

Wisconsin Public Television  
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**RAY HENDRIKSE**  
Tank Driver, Marine Corps, Korean War  
2004

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**Hendrikse, Raymond J.,** (1928- ). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 58 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

Raymond J. Hendrikse, a Sheboygan, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as a Marine Corps tank driver during the Korean War. Hendrikse talks about being delayed in enlisting by his family. After tank school at Fort Knox (Kentucky), he mentions serving in Palestine, cold weather training in Labrador (Canada), and playing baseball. He speaks of arriving in Inchon (Korea), driving a tank across a narrow bridge on the Han River, and using flamethrowers in Seoul. Hendrikse discusses landing at Wonsan, pushing north, getting attacked by Chinese troops during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, and surviving the disorganized retreat to Hagaru-ri. He describes moving through Koto-ri to pick up other survivors, living off of air-dropped Tootsie Rolls, strategies he used to endure the severe cold, and being evacuated from Hungnam. Hendrikse comments on being moved from Baker Company to Dog Company during the reorganization of troops. He tells of the tank crew having fun with Manchurian horses. Hendrikse recalls finding a woman hung in a tree by Communists who thought she was a spy. He details the danger of anti-tank mines, altering the tank escape hatches to better protect against them, and improvising tank diaphragms out of ponchos. Hendrikse talks about the equipment and armaments on the tanks and teaming up with another tank to keep enemy infantry from damaging the periscope or throwing grenades down the hatch. After coming home, he tells of being sent to Vieques (Puerto Rico) as a platoon sergeant even though he was supposed to stay in the States for six months. He portrays the command structure of a tank company and reflects on the Marine value of never leaving people behind. After his discharge, Hendrikse talks about moving to Baraboo (Wisconsin) and playing baseball in Madison. While visiting a Korean monument in Phoenix, he relates a chance meeting with another member of the “Chosin Few” who carried a case of Tootsie Rolls in his car. Hendrikse characterizes the camaraderie between the men in his company, a reckless tank driver named Frank Weir, and a Marine named Charles Raimer who would do anything on a bet.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Hendrikse ( b.1928) served in the Marines from 1948 to 1952. He was honorably discharged at the rank of staff sergeant, became a forest products and utilization specialist, and eventually settled in Monona (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 WCKOR016 and WCKOR017.

**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, May 27, 2004

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television Staff, n.d.

Transcript edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

**Transcribed Interview:**

Ray: Came out of high school in 1946 and, of course, the military was a high item on all the news at that time, and a friend of mine and I intended to go into the Marine Corps. And [I] came home, got papers to enlist and brought them home and my father said, "I won't sign for that if it's a day before your eighteenth birthday," so that eliminated me. And then prior to my eighteenth birthday I had a sister come down, sick, and my mother said, "Whatever you do, don't go now until she's out of bed." And so I waited. And then I went in 1948 after she came up, out of bed.

And [I] went into the military and first thing I was to go to tank school down in Fort Knox, Kentucky. And, they also had a group that was going over to the Mediterranean at that time because they had given Palestine back to the Jews and they were sending 5,000 Marines over there just to be available. And so they were taking a platoon of tanks and I wanted that badly and couldn't get it, but somebody got sick or something happened the week before they were leaving and they said, "Well, if you still want that, you can go now as a substitute," and I did. So I went over to the Mediterranean then and had a nice time; came back from that and they had a group that was going over to Labrador for training for cold weather activities. So that fall I went over to Labrador, trained for a couple of months on that, came back, and was a little leery about going into the kitchen on mess duty and I sure didn't want that. So I thought, the only way I can get out of it is if I can go out for baseball and get on that team. I'll be all set and I did.

So I played ball until Korea started. And, of course, that started and they took the Marines that they had over on the West Coast and sent them over there at what they call the perimeter. And that was between July 25<sup>th</sup>, when the whole thing first started, and September 15<sup>th</sup> at the Inchon landing and by that time they had taken the Marines over on the East Coast, where I was, shipped them over to San Diego and sent them over to Japan--combat loaded in Japan--and divided us all up as a nucleus and Reserves. And then we went in at Inchon and, yeah, it was the first time in my life I'd ever seen anyone hung, at Inchon. Other than that things were not all that serious until we got to the Han River, of course, you know, they knocked everything out for crossing the Han. And so they had to hesitate for a little while until they could get some kind of bridges built to get the tanks across, and then that happened, and we got the tanks across. And now they knocked out a bridge in another area and so, what we did is, we found a railroad track going over this valley and we could straddle the tracks and still hang over. The only thing is if you looked down it scared the daylight out of ya--and we only agreed to do it if we could have three or four engineers go ahead of us to check for land mines on the bridge. And that worked out nice and then we got across--we got into Yong Dong Po—

Mik: Now wait a minute--you were driving that tank? [laughs]

Ray: Yes, scared deathless. To this day, if I [chuckle] if I'm on a high chairlift. And there's one up in the Northern Michigan, at Whitecap Mountain, and it goes from

one mountain to the next and as you look down it always reminds me of looking down that valley [chuckle].

Mik: So you were sitting up with your head out of the tank.

Ray: Oh yeah, yeah.

Mik: I mean, how much clearance did you have on the side of your treads? Was there any—

Ray: Overlap, overlap.

Mik: The treads were sticking over the ends of the ties?

Ray: Yes. And we had--I was on a Sherman tank at that time and the majority of the tanks in the company were the Pershing tanks, which was a little larger tank. And so we said, "Yeah, if we get a Sherman across first, and that works, then we can try the Pershings." And so that's basically what we did. Came across that and then the next goal was the Kimpo Airfield. You know, any time in the military the more offensive that you can get into it--and so if you got Kimpo Airport that would be a real nice stepping stone to Seoul. So we got Kimpo and, after Kimpo, then it was Seoul. And then after Seoul--and that was kind of a yo-yo for a little while. It gave me a new experience because, in tanks, each company carries about--I think we had three or four napalm-type flamethrowers and, in close areas like within Seoul, we used flame tanks in there and got a chance to see what that would do.

Came out of that, then we went up to the 38th Parallel and there was the big decision--do we cross it, do we not cross it? So we stayed there for a few days and, yeah, General MacArthur came up and cut the ribbon and away we went, crossed it, and after we crossed it, they changed another tactic. And it was not really a different tactic, but instead of continuing up north--I don't [know] why, but for some reason we all went back to Inchon--the Marine Corps went back to Inchon and combat loaded again. And, combat loading means you put all water fording gear on the tank--that's all added on to it-- and then we went into Wonsan. Now we're into the fall, early fall of '50, and going into Wonsan then was relatively easy. Again, there was a scare cause everybody talked about, "Oh, the bay in Wonsan's gonna be loaded with mines and everything. You're not going to get a ship in there." But, it was interesting; we went to Inchon, we loaded on ship, and, the interesting part then was, we loaded onto American ships, which the United States had evidently given to Japan, and they were manned by Japanese. And the manning of those ships as we came out of the harbor at Inchon--we were bouncing off of each other [laugh]. They weren't well-trained in handling the LST's and so we got out of there. And then we went into Wonsan, landed there, [and] went north.

Mik: Is Wonsan on the west coast, or east coast?

Ray: Wonsan is on the opposite coast so it would be on the, opposite coast of Inchon and Inchon is on the east so we went around the west, yeah.

Mik: No, Inchon's on the west.

Ray: Vice versa? I don't know, I call it left and to the right. [laugh] And then, from there, we had somewhat of an early Thanksgiving there and then we started off for what we were told was a China border. And as we were going up there and the closer we got to it, the tank commander--who was Haskell out of Massachusetts--and he kept talking about these aren't Koreans that were going by us. And we found out later, oh, they were all Chinese. And after, you know--nothing had happened, but then again a military tactic--they had gotten us all into position where now they could knock out the lead tank--lead vehicle--whatever it was--stop the whole convoy and open fire. And when they did that, of course, a lot of the people who were on trucks and jeeps and that kind of stuff headed for the ditches on either side. Well, what they had was .50-caliber machine guns on each end of those ditches and it was slaughter. We later exercised somewhat of that same tactic against them and we called it Operation Mousetrap, where you trap somebody inside and cut them off and then go to it. After that happened, we realized everything was disorganized. And so it was survival and everybody for himself and--I don't even know where that was--but the struggle, at that time, was to get to Hagaru. And again, I don't remember if we were going east, west, north, south or whatever, but we did get to Hagaru where we had opportunity to treat the wounded, stack the dead, and organize; to head out to reload at Hamnung [Hungnam].

Mik: How long of a period was that that you were trying to get to Hagaru?

Ray: Probably four--five days.

Mik: So that was four or five days of just such constant fighting that you couldn't—

Ray: Yeah, it was a lot of disorganization and, you know, it—well, when we eventually got to Hamnung to reload--to go around--Baker company, which normally carry twenty-two tanks--we had three left. I was fortunate that [laughs] one of those was the tank I was on. So, yeah, and when you say it that way it actually sounds a little more severe than it actually is because the cold conditions were what took some vehicles out of service and, without that vehicle, that crew had to find something else--if they found something else—and, I don't know, I was more interested in Ray[?] than a lot of other things that were going on. So, we got to Hagaru and there we could defend ourself--protect ourself--better because we were up on a ridge now and there is an airport up there that the military started working on right away to get supplies in and ammunition. And, even no, I don't think they brought in any replacements at that time yet, but, yeah, Hagaru was a gathering place--a reassi--an assembly for all the units that were caught in that trap. And so we stayed there and the decision was made, “Okay, now we gotta start heading for Koto-ri,” where we had another group of people that were cut off, but [this] was between Hamnung and

Hagaru. And so now we had to fight our [way] through to them and, of course, you know, in any military tactic--in a tank--you are not exposed to where the critical points are. All you are trying to do is to get from one to the other and we were pretty much unfamiliar with where we were and everything so we stayed as close as we could to roads and things. And [the] Chinese know all that--and they know where the cutoffs are and where to put their people to stop us from getting through. And so we depended an awful lot on what the infantry could do to keep those passes open and, you know, we'd support them as much as we could but we couldn't get the equipment in there and, of course, the Corsair airplane was very helpful in that because they softened up a lot of stuff. And then we got to Koto-ri, picked up the people that were in that area that never got to Hagaru, and then from there we had another opening up to get to Hamnung to get out. And then, once we got to Hamnung, we loaded ship and that's when I told you we--Baker company that I was in--we put three tanks on the ship and that's all we had left. And we came around then, went down to Masan--that's way down in the southern end of Korea--and, there we were for I'll bet three weeks. And we got all new equipment. We got a lot of replacements and we reorganized.

Then I left the company I was in. I was in Baker Company and Baker Company, at that time, was organized by the nucleus from the regulars on the East Coast at Lejeune and the Reserves from Oakland, California on the West Coast. And I didn't know a lot of those people, and eighty percent of the company I was in was the Reserves from the West Coast. And so people I knew in Dog Company--or I had more close friends and things--and they were reorganizing. We were reorganizing. Everybody was getting new people, and new equipment, and so then I got into Dog Company and that's basically where I finished out then. And in Dog Company, we, of course, went back on up and started working toward the whole thing and [an] interesting thing about--I don't recall when it was but it must have been that spring of '51--we ran into--they brought in 10,000 Manchurian soldiers on horseback. Well, it was unique to say the least because if we were going back to get gas or anything--one of things we wanted to bring back with us to play with that night was horses. [laughs] And so late afternoon, when we had to go back to get ammo or gasoline or something, we'd always try and attach a horse or two on the back of the tank and bring it back with us and [then] that night we could have a little bit of entertainment if we stayed back. And, then another time, we were any valley--

Mik: Before you go on, what were those horses?

Ray: Manchurian.

Mik: But what kind were they?

Ray: I don't know, they were horses is all I know--

Mik: About the size of a quarter horse--something like that?

Ray: I don't know. I don't know one horse from another. All I know is we had fun with them. On that subject, we had a guy by the name of Yosh Barkowitz [?] who was a--oh he went to Indiana and played fullback, and he was a linebacker, and he was big and strong, and he got on one of those horses--And when we would set up at night--even if we were back, we would always set a tank, and a tank, and a tank in a circle. And then, in between the tanks, we would take one of the thirties and dig a fox hole and have that for crossfire. And then, in front of that, you'd always put a listening post. Somebody would listen for anybody coming through. And you'd also put trip flares out there--Well Yosh Barkowitz [?] got on one of those horses one night and of course he hit one of those trip flares and, I'll tell you, you hit one and that horse--horses are kind of timid anyhow--I mean, everything flew. And it was quite comic. It was like 4th of July. I mean, fireworks were going off all over. Poor Yosh was trying to stay on that horse. Comical part of it, but you'd have to have some fun in all of this too.

Then, another time, we were going in a valley--and this is much more on a serious note-- we were in the valley, and we'd been in there all day, and we'd pretty much secured things and, we pulled out of that valley that night, and when we got back there was one tank missing. And we had lost all contact with that tank as to, you know, radio contact. What had happened--it didn't come out with us. So a person by the name of Turner, Staff Sergeant Turner--he was one of the platoon leaders for that platoon where that tank was--he said, "I'm going to go back and look for it with the jeep from headquarters here." And another friend of mine, who was on the same tank with me, Tallman, said, "I'll go with you and ride shotgun," which is to protect him, you know, if anything should--And I said, "Well, if you're going to go with him and ride with him, I'll ride in the back and I'll ride shotgun from the back." So we went back into that valley and, well, here was a woman hanging in a tree. You know that's not a--anything you want to see so we looked at that and started to inquire from some of the local natives that started to come out when they saw us and said, "What happened?" And they said, well, the Communists suspected that she was telling us what was going on in that valley. So they took her and hung her in this tree just so she could stand on her tip-toes. And then they had like a--well we call it [a] two-by-four or baseball bat, and they'd knock her legs out from under her. Down she'd come, they just tortured her to death that way and when we saw her she was just hanging there--ugly sight. And then, after that, they started--

Mik: Did you find the tank?

Ray: Yeah. Yeah. We did, yeah. And they were busy with certain things, you know, if a tank gets knocked out in any way there's an escape hatch in the front, which can be both good and bad. It's good if you have to get out of it in a hurry and, you know, something's hit and you can get underneath because that's where the escape hatch is, but if it's not--and when we first got there the Communists would put tank mines in the road and they would see what damage it was doing and if they hit--if a tank, initially in the first couple weeks, hit a mine, you could keep going--hardly damaged the track. Well the next time, they'd put one on top of another till they got to the



point where they were blasting those escape hatches right up from the bottom. And that was taking legs off of the drivers. So then we started putting sand bags on the escape hatches. Well now when it would hit that you'd get blinded--the sand would just fly up in your eyes. And so after a while, we thought, well, when we go back we started taking the old .50-caliber machine gun barrels that were worn out and welding them across the bottom of the escape hatch, which was fine. Now they couldn't blow those escape hatches up and get your feet anymore, but the problem was if you ever dropped one [an escape hatch]--to pick it back up with one hand was almost impossible. It was so heavy. But, yeah, that's how you improvised [smile].

Mik: What's that feel like--to be moving along and hit a mine?

Ray: Depends on the size of it, you know. Again, you know, there were times in a tank when you'd get in a minefield that was **anti-personnel fight[?]**. We played with them. I mean, it was fun popping them here and there. It was like lighting firecrackers, but when you hit one that was an anti-tank mine--

Mik: Or two or three.

Ray: Or two or three, then it was serious. It's--and, you know, the first thing is there's such a ruckus within, you know, everything is so disrupted that by the time it settles down and you get your bearings on who's where and who's what, ah, yeah, then you better have a cool mind because now you gotta get out of there. And what we normally would do in situations like that is, if you were with a platoon of tanks, one tank would come alongside and you would take the personnel from one tank, and put them in the one that was not injured, and you could get them out that way. The problem is, you had to do that real quick because as soon as you're knocked down and you're not mobile, then the mortars start coming in real quick. So--

Mik: Zeroing in on the tank.

Ray: Yes. So you better be cool and you better act quick. But you can also go through two packs of cigarettes in an afternoon.

Mik: How do you drive a tank?

Ray: Laterals. Not anymore. Now they've got the toggle stick, but going in at that time with the Sherman--you had laterals just like a Caterpillar or something and you had a clutch. You had Ford V-8s in them; 850 horsepower. And even the Pershing, which was a larger tank than was the 26--that had Ford V-8s in it. And you also had a little Kohler electric plant to keep the gen--the batteries up so that when you were pretty stationary in a--and you were moving the turret for the targets--that turret takes a lot of energy out of those batteries so you kept the little electric plant going that was mounted in there too.

Mik: And were you--how well could you see?

Ray: Well you had periscopes. And it's like being in a submarine or something, you know, you had the per--when you were buttoned up, and of course once things were secured, you unbuttoned to get your head above and take a deep breath of fresh air and things. So yeah, you could see through the periscope. The only problem was, with periscopes, a lot of times, if the enemy could crawl up on the tank and take a rifle butt and jam that periscope down, you know, now you were struggling to keep periscopes up. But you always, again, worked as a platoon and the common terminology was, "scratch my back," that meant somebody's on my tank. Another tank starts shooting **you 30**,--getting them off of here. And so you protect each other that way.

Mik: You don't think of that with a tank. If somebody's on your tank with a rifle butt trying to knock—

Ray: Or even looking back at ya! I mean that's eye contact [chuckle]. But you got a lot of heavy armor between you. The only bad part of when they got up on the tank [is] that the way they could hurt you was by opening up the engine doors and dropping grenades in there. Then you were done. And that's where this term came "scratch my back" cause if they started to crawl up on your tank, you better get them off of there. And of course you can't do it from within your tank. They're too close.

Mik: So when you're—like--when you were in the mousetrap, and you couldn't go forward, I assume that was like on a mountain road?

Ray: Yeah. They know how to choose the spots.

Mik: So what do you do? It's just looking for any way to back up or go down the side of the mountain?

Ray: Well you never looked to go down the side of the mountain because, you know, that's straight down. They pick a spot where it's hairpin and so the first thing is to--whatever has stopped the column--to get that out of the way--get that out of the way so you can go forward, backward, and you can maneuver. And that's the way you do it. Then--and we do the same thing. I was on both ends of it. I was caught in the trap and I was the offensive on the trap. And that's ugly too, you know, it's certainly a lot nicer when you do that because you've got the advantage on that, but it's not nice to drag all those bodies cause the next day you--especially in the summertime, you know, that--it's--you just take a dozer and dig one trench and start dragging bodies. Ugly.

Mik: When you were describing Koto-ri?

Ray: Yeah. There's three places up there. It was--Yudam-ni was the one that was the furthest north, and then Hagaru, and then Koto-ri. Those were the three cities and people talk about Hill 1472 and 1921. And I didn't know one from another except

Hagaru. I knew that because that was a plateau and you could pretty much defend yourself from up there. One of the things, you know, the United States was prepared so that when we eventually got to the China border and stopped, they were starting to bring supplies into Hagaru. One of which was cases and cases of Tootsie Rolls. And now when we were going from Hagaru, back to Koto-ri, back to Hamnung, we had no food. And now they were flying over and dropping these cases of Tootsie Rolls and that's what we lived on for the ten--fifteen days we were coming out of Hagaru and going to the coast.

Mik: So when that whole thing is referred to as the Chosin Reservoir, where was the reservoir in relation to--

Ray: The Reservoir, in the direction I was going, was to my right, which would be to the east--would be to the east of us. It was on our right-hand side. Yeah, that was the Chosin Reservoir. And, you know, that was a critical point for everybody involved because if they damaged all the dams for that, you know, that was their electricity that was supplying a lot of energy to that country.

Mik: To North or South?

Ray: North. North.

Mik: So they were protecting that.

Ray: Yes. Yeah. Very much so. And yet, you know, once we got in there, there was basically Chinese that we were against then. And there's lots of them.

Mik: That's what I heard--big numbers.

Ray: Lots of them. I don't know the numbers. I never looked back at what the numbers were, but I've heard that there were times that, I think, we had about 15,000—roughly--Marines that were up in that area; not all together. Some were at Koto-ri. Some were at, you know, different spots, but coming out of that whole thing I--And I don't even know the numbers that they brought out of there, but they're talking about, like, 150,000 Chinese and, you know, that sounds again like the disadvantage is so overwhelming, and it is mentally, but that many people didn't have that many weapons, you know, so if I got a tank and you got a club, keep coming [smile]. That isn't to say we didn't lose people, you know. We lost a lot of people up there.

Mik: And it was cold. **[End of Tape WCKOR016]** So, you were about to tell us about the cold.

Ray: Terrible weapon, but it's on both sides. It's not only against you, but it's for you. With the enemy, you know, it's hard on them too. Yeah. It was twenty-five below and, you know, you'd throw a wind chill on that and you're up in those mountains and it's cold. And feet, you know, to this day I--tank pictures that you looked at--I

think I'm the only one on that tank that didn't freeze my feet off. It was cold. And so cold that when we got to Hagaru and we started bringing people up, there was a corpsman up there--his name was Pete Hammond--I'd have to look it up, but he was in our company--and he got shot right through the jaw. And, of course, you know, when you're shot through the jaw and you're bleeding--he had a red icicle right hanging down on his jaw and you looked at him and it, again, was pretty ugly to look at, but for him--and he couldn't smile--but he knew he was gonna get evacuated out of that place. And so all he would do--he put his arms up and he was telling us, "I'm flying outta here. You guys are staying." [laughs] So yeah, it's--when I see icicles today I still think of it, but they're not red.

Mik: And I remember from the listening session, you said that you had had that cold weather training in Labrador.

Ray: Very, very helpful to me.

Mik: And what was that training?

Ray: Well, we went into Labrador for cold weather training and--how do you take care of yourself--how do you take care of your feet--how do you take care of your self--you know? Movement is very important--dry feet--dry clothing--it--all of those kinds of things and fortunate for me--Labrador. Where we were is tundra and tanks on tundra sink down and you belly up. And, yeah, the first day or two you can throw grenades under there and blast that mud out of there and go another ten feet and you're hung up again so, you know, after that we just put our tanks aside and started-- tanks and amtracks are real closely related and, personnel-wise, you shift from one to the other. And, course, you've only got so many amtracks. You can't bring all the people in from tanks and give them an amtrack because they only had enough amtracks for their crews and so we spent most of the time just learning how to keep warm because we did not have tents, you know. We had the sleeping bags, but you know, you're smart enough to know by that time that the sleeping bags that you have are three parts--and there's an outer part--kinda waterproof, and then there's a, irregular down-filled--and these are mummy types, and then inside that you have, like, a woolen. And so you learn how to keep warm in that. You know, you don't go into that undressed. You go in dressed and take your clothes off once you're in. And even some people who were cold, cold, cold and wouldn't take their shoes and socks off because they were--feet were too cold--and they'd fall asleep or something. They wake up in the morning and their socks were still wet. Well, that's the worst thing you can do because now you got the day in wet socks. If you don't have any others with you--So little things like that and diet's important too, you know. You don't have this or don't have that, but I talked about Tootsie Rolls. Tootsie Rolls--there's a lot of energy in them. And, that keeps you going too. So you gotta keep moving. You gotta keep dry.

Mik: Tootsie Rolls for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, huh?

Ray: If you had three of them. [chuckles]

Mik: And they were air-dropping them?

Ray: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, as the column was going out, you know, they would drop them through to us and, yeah, it's interesting, I received a letter from a friend of mine in Madison here and there was an article in the Wall Street Journal and in there was about the food in the military and one little paragraph mentioned something about Tootsie Rolls. And he sent it to me. He highlighted it and, you know, he said, "Ray, you can probably relate to this." And I wrote him back, "Yeah," I said, "I sure can." But even more so, I was in Phoenix several years ago, and I was invited to a dedication of a monument, on the Capitol grounds, to one of the politicians there and after it was all over, they always have their muffins, and sweet rolls, and juices, and coffee, and things and I told my wife, "I'm gonna just take a walk and look at some of these other monuments." And I came across the Korean monument and sitting on a bench by that was some person who looked like he just came off the streets and on his back on the jacket he had written "Chosin Few." He had handwritten it himself and he was just sitting there hunched over and I went and sat next to him and I--he never even looked up and I said, "Chosin Few, huh?" And he just kind of grunted and I said, "Hey, I'm one of you." And he kinda looked at me and I pulled out my "Chosin Few" card. He looked at it and we, kind of, looked and didn't talk much at all. And about two minutes later, I said, "Well, I gotta get up and go now." And he said, "Oh, by the way," he said, "When you get to the parking lot," he said, "You'll find an old rusted-out Chrysler out there." And he said, "If you open up the back door," he said, "on the backseat there's a case of Tootsie Rolls. Help yourself." [Laughs] I wrote that to the president of the Tootsie Roll company. Two weeks later, I had a case of 'em on my front doorstep. [Laughs] Still have some left. My grandkids have all left town now so I don't have anyone to give them to.

Mik: While you were still in Korea, was that sort of a badge of honor to have been at Chosin?

Ray: I think so. To me, it was going in at Inchon, going in through Seoul, going in through all of that. I never had any fear of anything ever happening to me. Chosin was an eye-opener. It was reality. I mean, some of the, you know, they talked about we lost more people there than we did at Iwo Jima and some of the other islands and I think I understand that now. Yeah. That was an eye-opener to me. That was reality.

Mik: There was a lot of fighting your way back to safety.

Ray: Yeah. Yeah. Both the enemy--and the enemy could be people, or it could be temperature, or could be lack of food. There were a lot of enemies then.

Mik: And what--you said some of the tanks or some of the vehicles were knocked out by the cold and it just--they were too cold to even start them up?

Ray: Well, one of the things in a tank--and to get the gasoline in the tank and then you didn't have the equipment--the hand pump--to pump it from a fifty-five gallon drum up into your tank. You had to physically wrestle that thing and get it up there. And in those conditions, there's your gas cap and, around there, there's a well--not all the way around, but about three-quarters of the way around--and there's snow that gets in there and, of course, that snow--as you're opening up and it's cold so you're trying not to have bare hands--and some of that snow will get down in there into the gas tank. And when that happens and you get water into your gas--if you're familiar with the fuel pump--there's a diaphragm on a fuel pump that pumps that--and if you get water in your gas, that diaphragm's gonna crack. Now that diaphragm may be a ten cent item, but if you don't have diaphragms--

Mik: Goodbye day.

Ray: Good-bye. There's no way of running that tank, you know, so, you know, you can salvage from one to the other in proper conditions and we'd even done it over there. The poncho--you know what a poncho is? Ok, you take the poncho--and that's waterproof material--and you can punch out a diaphragm out of a poncho. Improvise. [laughs] Now it, you know, those are the things that, yeah, you learn to improvise to survive. It can be done, if you got the time.

Mik: So, why Marines?

Ray: Why for me? Marines? [chuckle] Hmm. I guess when I was in high school--Iwo Jima--Tarawa--all of those events--just sold me on the Marine Corps. And I'm happy for it, you know. One of the things, even coming out of that Chosin, Marines didn't leave anybody. I mean we--bah, I don't care if they were dead, whatever, you never left them. You went in after them all the time and I always had that feeling, "Ok, so I gotta go in after you," but same thing happens to me, they're going to come in after me. And I took a lot of comfort in that. That nobody was gonna leave me be. And I'm not saying that anybody else did leave their people. I don't know that, but I do know that coming out of the Chosin, we did have some Army personnel with us that came out and they were very thankful that we took them with us because--all the disruption--they lost their leadership and we didn't. So, you know, why the Marines? I don't know. I was just impressed with all of that from the Second World War, and not doing this and not doing that. And I was satisfied that it was good for me. I'm not saying that somebody in something else isn't any better. I know that and I feel that the military has a lot of top quality people in it. When I was in it, I met some great people.

Mik: What is the command structure in the Marines? Like in your tank company--

Ray: In your tank company? The tank commander or the company commander is a captain. Each platoon has a lieutenant or a second lieutenant and then each of them have a staff sergeant as a platoon sergeant. And then you have a tank commander

who's a sergeant. And you have a gunner who is probably a corporal. A driver who is probably a corporal. An assistant driver who is probably a PFC. And loader who is probably a PFC or a private. And all of those positions are basically interchangeable, too. I mean, somebody might drive today and somebody might be tank commander. You know, I mentioned something earlier that I was of the opinion that one of the people on the tank I was with was a Reserve who was an infantryman. And he was not comfortable in tanks because he had trained infantry. And if they'd have taken me out of the tanks and put me in the infantry, I wouldn't have been comfortable either. And he was put on the tank with me because he had an AB blood and I have an AB blood and we were the only people in the outfit and I was told that you cannot put people together in combat unless you have people with like-type blood. And so, problem was, he left after about ten days and then I was the only guy in the outfit that still had AB blood. [laughs] And it never dawned on me until people told me, I had no idea there was such a thing. And, you know, these kind of things get bent. When I came back from Korea, you were supposed to be back in the States for six months before they could put you overseas again and, by that time, I was to be out. They had extended me from three years to four years and I was to be out at that time, but some captain came up to me and said, "I'm taking a company of tanks over to Vieques,"--that's the island that the Navy was using for bombing and the Marines were using for practicing landings. And he said, "I'd like to take you along as one of my platoon sergeants." I said, "Yeah, but I can't go." I said, "I have to be in the States for six months." And he said, "If I fix it up for you, would you do it?" I said, "Let me think about it overnight." And I did it. I did it. I don't know. I'd like to do it today. They tell me Vieques is a real nice tourist island now. [chuckle]

Mik: So you got back down to the 38th Parallel after Chosin—

Ray: Well, we went around the 38th Parallel. We went all the way down to the bottom to Masan--buried the dead, sent a lot of the wounded back, got a lot of replacements in, got a lot of new equipment in, had warm food.

Mik: And then you headed north again?

Ray: Then we started north again--this time from the bottom up and, you know, to head north that far, I think we spent--I know we spent time with our tanks on trains--to start north--to get back up to the lines. Yeah. And then back north.

Mik: And then were you on the MLR? Or did you go? You'd just went, then, back up to the 38th Parallel.

Ray: No. We went to that demilitarized zone. Yeah, and that's where we went up to--

Mik: And then what was that like?

- Ray: Well, that's about the time I left. By that time, the military had come up with-- anybody had come in--if anybody had come in on Inchon, they have to go home now. You cannot keep them there. And I was one of those. So, I went home.
- Mik: I meant to ask you--at Inchon--were you, like, on the first wave?
- Ray: Yes. Oh yeah. You're at different beaches. You had "Red Beach" and "Green Beach" and, yeah, I was in Baker Company and I think it was "Green Beach." And, again, I don't know the technical terminology of the "who was this" or that. All I know is we were in Baker Company and went in.
- Mik: Tell me about playing baseball.
- Ray: Great job.
- Mik: I didn't know there was a baseball unit in the Marines?
- Ray: Yeah. They—well, actually, you're--you had Elroy Hirsch--played for the El Toro Marines. And he was a left halfback and a good friend of mine whose brother I just had breakfast with yesterday, Bill Schroeder. You don't know that, but Bill Schroeder was the right halfback and Elroy was the left halfback for the El Toro Marines and then when Hirsch left, and started playing professional ball, he played for the Chicago Hornets in the old American League and Bill Schroeder, again, was his right halfback. And then, of course, the American League disbanded and Cleveland was one of the teams that came over with him and Hirsch then be--went with--I think the Los Angeles Rams.
- Mik: That was football.
- Ray: That was football, but they had baseball. There was baseball. Yeah, it's a great--it's a great thing. I was having fun. I didn't go. I was playing all the baseball, and football, and basketball before I went in so I didn't go in for that. It was a new experience I wanted to see. And I came out and I played football again. I played college football and, yeah, did not play college basketball, but I played college baseball and--
- Mik: What did you play in baseball?
- Ray: You're gonna die over this. [chuckles] This guy, Schroeder's brother, that I had breakfast with yesterday--he was a great shortstop on the other side of town. He went to one school and I was a shortstop on the other side of town. I was a left-handed shortstop. [chuckle] I was a left-handed shortstop and then when I went into the Marine Corps, it's the only time that I ever played the position that suit my physical activities. I played center field. Came out of the Marine Corps and I started college and I started playing third base. I moved to Baraboo when I first started working, I came down to Baraboo and Newcomer's Club. My wife had met



somebody at the Newcomer's Club and they had invited us for dinner and he was a softball pitcher there and he started talking about when he was playing softball in Port Washington. And I said, "Oh, I used to go to Port Washington and play ball. They had the Monahan Brothers." And he said, "Yeah, how'd you know that?" I said, "Well, we played there, when I was a kid, before I went into the military." He said, "What position did you play?" And I said, "Shortstop." And he said, "Then you're left-handed." And I said, "How did you know that?" And he said, "I used to watch those games as a little kid." And he said, "They had a left-- his Sheboygan class came in with a left-handed shortstop." And that's what I played, then I--, when I went to college, I played third base. Then I came to Baraboo and I started playing shortstop. I played some third base. I played some second base and we had a catcher that got hurt. And they were looking for somebody and I said, "Well, I'm really not a catcher, but when I was playing every day--all day in the Marine Corps--you'd get bored playing this position--that position, so you kinda play here and there. And I said, "I've done some catching; just in practices." And they said, "Give it a try." And I did and I kinda liked it. Then I came to Madison and I started playing left field. And, again, the catcher got hurt. And they tried another guy who said, "Oh, I used to catch." And they tried him and it wasn't working out that good and so they said, "Anybody else?" And I said, "Yeah, I--" and that's where I ended up. And then when I got to be forty-eight years old, Madison said, "You don't live here." You can't play here any more. I lived in Monona. So I was done, which was fine. I was old enough to say that's enough.

Mik: So when that was--when you were playing baseball in the Marines? That was basically your duty? You played every day? You'd get up and go practice and then play a game?

Ray: Well, you'd get up--if you had a night game, you'd probably get up at ten o'clock in the morning--eleven o'clock in the morning and have a bite to eat and practice that afternoon and-- was nice--never lived that good. But even that, you know, it gets boring.

Mik: So, what's it like in a tank when you're in action and that cannon is firing? Is it pretty noisy in there?

Ray: Very. Very. Yeah. It, you know--talked about frozen feet. Again, I don't know why God was good to me, but my ears are fine--my feet are fine. You talk to any one of my friends, and they lost both of 'em. They're wearing hearing aids and they're not walking.

Mik: Did you use earplugs?

Ray: Yeah. Yeah. You used earplugs and you also had intercommunications so, in your helmet, you had ear--you know, and you had a lip mic. So--

Mik: Now, was it you and the tank commander or was everybody on the same—

- Ray: I went in as a driver. I came out as a-- I went in as a driver. Then I became a tank commander and then I came out as a platoon sergeant. And when I ended back up here in the States, that's what I was. I was a staff sergeant--platoon sergeant.
- Mik: You were talking about these photos; following the stream beds. Was the terrain--it must have been a challenge for a tank driver in Korea.
- Ray: Your other company drivers are more of a challenge than the terrain. Yeah, it's a challenge, but you go around the country and you think you're a good driver. There's some good drivers. There are some good reckless drivers. The one we had in our company, Frank Weir. If our company took off and was going, for a day, to come off of this front, and support this group over here on this front, and we were swinging--if Frank Weir was the fifteenth tank in that convoy, by the time he got to where you were going he was the first tank. Nobody beat Frank. And I can--he had a platoon sergeant who was also the staff sergeant--the—yeah, he was platoon sergeant, Rip Kirby, and he had to be six-four and two-ten. And Weir would just scare the hell out of him--just scare the heck out of him. And there was one time when we were doing, you know, moving and Weir was just taking off and gone. And, nobody was gonna stop him. And he kept going, and going, and when we finally got to where we were going, Rip Kirby opened up, reached down out of the turret, and picked Weir up by the shoulders--turned him around. He said, "You ever do that to me and I'll kill you." And his gunner was Charlie Baker--pulled out his .45 and he said, "Drop him." Kirby dropped him right there. I mean there's camaraderie. [chuckles]
- Mik: There's camaraderie and there's camaraderie. [chuckles]
- Ray: Yeah. Frank Weir could drive a tank. I still talk to him periodically. He was a steamfitter in Chicago. He had to move to Tucson, Arizona because of his wife had arthritis and things got very bad so he moved down there and called me one time and he said, "Hey, Charlie Baker's down here." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah, I saw it on the records." I said, "Well, where is he? Give me his address." And he said, "He's living under a bridge."
- Mik: Yeah, you mentioned that.
- Ray: And that's the guy who, Baker's the guy who pulled out the .45 and said, "You just drop him."
- Mik: So, you're never quite as close to people as you are to people that you fight and die with?
- Ray: Never. Never. Never. Never. I just drove all the way from Madison to Richmond, Virginia--a guy by the name of Charles Raimer had died. Now Charles Raimer was at Hagaru with me. And if he had the watch--then the machine gun--between the

tanks--over the ridge, I sat with him that night, in that foxhole, with his feet in my armpits and mine in his so we wouldn't freeze our feet. And if I had it, two nights later, he did the same for me. Yeah you're close. You're close.

Mik: You're not alone—

Ray: No. No. God, I-- going over to Korea, he had a '48 Ford that he had bought. And he was a very conservative person. He never spent any of his money and so he didn't smoke. He didn't--he wouldn't have a beer. He saved it all and he bought this vehicle and he was gonna bring it home. And he lived in Buies Creek, North Carolina, which is about ninety miles--one hundred miles from Camp Lejeune where we were, and he was gonna bring his car home. And he was also a guy who would do anything on a bet. Anything! And Lucky Atkinson was from North Ca--he was from Boone, North Carolina--and Lucky had a car and he was gonna drive Raimer and then take him back to the base. Raimer was gonna drop his car off and drive back--[he] asked if I wanted to go along. I said, "Sure." On the way back, Lucky's driving and Raimer was known for any challenge. Lucky said, "Raimer, I'll give you five dollars to go the next ten miles or ten dollars to go the next five miles on the hood of my car." Raimer said, "Ok." Got out there on the hood of the car and he's laying--we're doing ninety-two--ninety-three miles an hour--flying down that road. And he went the distance, but Raimer had frost on his fingernails and he was freezing! He got in the car and he started to turn the heater on. Lucky said, "Oh no, this is my car. You want that on, you want--" And Lucky rolled down the windows. He said, "You want those windows up? Ten dollars." Raimer gave the ten dollars back. [laughs] But he would do anything. I've seen him on rivers with ice and say, "Raimer, you swim this river." And he would break the ice in front of him and swim it. But he's the one we just buried too. Great guy.

Mik: These pictures that you showed us, obviously it's not the winter at that point. What—

Ray: Hot.

Mik: Where were you then? Is that when you were in the South?

Ray: Yeah, the southern part. And it's hot down there. And, you know, when I see the South anywhere around the thirty--Seoul is hot, hot, hot in the summertime. But you get up around the Chosin Reservoir area and it's cold, cold, cold. I mean, you know, for the difference in the temperatures--I don't know what Florida's like because that country is a lot alike in size and shape to the State of Florida and I don't know how cold it gets in the northern part of Florida or how hot it gets in the southern part, I've been in Miami a couple of times and I've been in Orlando, but I'm always picking when I go down there.

Mik: I don't believe they've ever seen twenty-five below.

Ray: In northern Florida. [laughs] Well that--it's twenty-five and, you know, you throw a chill factor on that and it--and it's cold.

**[End of Interview]**