifles--[laughs] not bazookas.
- Mik: And when you were moving up and down with the Chinese, was that a heavy weapons unit?
- Jim: No, it was in a rifle company, infantry company, yeah.
- Mik: And so you didn't have any mortars?
- Jim: Oh, we had mortars in--but, I didn't have 'em--
- Mik: Not in your company. Do you think we got about enough out o' you? Is there anything you haven't told us?

Jim: No, uh-uh, not that I know of.

Mik: Is there, Betty?

Betty: [unintelligible]

Jim: What is she talking about?

Mik: She said there's a lot of stuff that she's forgotten.

Jim: You think about it sometimes, you know. But, I find as time goes on, the more I think less about it.

Mik: What makes you think about it?

Jim: Well, if I see somebody that I used to know, or every time I see George Boyer, that brings a lot of it back to me, you know. I see him more than anybody that I know, and there's another one, Chet Langemorber, but I really didn't know what he done during the war. Do you know what Chet done, Betty?

Betty: He was in the Air Force.

Jim: Huh?

Betty: He was in the Air Force.

Mik: Air Force.

Jim: Oh. Yeah, he didn't do nothing but sit on his ass.

Mik: You don't like the Air Force either.

Jim: [Laughs] Hey, there's no doubt George--he don't care for nobody but himself.

Mik: Do you ever dream about it?

Jim: No, not lately. I haven't in years, but I used to after the war--once, if I'd be seeing somebody that I knew or something then--seems like it'd bring back something, you know--

Mik: Well, thank you!

Jim: You're welcome!

Mik: Thank you for the interview, and thank you--

[End of Interview]