

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN BRESKE, JR.
Infantry, Marine Corps, Korean War
2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Breske, John, Jr., (1931-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 3 videorecordings (ca. 90 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

John Breske, Jr., an Eland, Wisconsin native, discusses his Korean War service in the Marine Corps. Breske touches on joining the Marines, basic training in San Diego, and transport to Korea. He describes his first impressions of Korea and Seoul. Assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division Reinforced, he portrays combat on the front line, guard duty in the outposts, night patrols, and setting up ambushes. Breske characterizes some other men from his unit and estimates casualties for his patrols at fifty percent. He reflects on MIAs from his unit and says he still doesn't know what happened to some of them. He explains when outposts were being overrun the Marines would take cover in a deep bunker and call artillery fire on their own position. Breske speaks of enemy infiltration and demoralization caused when the enemy would find and disable booby-traps in the dark. He mentions booby-traps like Bouncing Betty mines, the effectiveness of Mickey Mouse boots at keeping feet warm and deflecting the shock of mines, and the use of flak jackets. Breske reflects on his mindset during combat and emphasizes the important role a medical corpsman has in a patrol. He reveals he often carried a Browning shotgun with buckshot on patrol even though it was illegal, and he explains how he used grenades. He characterizes Turkish and Canadian United Nations forces. Breske describes food on the front line, recalls the high number of dud mortars the enemy fired, and analyzes the effectiveness of air support. He explains that even when his unit was on reserve off the front lines, they were training rather than resting. Breske touches on keeping track of the peace talks at Panmunjom. The day before the armistice, he details the high-casualty patrol where he was wounded twice; he states they were ambushed and retreated, and then he volunteered to return to the area to search for a couple patrol members who were missing in action. He reads his Silver Star citation and states he was just doing what he thought he should be doing. Breske touches on his evacuation by helicopter, treatment aboard the *USS Haven*, and having a doctor who was also treating baseball player Ted Williams at the time. He states that after the armistice the sky was lit up for three days with fireworks, and the doctor that operated on his arm at the aid station was a little drunk from celebrating. Breske states they cleaned and packed his wounds and guesses they were worried he would get hemorrhagic fever. He recalls another instance when he was wounded and sent to a Danish hospital ship, the *Jutlandia*. He comments on three seventeen-year-old soldiers in his unit who lied about their age so they could serve on the front lines and who were all killed in one night. Breske declares his community in Elderon Township (Wisconsin) was very supportive after he got home.

Biographical Sketch:

Breske (b.1931) served in the Marine Corps from 1952-1954, and was in Korea from 1952-1953. He was wounded twice on the last day of the war and awarded two purple hearts as well as the Silver Star. After discharge, he attended barber school in Eau Claire (Wisconsin) and operated Breske's Barber Shop in Wausau (Wisconsin). He currently resides in Eland (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

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Context Note:

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin Korean War Stories." Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCKOR041, WCKOR042 and WCKOR043.

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 22, 2004.
Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.
Transcript reformatted and edited by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010.
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

- Mik: Let's start at the beginning of your military service? How did you come to get into the military?
- John: Well, I was thinkin'--I went in--they had a lot of casualties in Korea. When we went down to Milwaukee, we got in-- they must have took about-- probably forty guys out of that bunch that came from Marathon County here. And ah, we went in the Marines, they just took us in the Marines because the Marines were really--had a lot of casualties. So that's how I got in the Marines.
- Mik: Did they ask you?
- John: No, no they just picked, ah, this guy, this guy, they just pointed the guys out. This way and the guy took us. [laughs]
- Mik: Did that--was that okay with you?
- John: Didn't make any difference, no. In fact, I liked it after I got in awhile. I thought it was quite helpful.
- Mik: Where did you go to basic?
- John: San Diego.
- Mik: What was that like?
- John: Ah, it was--the first week or so was a little tough to get oriented and what's going on but once you get with it, it's no problem. None of the stuff bothered me. As far as the calisthenics and whatever they made us do, I could handle that with no problem.
- Mik: Now were you, when you went in, you were aware of what was happening in Korea?
- John: Right.
- Mik: And you knew that's where you would end up?
- John: Well, we didn't know, actually, we didn't know, but it was good chance, definitely a good chance of going there. But, you know, like I think, what is it? One out of seventeen or eighteen guys get in the front lines. I mean the rest are backups or whatever, but ah, I had a good idea that I'd be in infantry. I mean, when I got to Korea.
- Mik: So, how did you get to Korea?

John: We went by ship and at the Inchon Harbor, that's where we landed. And uh, we went by train for probably fifty miles or so and then we got on trucks and they hauled us last leg.

Mik: Do you remember getting there? Do you remember what you thought?

John: Ah, I know some of the first things I thought when I got close over there, you could see this dirty water and so what I was thinking about our shores. We left our shores, we had beautiful blue, ah, water, you know you get probably about half mile from our shores and there is this beautiful blue and you get over there and it looks like you would get out and walk out on mud. It's just, the ocean is really dirty over there. Must be all the regular cesspool in the world—over there by them oriental countries there. Ah, but, ah --to see the kids and the people around, I mean, I'm with--it was kinda like I thought it would be. It was in a lot of ruins and no buildings. And Seoul--as far as Seoul, there was a few buildings standing but most of them were shot up. Not much.

Mik: And you saw that from the train when you went there?

John: No, ah, we drove I think with trucks we went through there. We went through in Seoul.

Mik: Did you know where you were headed?

John: Well, I knew where, ah, the division was. Ah, we have, we were aware of that, we knew that. And we just more or less went up and we were ---got into a day, they gave us probably about ten days of orientation and little training before we went into our units. Ah, as far as knowing where I was gonna go--rough idea that's about what I can say.

Mik: And then, where were you going?

John: What did you say?

Mik: Where were you going?

John: Where was I going?

Mic: Yeah, when you said you had gone up to your unit:

John: Well, I was assigned to Easy Company and that's where I stayed the whole while I was there, I was with this same company and ah--I don't know, ah, except for going back from reserve, everything was--I put in most of the time was on the front lines. I had probably, out of my year over there probably, I'd say 80% of the time I was on a--in combat or some kind of a--something.

Mik: Describe the front line for me.

John: You mean how it looked or--

Mik: Yeah.

John: Well, there was a lot trench lines, ah--and all along there our main line of resistance was a trench line pretty much all the way across Korea, I'd say, was. Ah, and there was bunkers, they had bunkers built and you know, so that you could take artillery and mortars. And uh, I think the biggest thing where I'd had seen most of the combat was on these ah, outposts. There were probably somewhere half a mile in front of the main line--to the outpost like a hill, and ah, and ah, that's where we'd--like a platoon or a company would get onto that hill and stay out there that day and take the blunt of everything that I kind of attacked. They'd be the first ones to--that's where we spent most of our times was on outposts.

Mik: I know some of those outposts had names. Did your outpost have a name?

John: Yeah, there was a lot of 'em, ah, well, there was, ah, at the end of the war there was Boulder City, Vegas, ah--Ashcom City-- Anyway it was like the cities from Nevada, or someplace like that ah--mostly was were I was. Bunker Hill was ah, there was a lot of casualties on there. That was, everybody knew where Bunker Hill was. It wasn't much of a hill but there was a lot of casualties. A lot of people got banged up or killed on that hill.

Mik: And what hill were you on?

John: I was on a lot, just about all of them. We moved around, never was in the same place. You'd stay in the area thirty days, that was probably tops in the area. Thirty days something like that. You'd move over to some--

Mik: What was your particular job, when you would go out to the outpost?

John: Well, ah, the main thing that guys would out for like listening posts. I would go out and find an outpost yet and ah, see, if you could detect anybody trying to sneak up or coming up on the--before they'd ah--so you'd knew ahead of time was going to happen. And uh, we'd did a lot of that. And uh, otherwise, improving in your position. Ah, probably dig in a little better--make it a little more comfortable for everybody, you know. Over there. It was a pretty much of a routine deal. It's the same--a lot of--oh, yeah, patrols. We did a lot of patrols. If you'd get an outpost then you'd patrol probably into no man's land, probably a mile, a mile and a half. See about ten, twelve guys that would sneak around to see if you could find out something. Did that--we did a lot of that.

Mik: So, you'd go out til you'd make contact or don't make contact.

- John: A lot of time make contact or if you didn't make contact, ah, see if you could find out what was going on--if any movement of the enemy--finding a--[laugh]
- Mik: No, I missed him--he went your way--He's a dead man if he came my way. [laughing] I know that we are talking about something that was over 50 years ago.
- John: Yeah, you're right.
- Mik: But--
- John: I can remember a lot of the stuff real plain, you know. Ah, you can remember, I remember some of the guys. I had good contacts with some guys for years after we got back and then that kind a, ah, I don't know what happened nobody--quit writing or going to see each other, you know. Ah, one guy still fills me in, that was with me when I got the Silver Star. He still sends me ah, that lapel button; that Silver Star button every year for Christmas; he sends me one. We were pretty close. But ah--no, if somebody questioned me about things, I can come up with pretty much what happened.
- Mik: Do you remember ah, were you with, primarily, the same people the whole time you were up on the--
- John: Yeah, you were ah--we, but, the personnel was changing all the time cause you got people who being wounded, and ah then you would be rotating--they rotated too--you know you had some older people in there and so, you probably were with some people, I would say, I was with probably four or five out of my company probably were with me the whole time I was there. Otherwise people would come for a month, two months, you know, some people they couldn't handle it--they went back--you know some of that so--it was ah, you've seen a lot of people--I've seen--went through a lot of people.
- Mik: Yeah, when you were out on the outpost, and going on patrols and so on, how many casualties were you taking? Like, every day or--
- John: Well, you took a few casualties every day like, guys getting hit with shrapnel and some of that. A lot of patrols you'd go on--we'd never fire a shot or anything; it was quiet, real quiet, but, ah, then you'd have where you got a lot of casualties, probably 50% of the platoon or the ah, the squad that went out on patrol would be--something happened to somebody. And you'd have ah, we had a few, I had a couple of good friends that were MIAs that were just missing, we, you don't know what happened--so much going on and all the sudden this guy didn't--wasn't there--no more. And ah, like they say, you always bring back your dead or whatever but it don't always happen. It's not that you don't try but, ah, it's just sometimes it just don't work. It don't happen.
- Mik: Well, if you can't find 'em.

John: No, you go back--we went back a lot of times for--we worked the area again where we had casualties if we'd lost a man and we'd go back and sometimes you found em, sometimes you didn't. Some of our guys were taken prisoners. Ah, we'd try, I tried to follow up on some of the guys that were MIAs and ah, never did really find out what happened.

Mik: Were these patrols at night or in the day?

John: Night. Everything--was very little activity in the daytime. All the ah, just as soon as it got dark everything was ah--I think of us guys were [laugh] you could just about see in the dark I think--cause every thing--we did got in the night you know--used a lot of binoculars--which you know a lot of people think, take a pair of binoculars out at night, they think you're--they think they do you no good but it does help you. You get a moonlight night or ah--a lot of say ah, artillery ah--oh, ah, what am I trying to say? White phosphorous--you know that lights up the area--and you take out a good pair of binoculars, you can see what's going on. You can see probably 300 hundred yards in front of you of what's going on--it helps you.

Mik: What was the worst patrol you went on?

John: Well, I think when I ah, when I got the Silver Star. That's about it. I think we had the most casualties--that's about--when everyone was hit--then when we went back to that same spot. I went back there again--and ah, anyway, that was the most casualties I was ever--quite a few were killed on that.

Mik: Do you remember the details of the patrol at all?

John: Well, I was--on that night, we changed off. We--guys would ah--somebody to take the point for the patrol and then sometimes you took the rear of the patrol and if the job, if you took the point, you had to be--you were supposed to look out so you didn't walk into any ambush. That was your biggest thing to watch out for. And then the guys that were last two or three guys in the patrol--they were supposed to watch so nobody snuck up from the back. And then also if you did get into a skirmish, then you'd stay there and deliver recovering fire--so the rest of the guys could pull back through you and you'd be last one to leave the position. And that was probably the biggest things. And then we got a couple of guys to watch out for your flight--two more---but the biggest thing, I think--ah--the two toughest part on patrol was the front and the back--cause they would sneak up on the back you know trying to take the last guy someone a prisoner--somehow.

Mik: And where were you?

John: On that night, I was ah, I was in the rear of the patrol. I was ah-- we had a first lieutenant, I think he was Riegert, his name was and he was top graduate out of Annapolis--I think about 4 years prior to that. Ah--anyway I got to be quite close

with him over the--probably the last six months I was there. Ah, he went back a few times--see he was like--when--if you get who is in charge of our--he was our platoon leader. And when we went back in Reserves, he went up, he made ah--had a rank, so he wanted me to come back to be his--his ah, secretary more or less, you know. Well it didn't work cause we got back in secretaries--another bunch of casualties up in front, and that was the end of the secretary. He went right back to the front again. [laughs] That's why in the Marines--they always tell you, you were trained for a duty, your man and wherever you go--we need somebody on the front--they just pick you and you go back up. That's it. So--I probably could've been out of there, out of combat if I went with him. Cause after you're hit twice they usually don't put you back on the front. So, and I went back and I got hit again that last night of the war--that's how it goes I suppose. I was wounded the last night, in fact, I wounded twice that night. I was hit at about 11 o'clock at night with shrapnel and then I was hit with ah--bullets-- oh I think about 3 o'clock in the morning or something like that.

Mik: Where were you when you were hit with shrapnel?

John: I was hit in the legs and in the back ah-- it covered the back--the shrapnel came in the back side of me.

Mik: But were you on patrol or were you on--

John: No, I was on the--we was on the front then--it was--

Mik: So, the--it was a mortar?

John: That was a mortar. I'm sure it was.

Mik: It landed behind you?

John: Yeah.

Mik: And the shrapnel hit you? What did it feel like?

John: Ah--I think the--in the legs and back, it wasn't so bad, ah--it hurt but, very short ah--when I got hit in my right arm and right shoulder, that hurt. I'm mean that hurt, that must've been more--hit some nerves or bones or whatever--that hurt. Cause that's how I lost my arm--when I got hit there. I thought I was--the arm was gone and a--when I got my--picked myself up, it was still there so, [softly laughing] That was a lot of shocking for us there--that was like I say, a short time too it hurt, I mean, it hurt--couple of minutes, it was ah, I think I got, only thing I think I could say would bother me was loss of blood; got a little weak or something--but it was--the pain was not much pain.

Mik: So, you got hit in the arm the first time you were wounded?

John: No, ah--

Mik: That was the second time that night?

John: The second time that night, then I got hit but that was with bullets. That was burp gun slugs--it's a small caliber, a little bigger than the twenty-two. It's a very, ah, it was probably the, ah, the most firepower of any gun at that time. It was a Russian burp gun--they really, like I say they say a burp gun they call it, well, the reason they call it a burp gun because it sounds just like a burp cause it burp! It was no bum, bum, bum, like that, it was so fast that it was--it sounded like one actually one long shell going off or something, you know.

Mik: So, if you got hit by bullets, they were pretty close, were you under attack?

John: Quite close, yeah, yeah. Real close.

Mik: So, you were under attack?

John: Sure, sure.

Mik: What-- what-- what were those attacks like?

John: Well--like I said, when they came, I don't know what I said, but ah, when they came, they'd come and uh, one bunch and then another bunch, they'd come in waves. I mean that's the way they came--you know--and uh--just they didn't have no--there was no strategy behind it--they just figured if they kept coming and you'd run out of bullets pretty damn quick and they'd overrun ya. Which would happen a lot of times --they'd overrun ya. In fact, in them outposts, what we did when it got so bad. We had a big bunker that we could all go to--all run, scramble into--and call in our artillery right on your own position. You know call in artillery and mortars just to pound the hell out of them as if you were down in this hole. And then as soon as they quit, then you'd quick all come out of there again and clean up the area then. But, ah, it was a way of surviving cause ah--you couldn't handle it cause when they came so many there was just no way. So, if they'd come in with artillery and mortars, as soon as everybody got in that hole, and just pound the hell out of it for a while and then everybody comes out. Say five minutes of that and then you'd come out. And it worked.

Mik: So you had a land line telephone up to that position?

John: Ah, you had a wire. It was ah, it was a radio, but it was wires and then you had to have a radio. The radios weren't that good at that time. Ah, now, I mean there's so much improvement but it was mostly wires, comm wire. So they ran out to these positions, and that's how the contact was with the upper echelon you know, it was all by wire.

Mik: From where I'm sitting, that's a pretty amazing thing. You say it so matter of factly-- of when you know all these waves come in and you're overrun, you go into this bunker and then you come out--that's quite a world you were living in.

John: Yeah, well, it's a good thing you're young that's all I can say. [laughs] You can handle it when you're young. I wouldn't even want to try it now. Thinking about doing what I did was--

Mik: When they were attacking in waves like that, how many do you think there were?

John: I don't know. Two or three hundred at least, on them outposts--somethin--but there was more--and ah, I always said, I like them big Chinese, we had that Chinese Marine division in front of us for a while and they were all about probably about 6'11", 6'2" at least, and that was big for them people over there. And uh--I always told them guys, that's the kind of guys I like to see at night, them big guys, cause them little guys really could sneak up on you--they were the ones I worried about. I would rather them big guys--they made more noise and everything else--so--it was-- If I was going to pick the guy I was gonna have to fight against that night, I'd take that big guy cause I like to hear him coming or see him or something [laughing] Better than one of the little Chinese or little Korean or something like that sneakin' around on ya.

Mik: Was there a lot of that? A lot of infiltration?

John: Yeah, you got infiltration all the time, in fact, they were demoralizing, I mean that's what they tried to do; demoralize--they'd just--they'd ah, you'd have something booby-trapped and they'd take that damn booby trap apart at night in the dark, pile it all up real nice and neat for ya and show ya and tell ya that-- well, whatever you set up for them---it didn't work you know [laughs].

Mik: How--describe what the booby-trap was like--

John: Well, you set up a--oh we had a lot of booby traps--set up for--on these ah, outposts with ah, say napalm or some of that wood--where you'd get some lighting out of it, some would blow up--and they'd come sneakin in--this little traps that go to set this off. Well, we had quite a bit of that stuff. Then we had trips a lot of little mines--we mined some too but, mining, they didn't want you to do no mining cause, you know it had to be all put on record--and uh, we didn't do much, we did a little bit on our own, but not much. It was mostly, it was all put in by engineers if you will. So we'd have a--they'd have a blueprint of the area that was mined.

Mik: Cause they didn't want--

John: No.

Mik: Your forces coming back in there, not knowing where—

John: Why sure, our people getting into it.

Mik: Now, did the, ah, the Chinese and the Koreans, did they set booby traps too?

John: Yes, a lot of it--a lot of it.

Mik: I suppose that's what the point man had to--

John: That's right, you had to watch out for that and uh, these Bouncing Betties, they called them when I was there. Anyway, you could step on 'em--they'd bounce up probably about six feet and then they'd blow off, you know, so you'd get a lot of shrapnel. We had a lot of casualties from that. Another thing, ah, the guys asked me too, "What'd you wear around you feet when you--when it was so cold, and wore them bunny boots, not bunny boots, but the Mickey Mouse boots, the rubber ones. I think the bunny boot was a white boot that was leather and ah, the boot that we wore was ah, Mickey Mouse boot and that was a big, it was a clumsy boot--it wasn't really ah, you never, I don't think anybody ever froze their feet in them but, you got cold feet in them--but as soon as you'd walked a little bit. They'd get warm right away. But ah, they were so insulated that if you stepped on a land mine or something like that--a lot of times it'd save your foot cause there was enough cushion in that rubber to ah, to take the shock of that mine going off. It saved a lot of guy's feet. [long pause] I'm sure when you looked at it some of the boots were tore up boy--they took the shock, they took the shock.

Mik: And just deflected everything else?

John: Yeah, well it didn't deflect but it just--it took that initial charge or whatever it was and uh, saved a lot of guys' feet.

Mik: So, did you ever walk point?

John: Yes.

Mik: What were you concerned with most, when you were out there?

John: Well when you are out on point, the idea was to--you'd walk a little ways and stop and observe and see if you could see any movement or hear anything--set up for a while, we set up ambushes too. You also, on them patrols, we'd set up ambushes where we--knew they were working area, set up an ambush and uh, for them to come into you know. But ah, yeah, if you were on a point, it was hearing and looking for anything, any movement that you could see up ahead.

Mik: When your life depends on it, do your senses get pretty acute?

John: Yeah, you do get pretty sharp and uh, I always said, too you didn't want to carry too heavy of a weapon, cause if you got tired, then you weren't as alert as you should be. So, a light weapon was always good to carry--something that was light that you relied on and you thought it would do the job for you.

Mik: So, how did you feel emotionally when you would go out a patrol? Was it a dread thing before you went out?

John: Yeah, you got it. You got it. Ah, yeah, you know a lot of times they'd pick--they'd say at night we're only gonna send six guys out there. And uh, who was picked? You know? Probably, your ah, your ah, platoon sergeant would pick the guys and uh, sometimes you'd miss a couple of nights and then you'd hit it probably two nights in a row you'd hit it so, ah, or even three you'd go sometimes. So--it was ah, you didn't want to go. I mean really ah, but we all had flak jackets. Ah, there was a lot of people say, "Well, they ain't got flak jackets." I said, "Well, we had flak jackets." All the while I was there, we all had flak jackets and also had ah, if we knew there was going to be ah--like if had, there wasn't a lot of pants, but they had short pants, probably like this that were made out of nylon or something--that they could take shrapnel. And uh, they were important, but we couldn't always get them. That was something that was short of, they didn't have many of them but, we would get them. But flak jackets, we all wore them all the time--that was a--and a helmet, everybody had to have a helmet on all the time. You never--they always talk about--before I went into service, they says, "Well your helmet's heavy and nobody wants to carry the damn thing around." Well I'll tell you, I never seen anybody say they didn't want to carry a helmet around. It was there and it was a part of you.

Mik: So, when you're on point and you're stopping periodically and listening, what were you looking for? I mean, you were trying to see as well, what would you look for?

John: Well, you were looking for so you wouldn't walk into like an ambush or something like that they set up for you, which they did set up. I never walked into one. But ah, I think that was the big thing, you were, and you'd always kinda try and pick the ground the right part of the ground so you wouldn't be--you wouldn't be, I don't want, you don't want to get on the skyline--that, you want to stay away from that. And you didn't want to get into everything--heavy brush where you couldn't see. You always kind of picked your spot where you should go and look it over ahead a time before you went there and that'd be about--just like if you were hunting or something like that, you'd kind a of look ahead where you think you'd be the best position for you to be to handle the situation which you were in. I think of deer hunting, I saw, I do a lot of hunting and that's the same with that, you're always looking so that if you would see something you're in the right position to handle it.

Mik: Did you--it's too bad there's no hunting at night--other than that you'd be pretty good at that. [laughs]

- John: I see all these different lights they got now too, I said, I wish we would of had them when we was there--it'd been great! [laughs]
- Mik: What was the terrain like where your patrols were?
- John: We had a lot of rough--it was some--that Taebaek-Sanmaek that was a big mountain range right in front of us--and we were on the edge--in the foothills of that. It was a lot of rough ground. But the longer we were there, the more shot up there you got and open it got, but a, there was a lot of rough, real rough ground--hills, and mountains, there was small mountains, yeah.
- Mik: What kind of vegetation?
- John: Not really much. Ah, a lot of brush, small trees and that stuff. And Koreans wherever you go. If you got next to any towns or little villages up on the hill, raising rice and stuff like that but, otherwise as far as vegetation, not really a lot--not much vegetation. We a--
- Mik: Good! Fewer places to hide!
- John: Well, sure, yeah, right, right. It was better. And it was--in some ways it was good and some ways for you to hide too, if you wanted to--you know--to get behind something, there wasn't much like that here--
- Mik: So did you set up any ambushes that worked?
- John: Oh yeah, sure. We had our share that worked and probably one out of ten--fifteen that would actually work where you'd draw somebody in are something like that. A lot of em, I mean we just set em up. I don't know if it was for--to people that were telling you to set this up, if they didn't have the right information or what but, a lot, a lot of quiet nights too, there was.
- Mik: So, I suppose, if you're experienced at setting up an ambush, that helps you know what to look for when you're on point.
- John: On point, sure it does. Sure it does.
- Mik: Lookin' for places that you would pick for an ambush?
- John: You'd pick for a, that's right, so you'd wouldn't want to walk into a spot like that--you'd go around it or something like that--right.
- Mik: So, you were in the rear on the night you got your Silver Star.
- John: Um hum.

Mik: And, and what happened?

Videographer: I think I am going to stop in here for one second. I'm going to change tapes. **[End of Tape WCKOR041]**

Mik: Now if you don't want to talk about--

John: Other--very little stuff bothers me, yeah.

Mik: So you said you were in the rear and you were on a patrol that night and what do you remember happening?

John: Well, we just kind of more or less, probably walked into an ambush--that time. And ah--and we had a lot of casualties and ah--so the front was probably--but then it was--everybody was in, we were gettin' by ah--they were throwing a lot of hand grenades and everything was getting thrown around there. And then we had a lot of casualties. And then we ah--when we pulled back, I was the last one to leave that position. And ah--like I say, I think we had one or two MIA's that night. And ah--so we were on a--the reason we all went back to the same spot then. We went back there one more time that night and we didn't find our missing people. So the next day we're on this high position looking down into this kind of valley where this all went on, took place. And we could see a guy down there moving his hand, or moving his arm. And what they had, a guy set up for us to, they knew we'd be looking for this guy so they had a guy laying there more or less. And they couldn't believe he was a Marine, ya know and ah-- So the next night--I and a couple of other guys, we volunteered to go back to same spot from a different position though we thought we could sneak up on the place ya know, and ah--it wasn't. It was a Korean, it wasn't our man.

Mik: So was he there as a decoy?

John: Sure, yeah. Yeah, we snuck right up to him and he, he was more surprised than anybody was.

Mik: And I suppose when you got out of the firefight, realized you were missing a couple of guys, so then you went back to see if they were wounded or--

John: Yeah, we tried, when we got by, pulled back probably a couple hundred yards then got ourselves organized and went back again. And ah--like I said, we didn't find our people there. They were taken prisoner, I'm sure, but I never did, I tried, I wanted to. One of the guys that were ah--was taken that night was MIA. His parents--and--I was in contact with them for sometime after that, but that, I lost that contact too. I really don't know what happened to him.

Mik: What did it say on your citation for the Silver Star?

- John: I don't know, you didn't read it. Ah--it's in that--it just said you went out of your way or volunteered, which ya didn't have to do. And ah--I don't know, like I said, there was just a couple of us that volunteered to go out there and see if we could get the guy back and no--so--
- Mik: You just gave me an idea. See, it doesn't matter what I've seen or read, it's what I get in the interview. So if you could here a minute, Butch.
- John: "For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity while serving as a rifleman of Company E, 2nd Battalion of 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division Reinforced. In action against enemy aggressor forces in Korea on 10th, April 1953. Participating as a member of a combat patrol, operating fire forward of mainline resistance when the unit was attacked by a numerically superior hostile forces, which inflicted casualties on all of our members of these fire team. Private 1st Class Breske rushed from his position to administrate first aid to his wounded comrades and for--after assuring himself of their safety. Fearlessly advanced in the face of withering hail of enemy grenades, small arms, and mortar fire to a firing position located extremely close to enemy. Continuously exposing himself to the hostile fire, he delivered accurately and damaging returning fire to cover the evacuation of casualties. And steadfastly remained in position to repel the savage enemy attack, which threatened to overrun the patrol. When the patrol had disengaged, he was last man to withdraw from the point of contact. Later during the night, he voluntarily guided another patrol as it searched a scene of a previous action for missing members of his stricken unit. By ah-- his indomitable fighting spirit, courageous initiative and selfish devotion to the duty. Pvt. 1st class Breske service inspired all who observed him and upheld the highest tradition of the United States Naval Service."
- Mik: That sounded a little more--
- John: Well, yeah, you put the--I think, you know, you and this goes on--you and you just later on admit stuff. You just take it for granted. I think a lot stuff, I just-- some of the stuff I should be doing. That's what I said to myself. And I ah-- as far as me drinking and doing anything after I get done drinking I don't like to do anything after I drink. Hunt, fish, or anything, when I drink, I'm just gonna drink, I ain't gonna, I'm no hunter, I'm no fisherman I know that after I have one beer even. I lose my, I just ah-- what--I'm not like I should be. One beer just changes my--not that I get--I mean that people didn't--but I know I'm not the same person.
- Mik: Well, I think that's what they call a cheap date [laughs]. Only one beer.
- John: It does the job. I figure if one beer doesn't do the job, I'm drinking too much. [Laughs]
- Mik: You sure wouldn't want to go out on patrol after you had a beer would you?
- John: No, no, no.

- Mik: So you were saying that ah--you just did what you thought you should be doing?
- John: I think when anybody that gets these ah--citation like that, for something like that, I think most people would probably do the same thing I did, I think. Cuz ah-- it's something you think you should be doing. I mean, you ain't gonna back down, you ain't gonna--you're there and you might as well do the job. And ah--one thing I can say, when it really got tough going, I kinda cooled down, I think I was--I could handle it. But I mean it was like some people really blow up, ya know. They can't handle tough spots. And I think I--that's where I probably excelled and I got ah-- when it was really hot, I could think good and clear, could handle it.
- Mik: So you said you were in the rear and you were holding that so that people could get past, but the citation sounds like you ran forward and--
- John: Well, you know you gonna help, you were gonna do, you know, you'd do different things. I'm sure there's more to it than ah--well, like I said, we had guys that were really banged up and needed our help, and this and trying to do that. And probably-- usually we always had a corpsman with us too. On these patrols we always had a corpsman. And ah--you can call them what you thought, what, what was wrong with the guy or something and things like that. But ah-- corpsman was a pretty important guy in your unit, I'll tell you that. Got to be quite close to them, and they sure saved a lot of guys. By knowing what to do. First aid, ya know.
- Mik: Yeah, you wanted that corpsman to be there didn't you?
- John: You damn right. Big help.
- Mik: You say you always had a corpsman with you, what was the make up of a squad for a patrol?
- John: Well, you ah--well, you could, you could go up as high as probably-- you could have a ah-- whole company going on patrol, but most of the time we went with, our patrols were probably ten, twelve guys and usually you always had a corpsman with you. And ah--a corpsman ah--you had one corpsman per company. And ah--so our, yeah, no--platoon, one corpsman per platoon. So that'd be like three firing squads, that be one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, like ah-- nine or ten squads and you would have one corpsman. He was assigned that. So it was pretty good. I'd say.
- Mik: And then everybody just has a rifle or was there?
- John: We had different--you had your kind of a choice of guns. I carried one on patrols. I carried a Browning shotgun with buckshot, which was illegal. I knew that, but that's what he gave us. 'Cause it was a good, it was good to carry that cause I was a, a grouse hunter and pheasant hunter and all that stuff. So that gun was pretty much a

part of me, I knew it really good. So I didn't mind carrying that, in fact I like carrying that at night. It was ah-- it was a good gun. Ah-- you could rely on it and ah-- you know, you got that spread, what, it was about nine pellets per shell. So when you shot that into the dark, you, it was good fire power. And we had grease guns, which was a, a grease gun to me, well, I wouldn't carry it because it was too much, too many malfunctions in it. So I didn't like that gun at all. And we had ah-- we had the regular ah-- Thomson submachine guns, we had them. That was pretty well liked. Ah--we had, well let me see, we had I knew we had a couple guys would always carry the BAR, Browning Automatic Rifle, and then M-2 Carbines and M-1's. You kind of had your choice--if you felt better with something then nobody bothered you on that.

Mik: Did your shotgun use a clip or just individual?

John: It was a five shot automatic, that's what they were. Got a magazine.

Mik: And then what else did you carry?

John: I carried the M-2 Carbine. I like that, kinda like that because it was, it was ah--it shot, it got a lot of fire power there and it was nice and light. I kinda like that lightness.

Mik: But I mean when you'd go out and on patrol, what else did you carry besides the shotgun.

John: Shotgun, I said the M-2 Carbine, M-1 Carbine, BAR.

Mik: But you individually. When you would get ready to go on patrol, what would you carry?

John: Well, if two guys--two guys would carry a Browning automatic, and that's kinda heavy, and that's, you got a lot of shells where you can carry a lot of shells with that. Ah--the M-2 Carbine, you probably carry two banana clips, probably three banana clips you'd have, which was thirty rounds and, say that'd be sixty rounds in a taped to back clip, OK? Ah--the M-1, you probably carried ah--hundred rounds or something that with you. And everybody carried a couple hand grenades. I always had a couple, three, four, five--you carried three, four hand grenades.

Mik: How was your aim with the grenade?

John: With the what?

Mik: With the grenade?

John: I'll tell you, you threw them at night, they were ah--I think what we used them more is to kind of ah--keep away from your position or kinda to ah--kinda out smart 'em.

I mean to use 'em, work 'em toward one of the side of you or something like that. If you saw where the action was, you could do some the other way just to--but we threw 'em down the hill a lot. I mean that was it, but on patrol it was a little different than when you're in a permanent position. Then it was a little different, throwing 'em.

Mik: Oh, when you're at the outpost?

John: Yeah, when you're at the outpost, that's different.

Mik: And when you're under attack, then you're tossing them?

John: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's, that's a lot different. But ya know, you're out on patrol, it's something you probably are throwing 'em to keep 'em so you don't have to sneak up on the side or something like that, ya know. That's what I do, most of the time, that's what I used 'em for.

Mik: I think you'd probably wanna be pretty quiet on a patrol too.

John: Sure.

Mik: You wouldn't want things banging around on you.

John: Oh, no, no, no.

Mik: And you said you wanted to stay pretty light.

John: Right.

Mik: Didn't want to get tired.

John: Right. That was a, I think, a big factor, you don't want to get so you're tired then you would get slipshod and, you know, wouldn't do the job.

Mik: How long would a patrol normally last?

John: Sometimes from ah--you'd start right after dark and wouldn't come back till goes to daylight again. But then most of them were three--four hour deals.

Mik: I suppose if you're setting up an ambush, you'd better take all night.

John: Sure. Well, it's ah--it all depends how cold it was. It was really cold, you could only set one up for probably two, three hours at the most. Then you had to come out of that, because you couldn't. We were well camouflaged, ya know, we had white clothes in winter time when they had white snow, ya know. We had ah--white

uniforms for that. But I'd say at night when it was cold, couple hours, maybe tops at your patrol area--set up ambush for--

Mik: How'd you feel when you came back from patrol? What did you do?

John: Well, ah--I think we probably would eat a little something and we'd, as soon as it got daylight, we'd ah-- most of us would--that's when you take a break. Crawl in the sleeping bag or something, ya know.

Mik: But would you feel this sense of relief when you had come back?

John: Well, yeah you were glad you got back. I mean you made it again, ya know, and and ah--like I say, always questioning what's happening to the rest of your close friends, ya know. How they did--made the night through and some of that. You'd have your little rehearsal in the morning--what went on that night before. Get up to the lieutenant and sometimes, they'd call you back, you'd have to go back to, to ah-- and ah--get interviewed by the higher ups in back unit. And also the, we had that Stars and Stripes would, would hit you for--wanted to know what the other casualties were and some of that, you know. But that would go right on early in the morning, right away and when you--and most of the guys wanted to go to sleep cuz you were up for probably twelve, thirteen hours at least, ya know. So if you eat something, you were ready to take a break.

Mik: Well, when you were debriefed like that, was it everybody or just the--

John: No, they'd pick the two--three guys that were probably in the most, in the hottest part of it or something like that, and they'd interview you. It was different. A lot of times you were ah--the highest ranking guy in your squad or patrol, or what, he'd get debriefed. You had a lot of times you had, we had an officer with us, like a 2nd lieutenant with us usually. And usually the 2nd lieutenant went on these patrols too.

Mik: Did you have any contact with any of the other UN Forces?

John: Yeah, ah--the Turks, we were tied in with them for awhile once. Ah--Canadians, ah--I'd say the Canadians and the Turks actually that's the closest ones I got to were really where I was gonna talk to 'em or, ya know. It was at--then we had a lot of other divisions, Army Divisions, I ran into a lot of guys that--in fact I run into a few guys I knew. That were in like the 25th Army Division. And ah-- the 24th, and 25th, they were tied in with us quite a bit.

Mik: What were the Turks like?

John: Well, the Turks, everybody said they were such a great fighters, ya know, and they had all these knives hanging out of them and that stuff--'n I said the only thing I figured out about them Turks is they smelt damn strong. They never took a bath, ya know, they'd clean up. They were a dirty bunch of guys, but they were supposed to

be rough, but they got pushed around too just like everybody else. There were Turk casualties n' they lost ground too and took it back. So I'd say the Turks were definitely no better unit than anybody else.

Mik: And what does that mean when you say you were tied in with them?

John: Well, you're tied in like I say like ah--our right flank would be tied in with the 24th or something like that, ya know. And other end was on left flank would be with the 25th or something like that. You always had some kind of contacts.

Mik: I see. So it's where you're overlapping the--

John: Yeah, right.

Mik: Along the MLR or--

John: Right.

Mik: And what about the Canadians? What'd you think of them?

John: Well, they were all right. I think ah-- it was, I think what we liked about the Canadians, if you ever wanted to buy anything, ah--if you wanted to have a party or something like that, which when we got back in reserves like that, you, once in a while we'd buy a bottle of booze or some gin. They always had gin and vodka and stuff like that. They always had some booze them guys did. Which we were trading them for some--probably our cigarettes or something like that. I never smoked, so we always had a lot of cigarettes there. When we got--they all gave us cigarettes when we were there, that's the only reason--though. I said the only reason I used them was for bartering with them or to buy something else. So Canadians were--I think they had it a little better than we did. And I think I drank--even drank when they had a little, they had some little tea set ups over there where they-- where you could get a little--get some cookies and tea [laughs] that they had back in their division, ya know. So I did hit that a little bit once in awhile.

Mik: Go for your afternoon tea.

John: Yeah. Right.

Mik: What--when you were up on the ah-- at the outposts, what was the food like?

John: Well, we, out there I ate very little hot meals. And that year I was there, very few--mostly C-rations and A-rations. That's what we live on, us guys did. It wasn't ah--and we'd get eggs every once in awhile, we'd get some eggs, we'd boil them up, my mother would send me Spam ah--stuff like that the guys would get stuff like that. But we didn't ah--we lived on mostly rations.

Mik: Was there--

John: Christmas time or ah-- Thanksgiving or something like that, we'd get a hot meal, but it was never hot. It was, but they were supposed to be hot meals, but by the time we got it, it wasn't hot--so not really, no. We ah--we had very few hot meals. But we got back from reserves then we'd have, they'd have some these portable set ups, ya know, where you could get hot food. But when you're on the front or there was very little.

Mik: Was the food always there when you on the outpost?

John: Yeah, we, I don't think I, I ever got ever really hungry, but ya know, you were getting ah--sick of eating the same stuff all the time. But you could eat, ya know, C-ration, there's was always a can of fruit in there. And ah--a lot of things we just, we just discarded them. I mean they, nobody ate 'em. But beans and franks, we ate that and we could eat that probably three times a week at least and, and ah--and there was always hot chocolate. You could make ah--like Nestles or something like them deals where you could mix with water and--so hot chocolate, that was something we, most of the guys didn't get sick of that. They like that. And salt rations were a little different, there was some meat in there. Ah--salt ration was ah-- probably a little more protein in there. And ah--I don't think you would eat them everyday, but we eat 'em probably once a week or twice a week, that's salt ration there, was a little different than a C-ration. A C-ration was what we mostly lived on though.

Mik: That was daytime activity. Eating and--

John: Yup, eating and, morning and, morning and ah--evening ah--we'd eat.

Mik: I'm still so caught up with this image of being overrun and running into your deep bunker and calling in the artillery.

John: It was actually a good feeling there, when it got so bad that you could always-- get to our--boom, everybody goes in and just--everybody's in there in a hell of a hurry, don't take very long and you're in there. And then you're controlling this artillery. It was great. It was survival. Well, you'd make it otherwise you'd have never made it.

Mik: And then what would you find when you came out?

John: Well, there'd be a lot of dead, they, they'd have a lot of, I mean because they weren't really ready for that, I don't think. And ah--especially if they threw that, like Willy Peter which, they called it, it was white phosphorus, you'd throw that in, ya know, that's, that's damn tough stuff. It's ah-- if you ah--even if you're laying in a hole, that stuff comes down like this and just gets on you, you're ah--you've got a problem. And they'd throw that in a lot of times. And that really was demoralizing, that stuff was damn tough on 'em.

- Mik: And then what would happen at daylight when you had all these casualties around you?
- John: Well, then you could--people got back and they really took you back fast. Ah--you gotta ah-- on these little helicopters, one in ah--guy on each. They'd hook you on the other side, ya know, fly you back to a med station probably a couple miles back, three miles or so back and you get first aid there and from there they'd ah--some, I was operated on in one of those. Ah--but then, then from there they'd take you back to a hospital ship, fly you back to a hospital ship. And you got to the hospital ship, you figured you got it made then--
- Mik: You were wounded twice on the last day of the war, but you were wounded once before that?
- John: That was when I first got over that. I got hit with shrapnel.
- Mik: Tell me about that.
- John: Well, I had one piece, one piece went right here, ah--this here ear, you can hardly see the scar, but this was kinda tore off, on that one, one piece of shrapnel there. Then I had some pieces in the face and ah-- I think that, the brunt was taken on that flak jacket. So, that probably saved me from getting ah--banged up more than what it was.
- Mik: Now was that in the trench or on patrol or--
- John: That was on patrol.
- Mik: Tell me about that.
- John: Well, we just got ah--in the spot where I think it was kind of a moonlight night that night, it was. Moonlight--and we got in this spot and they must have had that zeroed in. And somebody called in mortars when we got in that spot and we just got hammered, ya know, because we walked into a bad spot there.
- Mik: What do you do when that starts happening?
- John: Well, you try and lay as flat as you can. That's about the biggest thing. When mortars are coming, and they had a lot of duds. I wouldn't say a lot of duds, but I'd say probably one out of five would be a dud. I'd stand there in their mortars in which I didn't really think. Things were coming down there making a, "Sssshh!!!" Like that's going and all of sudden it thumps, and when it does that, it don't go off while you're pretty god damn happy, and I had several of them close to me that went dumped and nothin' happened. They didn't go off. I remember that plain as day, one of them damn things would just--it's getting hotter, and it's getting closer and all

of sudden "Boom," and nothing happened [laughs]. That's a good feeling. You thinking well that's damn good thing they didn't know how to make weapons, mortars or whatever, cuz they, they didn't all go off. Maybe it being more than one of five, probably one out of four that they had problems with. They had their problems with their equipment.

Mik: And then when they would go off, what was it?

John: Well, it goes up, ya know, so it's, actually you could be pretty quite close to ah--round that when a mortar hits, and if you'd have your helmet towards it or if you'd be laying nice and flat, you'd be, you'd probably get a hell of a lot concussion, but you ain't gonna--nothing's gonna hit you.

Mik: So that was what you felt the concussion of the air went over head?

John: Sure, yeah, you could.

Mik: Was it loud?

John: Loud, yeah. We had a lot of ah--we had a lot of close support from ah--from airplanes too. We had that ah--Corsair, which could--was--they could fly that right down and really give you a good close support with that. The jets weren't much, but ah--we had jets for support too. But the jets, ya know, they fly too fast. And ah, to hit us spot with these bombs, with them flying low, it was, I don't think they, well, it was too effective 'cause they dropped a bomb--they say if you were here, the main line of resistance was here and they were over there. I mean ah-- they dropped the bombs when they'd come in, they'd drop the bombs back here some place and you would see them things go carting over you. You know so it was, I'm sure they weren't too accurate, but demoralizing, that's what was the biggest thing with them, with the jets, but the Corsairs could really put it 'em on the spot. That was a prop driven plane, pretty good. I think Ted Williams was ah--in fact he was flying them when I was there. And in fact I had the same--when I was on--that last time I was hit, I was on the hospital ship, USS Haven and ah--my doctor was--had Ted Williams for a patient too. So he'd see Williams first then he'd come to see me. And then he'd always tell me because he knew I played baseball and that was something he was going to tell me, but Ted Williams' voice--"the arrogant son of a," ya know, he'd--he was, Ted Williams a tough guy to handle, but boy he was miserable because ya know, he got called in twice. When you're right in your prime of your baseball career and somebody calls you back twice. I think it was rotten, I mean--pull a guy back in twice. And he was--that's when he was really playing good baseball. And that was a--spend him--I suppose probably took four, five years out of his, out of his baseball career.

Mik: So he was kinda bitter about that?

- John: You damn right and, that's why he was--that's why the doctor says he was really hard to handle. He crashed a plane ah--the jet and that's how he was. I dunno why he crashed, what the reason--accident was about. But anyway, he was crashed, and he was hurt, and he was on the same ship I was.
- Mik: Could you get close to air support at night?
- John: No, we didn't get much air support at night no, no. Just--we got artillery. And ah--mortars, that's all you had for support.
- Mik: So tell me about ah--you're on patrol, you get wounded, and then how did you get back to the--?
- John: We usually carry a couple stretchers with us. Ah--the ones you could break down kind of, ya know? We always had a couple of them along and ah--that's what you'd do, you'd carry 'em back on a stretcher, and the guys was--
- Mik: Did they carry you?
- John: Ah--yeah--I got carried that last time I was hit, I got carried, but ah--
- Mik: But not the first time?
- John: No.
- Mik: You walked out?
- John: Yeah.
- Mik: Were you evacuated that time?
- John: Yeah. But ah--it wasn't, like I said, I could handle myself. I could've the last time too when I was hit, I could've walked back if I had to, but I think the loss of blood--I was a little weak and that's what my problem was. I got there otherwise--I could've walked out too that time. **[End of Tape WCKOR042]**
- Mik: So you started to tell me something, you had thought of something and was it talking about being wounded or--did you say you were operated on after that one in one of the field hospitals?
- John: Ah ah--yes, I was in that ah--the last time was I was hit I was--it was kind of be--ya know, there was a lot of casualties. And ah--in a way, what went on is that last like, it was kinda, I think it was kinda stupid that everybody was gettin' rid of their ammunition cuz they knew the war was gonna end. So the Chinese and the Koreans, they were throwing everything out and the Americans were. We were throwing all our stuff into--and it was daylight I think for three days. And I don't

think I've seen any darkness then through last three days. It was just, the sky was just completely, everything fireworks, there was fireworks. And ah--anyway when we went back--

Mik: That's something I was gonna ask you about. It seemed like the fighting was really heavy for the war coming to an end.

John: Yeah, it was.

Mik: You said you were wounded twice on the last day.

John: Yeah, it was kinda, I thought it was kinda stupid because why, I mean, they knew it was gonna end, why ah--throw all them stuff out there and that'd mean more guys are gettin' hit and wounded and killed and you know what should have been. They should have just shut her down at twelve o'clock at night or something, that's what they shoulda did, but it wasn't till--I was evacuated before it ah-- before it was really ah--I think it was eight o'clock in the morning--I think when it was, when they shut it down, ya know. Then everybody just went and picked up their dead, the guys told me in. And ah--even the--talked to one or other, ya know it was kind of a--just like, I was damn glad it was over. Just like a baseball game or a football game or anything else. Everybody kind of shook hands, and was glad it was over with [laughs]. I was--I didn't see that, I was evacuated before that.

Mik: But they had announced ahead of time?

John: Yea, we knew it. We knew it was gonna end. We knew it that night about 12 o'clock I'd say. Eleven--twelve o'clock we--they said there was--armistice would be tomorrow morning at eight o'clock.

Mik: But it had been two or three days?

John: Yeah, a lot of- it was really hot. A lot of artillery n' mortars n', it was--there was a lot a, lot of casualties taken in the last two days.

Mik: So tell me about when you got shot that last night.

John: Well, cuz I was hit with shrapnel about probably ten-thirty--eleven o'clock at night. I got bandaged up and ah-- there was so many more casualties that ah-- I was, I went back with that, I shouldn't went back with it, but anyway see, then I ah--when I got shot, ah--they, we were kinda over around at that point and ah--this guy shot from back of me. I was shot at from the back of me more or less. So ah--like I said, before I was looking this way where I should, shoulda been coming from and then this guy came in the back and shot me there. But ah--that, I said, that's when I went "Woo! That really hurt, hurt me a lot." Otherwise, all the other ones I could handle, but not too much. And there's--I think a problem when you get hit, I can see why people go into--some people go into shock and ah-- the shock comes from loss of

blood, I think you lose--you get a little weak. And I know I was gettin'--when I was laying back there I was, I was a little dizzy or whatever. I knew I was probably gonna have a little problem with shock and tried to talk myself out of it or whatever it is, ya know. You gotta--ah—it's something I didn't ever think--I'd ever have a problem with, but I did.

Mik: What did the arm feel like? I mean you said--

John: I thought it was gone, when I first got hit, I thought that the arm was gone and ah--when I found that she was still dangling or something [laughs]. I felt it was pretty good. But ah--when I got, when I went--when they got me back to that aid station, ah, they brought, they knew the war was over so the doctors were celebrating too. Ya know they were having a good time about it then when they brought this--I was layin' on a on this stretcher or a cot like and then they had this doctor come in and he says, "Get him ready," he says n' he laid down right along side of me and and took a little nap. He woke up and I knew he was drinking. Then he got up and he operated on my arm and that's-- I had no problems, it was--he did a good job, the guy did a good job, even if he had a few drinks [laughs], it didn't bother me any [laughs].

Mik: So he wasn't like you, he apparently still had his faculties?

John: Yeah, yeah he was, he must have been able to handle it. [laughs]

Mik: And what did they do to your arm?

John: Just ah--they opened it up and took the ah--make sure a couple bullets still in that one and they ah--and there was that shrapnel. We removed that shrapnel too. He really went over me. And ah--they packed ah-- like my--leg and back, then once they packed 'em with ah--I don't know, I think the reason they packed 'em, I never did ask them doctors, but they opened the wounds up, cleaned them out real good, then they packed with a, some-- they packed 'em. And they left 'em like that for three or four days. Then they, before they sewed 'em up. And I think they were worried about hemorrhagic fever at that time cuz ah--anytime you get hit with shrapnel these, that shrapnel pushes the clothes, ya know your, dungaree or whatever it is. They'll would push that into the wound and, and there was so many rats around there and that's what is carrying that hemorrhagic fever. So I think they were worried about ah, you getting that hemorrhagic fever from that dirty clothes. Or ya know, wound. The shrapnel itself was clean cuz it was hot. So no problem there, and the bullets were no problem, but where that cloth that was pushed into this wound could give you, and there was, we lost guys from having a hemorrhagic fever and it was, it was ah--very common to have guys make it through being hit or something and then get ah-- hemorrhagic fever and die from that. So I think that was the reason for, that--they packed them wounds like that.

Mik: Did you ever get to ride in the helicopter?

John: Yeah.

Mik: After that, after the field hospital or--

John: The field hospital, after the field hospital I went back to where the hospital ship on a copter, yeah. Yeah, they put you in a sack on the outside, ya know. Later if you're gonna. Actually, all that stuff you think you'd be scared of some of the stuff, you know. It'd bother you, but it don't bother you because you roll with the punches. That's the way you're gonna go. You ain't got no choice, that's what, how do I go back [laughs].

Mik: So what time of year was that when the armistice was signed?

John: It was July 23rd, I think.

Mik: So at least it was a warm trip.

John: Yeah, yeah, it was warm, it was good then. A lot of rain we were having, I think then. I can remember--a lot of rain.

Mik: What were the--you said that you were pretty well equipped and you didn't get that cold in the winter.

John: No, we had ah--we had pretty decent clothes, I think the only thing that really gave me trouble was feet. Ah--ya know them Mickey Mouse boots as I said, n' they were ah--what happened if you'd walk in 'em, it was like a, they were like, I'd say they were a lot like a vacuum bottle, like a hot water bottle. You had two, two layers of rubber and then you had the insulation between, and what would happen, your feet would sweat so much and you'd, you'd be walking in water after you walked, you just, your feet would get all shriveled up, ya know. That was the bad thing about 'em, but they had some good points too, like I told you ah--you step on a land mine or something, it'd probably save your foot. And ah--if your feet did get cold, all you had to do was get up and walk, and if you could walk some they'd warm up again, ya know. So they were probably the best at that time that was out there for you.

Mik: But if it's winter and your feet are cold and you're down in the trench or trying to stay out of sight, getting up and walking isn't that easy.

John: No, no, not easy. But even, like I said if we could've changed socks or, ya know something like that, if we'd have more socks or anything like that, but ya know everybody says ya know ah--United States they got everything that is top notch, but ah--I believe that our guys doubt a little bit when they get in combat and that's how, I don't think they got everything they should have. You know socks should have been something that you can always grab a pair of socks any damn time you wanted and change them. But I wore socks a lot of times three, four days, even longer.

Mik: So, after you got to the hospital ship, how long did it take for you to recover?

John: Well I was in a hospital ship ah-- I'd say about, well, the first time I was on a hospital ship, I was on the *Jutlandia*, the first time I was hit, that was a Danish ship. And ah-- they ah-- that was their, what they ah-- donated or, that was their part of the country gave to the war was ah--this hospital ship. It was a luxury liner, I remember that was a beautiful ship. And they made it into a hospital ship. And that's what they sent over. And they had real nice nurses on there, and so as soon as you start lookin' at the nurses, your ass was gone, you were gone, you were off [laughs]. Half the guys kept his eyes closed and if you're not lookin' at these women, you probably stayed there a couple extra days. But then we didn't lay on there very long, you were gone. And ah--on our last ship was on that hospital ship, that was the *USS Haven*. That was all men. I think there, there was a few nurses on there, there was a few nurses on there. I think when I got back was--in fact that some nurses that ah--cleaned me up when I got back to hang around that's, that's the only time I'd seen her too.

Mik: So did you come back on the hospital ship?

John: No, I came back on a hospital airplane. They flew me--from Korea they flew to Japan, I was on in a hospital ship, hospital in Japan outside of Tokyo for, I dunno, couple of weeks. And then they, on a, they flew us back to California.

Mik: The first time you got wounded and you were on the hospital ship, how did you feel about going back to the front?

John: Well, I knew it was inevitable I was gonna go back. I mean it was, it wasn't even ah-- it was a break. It was a break to get outta there for a while [laughs]. Usually get--we ah--there was one guy that was really ah--I wish I knew more about the Jewish religion cuz I'd a probably joined him cuz we had one Jewish--and he was ah--he must have been a good Jew cuz he went to church every week. And it took him two days to go back and it took him two days to come back up to the front [laughs]. He was [laughs] traveling all the time, going back for his services. I says, "I wish I would've been a Jew," cuz I could--got about four days outta the week to get out of it. Yeah, he was gone two days back and two days comin' back to the front again. So, he probably had three days on the front outta the week [laughs]. Pretty good set up. Well, that's funny, he wanted to go to church, and they didn't--never stopped ya.

Mik: You talked about being young and that's what it took to be there and do that. Did you ever remember being scared at all?

John: Definitely, yeah. Yeah, when you would move your toes in your shoe, and they, they kept shooting at you and then they'd shoot at you again, ya know, you don't do anything. You weren't low enough or something' was wrong. Somebody could see some movement. Ah--yeah, I was scared a lot of times. But I think I handled it ah--

I really got--if I could have any kind of leeway there I--ya know, to sneak around anything, I was, I felt good about it. I never ah--I've seen guys that couldn't handle it. Ya know, just go nuts like kinda more or less, and you'd have to really get after 'em, cuz they'd give your position away or something like that, ya know, couldn't handle it. We had a few of them.

Mik: Did you learn how to keep yourself alive?

John: Yeah, you did.

Mik: Did you find the replacements when they came in sometimes doesn't last very long?

John: Well, that's right. You had guys that would come in there. We had ah--we had three guys that came in there at one time, I dunno, I'd say it was in the middle of time I was over, probably wasn't, probably about two-thirds of my time over there. We had, we had replacements come in, and they, every once in awhile they gave an announcement that anybody that was 17 years old did not have to be on the front lines. And they, there was a lot of kids were lying [about] their ages at that time, and they'd be in there. So, we had three of 'em in our company. And I told 'em, I says, "If I was you guys, I would get the hell out." That you could monkey with them for six months after you could tell they were gettin' low and charge 'em up and all that stuff. These twelve-volt batteries now, when they're done, they're done. You don't get nothing.

Mik: So you were telling about the seventeen-year-olds up on the--

John: Okay, like I said, I told them, "If I was you guys, I would, I would just." But they'd give 'em a job and ah--ya know back maybe ten miles or something like that in the supply or anything like that. And we, we lost all three of them guys in one night. All three of 'em. And they coulda been, like I said, they coulda went back. And I dunno if it was inexperience or what, I wouldn't say really on that, I don't know.

Mik: When you were back after your year over there, 13 months, is that what you said? Do you think it changed you any?

John: I really don't think ah--it changed me too much. Probably grew up a little bit, but--I mean I didn't feel like I'm back that ah-- ah-- I didn't need a welcome party or nothing like that. I mean I was, I was just glad to come back n' I ah-- when I went in, there was two other fellows, went in right from my home out there. And both of them were killed. So ah--I thought I was pretty damn happy to come back.

Mik: Where was your home?

John: Ah-- Well, Elderon is ah-- the township and it's there, well, our mail comes through Eland there, ya know, there's little towns out there. East of town here about twenty miles out.

- Mik: A lot of people that we've talked to say they felt forgotten, that nobody paid any attention to that war--
- John: Well, they did, they did. Ah, but I didn't ah--I don't know, I get a little recognition again when I got back, ya know. People were good to me, I mean they were--I had a lot of friends n' ah-- people were very ah--like I said, I got all my ah--the guy in the hotel in Eland, he--my girlfriend and I, we'd go there and we got free meals. I don't know how long he fed us for cripes sake. I couldn't believe how long he was--giving us dinners ya know, n' stuff like that. Every bar, you'd go in the bar, they'd buy me a drink. It was probably from about six months after I got back. I got a lot of, I had a lot of good ah--good times and ah--people were ah, very receptive, ya know, I thought.
- Mik: Maybe it depends on the community you're from?
- John: Yeah, that's right. I'm sure, I'm sure. Yeah--
- Mik: Sounds like you're from a very supportive--
- John: Yea. They were, they were very supportive.
- Mik: And I think rural communities are often like that. Everybody knows each other.
- John: Yeah, everybody knows--right.
- Mik: I wanted to know a little bit more about the end of the war. I mean the 13th month, it ended, but all that time, those negotiations were going on, how did you feel about that?
- John: Well, we ah--we had a hill that overlooked at Panmunjom and you could, with binoculars, you could watch real plain. And yeah--our guys would come, our side would come there in helicopters. They'd go, come flying in there and then these j--ah--the Koreans where they'd come in some black cars. I don't know what kind they were, but they were--looked to me like they were all black cars, or a good sized black car. And they'd come to this, you'd see 'em pull in there and they'd meet n' sometimes they were in there five minutes, sometimes they were in there ten minutes, and out they all come away they go again. Well, in the, and then we'd get the Stars and Stripes, which would probably be, four five days later, we'd get the Stars and Stripes paper, and they'd tell us what was going on at Panmunjom. Well, we knew it, we knew what was going on, better than they did, cuz we were watching it everyday. And at anytime you could watch what had happened there so, you know it was nothing was gonna happen. I mean--when they met for five minutes or something like that, you knew nothing was gonna come out of it.
- Mik: On the other hand, if they met longer, did you get your hopes up?

- John: Well, that's right, you would. And then they'd, you always, the word is always out, you know, you're gonna get relieved by some division or they're gonna take this out to the home or--always. I heard that from the day I got there. Ya know--it didn't ever happen [laughs]. Everybody was just wishful thinking. Where does this come from? Where'd you hear this from? And somebody just made it up I think, n' that kept the troops happy [laughs].
- Mik: So you were probably a lot better off just to focus on what you were there to do and not worry about it if it was under--
- John: That's right, that's right. But we were always, everybody was hopin' it would end, ya know. There was no question about that, you hopin' it would end. I think we even voted for Eisenhower that most of those guys did. I think at that time ah--I think that was, everybody voted absentee ballots [laughs]. I can remember that, and ah--I voted for Eisenhower I think, that's when this, that must have been ah-- when the election was that year. So--
- Mik: And is that because he said he would end it?
- John: I dunno, really I don't know, we didn't get that much good information on that, but, everybody thought it was a different, ya know, this is a different regime going in or something like that--could change ya know, that's all I can say. Cuz, we didn't hear no ah-- no politicians talking or telling what they were gonna do--we never heard any of that, ya know.
- Mik: Did you ever wonder why you were there or was it pretty clear to you? I mean, not just you personally, but the military?
- John: Ah--well, I mean, we had meetings before we left the States even about tell you what was happening. We were those guys that had, came back that'd tell ya about it. So we kinda knew what we were in for and what I think that pretty much everybody accepted it.
- Mik: And you thought it was worthwhile?
- John: Yeah, yeah.
- Mik: It was a job that had to be done?
- John: Sure, that's the way you felt, yeah. We were there, so--I know I don't think I ah--I felt that we shouldn't have been there or anything. I didn't feel that way.
- Mik: You sound like a good Marine?

John: [Laughs] I don't know. I think the--you do ah--you really respect the guys next to you and you respect the Corps n' think about it. I think--it was good training I think and I--anybody that says that you don't need that training, you definitely needed training and ah--their training is nothing compared to when you get in combat. It's a hell of a lot tougher. So you can't take training, you ain't gonna take the rest of it either.

Mik: The Marines carried a lot of the weight there didn't they?

John: Well, I think they did, but ah--you don't know. I mean I talked to different guys who were in these Army units. They had some, they had tough going too. So--I think everybody took their ah--share of it wherever you were. It didn't seem like they'd hit one area, hop, it'd be hotter than hell for awhile then that would be left lonely, they'd hit another area, ya know n' so. I wouldn't say that ah--we had it any tougher than any other units that were there.

Mik: Were there any fun times?

John: I'd say ah--the only fun times us guys really had was when you'd come back from the front. And ah--the first two days they always left you a later on party, we'd get a little beer. We didn't get much beer to drink though. We got a little beer--you'd probably get a case a beer, that was your allotment or something like that. And ah--as far as I felt, a little hard liquor you could get from the Canadians. But ah--you would get to the third day already, you were back in training again because, you get--I even asked the officers, I says, "What the heck's the deal? Give us a little break." I was gettin' sick of that after I was there about ten months dealing with that. And then ah--he explained what happened. He said, "We'll leave you guys lay around." He says, "They'll be gettin' in fights n' and ah--raising hell. So you gotta keep 'em busy. And that's all you got--you gotta keep the troops busy." So, so there was no ah--you know, you'd think you'd go back after you come outta combat for thirty or forty days on the front line, you'd come back, and say, "Well, we're gonna get a break now. Probably a week vacation of something like that." No, no. Two days was tops n' went right back in training.

Mik: And then back to the front?

John: Sure, you get probably ten days off, or something.

Mik: I think that does it for me. Did you have any questions? Anything?

Unknown: Just how he felt getting wounded the last day of war?

John: [Laughs] Well, I'll tell you, it should've been a little earlier, I would've got outta there quicker but--[laughs]. No, I don't think I ah-- I think I was just damn happy to get outta there. All my faculties were with me and my arm wasn't--I wasn't gonna lose my arm, not so bad. That's all I was, I was happy about it.

Mik: You're right the worst possible time to get wounded is the last day of the war.

John: Yeah, yeah, it shoulda been earlier cuz I coulda been gone. I coulda got outta there. But didn't have that luck [laughs].

Mik: Did you have any lasting effects from the wounds?

John: Ah-- it bothered me for probably about ten--twelve years, it bothered me some. But it wasn't, like I said, I could handle it.

Mik: I've talked to a couple of guys that were--the shrapnel was pretty important to them. Did they give you the shrapnel?

John: I, you know, I lost, I even lost them bullets. Ah- I don't know what happened, just from moving around and stuff like that. I ah--and my mother kept some of that stuff and my ah--and then my mother passed away. And ah--like I said, I don't know, I should've been more, taken care of that stuff myself, but I didn't. I haven't got them bullets left and them pieces of shrapnel. I think the biggest piece of shrapnel I had in me was, I'd say about that big around, but it was very jagged. And ah--it was probably eighth of an inch thick, probably a little bit more than that—thick--the thickness. I think it was from an eighty-one or mortar--it was from.

Mik: That's a pretty big piece of shrapnel.

John: Yeah.

Mik: Is that hit you in the--

John: That's why, ah--up in right about up in here or some place like that, I got that chunk. Ah--my experience too was ah--we got a lot of penicillin they gave us guys. Ya know, so they wouldn't get out. I suppose they worried about the hemorrhagic fever that's all I can figure out. So we got a lot of shots and ah--if you got a corpsman that would shove that needle in, he didn't shove it in far enough, ya know. You think that was, he was doin' you a--giving you a break by just pushing it in a little ways. Well, what happened, you'd get a knot there that would--the blood didn't take it away. It was--it'd build up there, ya know, in the--then you got a real hell of a sore spot there. So after you caught on, "Well shove that damn needle in as far as you can." And so it goes into your system instead of just make a, like a knob underneath your skin or something like that, ya know. Cuz man, you get so damn sore, you was--you don't know where to get a shot next it last--then you got probably two in the morning and two at night. So you know, so after about two weeks of that you were gettin' pretty doggone sore.

Mik: Well, thank you.

[End of Interview]