

Wisconsin Public Television  
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

DONALD A. KOSTUCK

Rifleman, Army, Korean War  
Career Officer, Army, Cold War and Vietnam War

2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Madison, Wisconsin

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**Kostuck, Donald A.**, (1931- ). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 3 videorecordings (ca. 71 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

Donald A. Kostuck, a Wausau, Wisconsin native, discusses his career in the Army, including his service during the Korean War and Vietnam War. Kostuck touches on enlisting in 1948, basic training at Fort Knox (Kentucky), and administrative school at Fort Lee (Virginia). Assigned to Fort Meyer (Virginia), he discusses working in the Pentagon until he volunteered to go to Japan. Assigned to Company G, 27th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, Kostuck talks about being unaware of trouble in Korea until he heard of the invasion by North Korea on the Armed Forces Radio Network. He describes the ship ride to Pusan (Korea), going north on a train, and being assigned to an intelligence reconnaissance platoon of the Regimental S3 Office of the 19th Infantry Regiment. Kostuck mentions spending two weeks scouting for enemy positions, characterizes a gung-ho soldier he worked with, and states he spent the rest of his tour in Korea as a rifleman with G Company. He describes sweeping villages for North Korean troops and supplies, witnessing a trench full of children's corpses outside a missionary school, and being moved north in preparation for the Inchon Invasion. After watching the Inchon Invasion, Kostuck recalls moving to Pyongyang, hearing the war was almost over, and watching a Bob Hope Show. During a three-day force march towards the Yalu River, he talks about using captured enemy trucks and hearing gunfire after a North Korean truck joined their convoy by mistake. He details setting up a perimeter near Sinanju, being in a forward listening position when the Chinese attacked, shooting until he ran out of ammunition, seeing his friend get killed, attacking some Chinese soldiers with a shovel after they overran his foxhole, and being knocked unconscious by a shot to the head. Kostuck recalls waking up on the battlefield, discovering he'd been wounded by a grenade, being helped to an aid station, and hearing bullets ricocheting off the division aid station's roof. After two weeks on a Navy hospital ship, he talks about his months of recovery in Japan and working as a typist for hospital headquarters and later for the personnel office. In February of 1952, Kostuck tells of being sent back to the States, having his repeated requests for another assignment in Japan refused, volunteering to go back to Korea, and managing to be sent to Far East Command Specialist School at Niijima (Japan). He recalls discovering he was the only person from his nine-man squad to survive. After the armistice, he tells of going to Korea to process American ex-prisoners of war. Kostuck comments on visiting Hiroshima and seeing the destruction there, having wheelchair races in the Japanese hospitals, and clearly remembering and dreaming about combat. He compares fighting in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Kostuck talks about being a sergeant major rotating between seven companies near Saigon, having difficulty determining Viet Cong from civilians, and danger to camp from the perimeter guards' being forbidden to fire without permission. He talks about blowing up a North Korean ammunition train, frying all the Korean village chickens they could catch in mess kits, and blaming President Truman for holding back the military during the Korean War. Kostuck mentions having "foxhole religion," recalls his mental state during the Chinese attack, and portrays the waves of incoming enemy troops. Kostuck reports lingering

trouble from and remaining shrapnel in his wounds, and he touches on returning to Korea in 1956 for occupation duty with the 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. He talks about representing his unit at a ceremony in Seoul and meeting Syngman Rhee. Kostuck recalls volunteering as a corpsman when he was in the hospital and describes the information he dealt with on medical forms. He reflects on how his parents were informed of his injury in battle, having to write a death notice to someone's parents, and telling his mother he was in Thailand when he was in Vietnam. Assigned to Fort Shafter (Hawaii) in 1957, Kostuck talks about seeking promotions, assignment to the Visual Broadcasting and Visual Activities Unit in Okinawa, earning a military occupational specialty as an intelligence specialist, and duty with a Korean-Chinese team. He touches on running a classified documents section at Fort Knox (Kentucky) and White Sands Missile Range (New Mexico), and while at White Sands he mentions working with the engineering systems test office, which was developing rocket engines for space flight with NASA. Kostuck recalls a time in Korea when he was guarding prisoners and one tried to walk away. Kostuck comments on learning Japanese and a little Korean, learning German, and serving in Germany for three years.

### **Biographical Sketch:**

Kostuck (b.1931) served in the Army for over twenty-nine years and in the Army Reserves for three years. He served thirteen years in the Far East, six years in Germany and Norway, was wounded in the Korean War, and was an officer in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969. Kostuck worked as the Emergency Government Director of Marathon County for fifteen years, retired at the rank of sergeant major, married Ann, raised a son, and settled in Wausau (Wisconsin).

### **Citation Note:**

Cite as: Donald A. Kostuck, Interview, conducted September 23, 2004 at Weston, Wisconsin and Wausau, Wisconsin by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Korean War Stories, for Wisconsin Public Television.

### **Context Note:**

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin Korean War Stories." Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCKOR044, WCKOR045 and WCKOR046.

### **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, September 23, 2004

Transcribed by WPT staff, n.d.

Transcription edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum, 2010

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, WVM, 2011

**Transcribed Interview:**

Mik: How did you become involved with the military?

Don: Well, I joined the service when I was seventeen. I dropped out of high school, and ah, joined the Army, went to down to Fort Knox, Kentucky where I took my basic. It was armored infantry training at that time. And I finished my basic training there, and then they sent me to Fort Lee, Virginia where I went to an administrative school, and where I learned how to type. And ah, from there I was assigned to Fort Meyer, Virginia, and I was working in the Pentagon for oh, about six or seven months I guess, and working in the retired officers section, and this master sergeant came in one day and he says, "I need three volunteers for Japan." And he just happened to be standing right in front of me. [Laughs] And I says, "Me, me, me," I want to go, ya know, I wanted to get outta that Pentagon. So I was [unintelligible] as Japan. I was assigned to the 27th Infantry Regiment of the 25th Infantry Division. Then I was in Japan when the Korean War started.

Mik: What year was that when you were in the Pentagon?

Don: That was 1949.

Mik: And what was the state of the military at that point?

Don: Well the--I believe at that time, they had the draft and--I don't know what the overall readiness of the services, I was only a private at the time, but it was right after World War II. We had quite a few World War II veterans still in the Army. But we found out when we went to Korea, that we really weren't ready.

Mik: Why did you want to go to Japan?

Don: I wanted to get out the Pentagon for one thing [laughs]. That's the main reason. And I like Japan, I like SERPS [?], I spent nine years over there, over a period of several years.

Mik: Now, when you went over there, did you have any indication that there was gonna be trouble in Korea?

Don: No, absolutely none. We didn't find out about it until the North Koreans invaded Korea. That's when we first heard about it. And then--

Mik: Do you remember when you first hear about it?

Don: Yeah, we's heard it on the radio, we didn't have television at that time. They had Armed Forces Radio Network, and I listened to that every day, ya know, and that's where we got our news from. Plus we had the Army Times Newspapers, and we had access to those everyday. So that's how we actually found out about it. And

then of course the rumor started flying, "When are we gonna go?" or "Are we gonna go?" And finally we had a company formation one day, and the 1st sergeant says, "We're going to Korea." And I was in Company G of the 27th Infantry, which was a rifle company at that time. But, because I could type, I had special duty with the Regimental Legal Office. So anyway--but I cut my training with the company. And ah, we took about half of our company and other members of the regiment. I don't exactly know how many, but there was quite a few, and they put us on a train, and sent us down to the 24th Infantry Division. And then from there, we went to Sasebo, which was a seaport, southern Japan. They put us on this old Japanese troop ship, which it kinda had a list to one side, and go back to the fantail, and they had this stairway that went down there, and they had these rice mats. And that's the only place in the ship there was--it wasn't a very big ship, but that's the only place the guys could go and--I didn't go down there because I didn't wanna get seasick. So I stayed up on the back of the ship and-- We landed at Pusan the next day, it was just an overnight trip.

Mik: What was the landing like? Was there any----?

Don: Oh, there was nothing. There was a lot of supplies being unloaded. We got off the ship, right away they marched us over to an area, and they gave us some K-rations. These were left over from World War II, and I don't think they were exactly fresh [laughs]. Anyway, I had a K-ration, and then he put us on a train. And actually, it was like freight cars, cattle cars. And we started going north. We hadn't been on a train but I'd say a couple hours, and we heard machine gun fire. And we didn't know where it was coming from. And somebody hollered out says, "They're shooting at the train!" So we all hit the deck and we made a real, as low as we could get. And as far as I know nobody got injured. I don't even know if they hit the train, but the firing stopped after awhile. And we got off the train later in the evening on that day, and I spent my first night in a Korean cemetery. I didn't know it of course, until I woke up the next day, and I realize all these mounds of earth, and somebody says we're in a cemetery [laughs]. So then they put us on trucks, and we went up to the Division Replacement Depot, is where we got our final assignments, and I was assigned to the 19th Infantry Regiment. When I got up to the Regimental Headquarters, they found I could type, ya know, and they [unintelligible] which we didn't have many guys that could type at that time. So they put me in the Regimental S3 Office, which was the operations section for the regiment. And ah, I was assigned to the I & R platoon, which was a Intelligence Reconnaissance platoon. We had three or four Jeeps, and we'd go out everyday looking for North Korean troops or enemy positions. And there was a young lieutenant in charge of our unit. His name was Patton, and I always wondered if this man was related, ya know. We never asked if he was related to George Patton, but he was the right age, he was a little older than I was. I was eighteen at the time. And he coulda been. He was a real gung-ho soldier. In fact, we were out on one patrol one day, and we got hit by a Korean road block, and we had this kind of a pass through the mountains there, and they were firing at us from the top of the hill. So we returned fire, and they finally left. And we didn't have any machine guns at that time, we just had

rifles and carbines and couple of Browning Automatic Rifles. And this lieutenant, I remember him saying, "I'm never gonna be outgunned again." And the story goes, and I didn't see this, he got himself a Browning Automatic Rifle and a field pack full of clips, and he carried that around with him. And that was quite interesting. But after about after two weeks, they assigned me up to G-Company, which was a rifle company, and I spent the remaining of my tour there and in G-Company.

Mik: And what were you doing there?

Don: Well, I was assistant squad leader, but I was a rifle man. We had a nine man squad. And ah, we'd go out on patrols everyday, ya know. We'd move almost everyday. We'd move from one place to another, spend a lot of time. Villages were absolutely empty, seen very few civilians. They were all hiding up in the hills. And in fact, we went to this one village one day, and they told us that the North Koreans were hiding supplies, ammunition and weapons and stuff, and to look very carefully as we went through these villages. We got this one village, and we found an Army lieutenant's jacket in the basement of this one Korean house and--. So we burned the house down, and then out in the yard there was a big pile of manure. And I don't know why I did it, but I put my bayonet on my rifle, and I started sticking it in this manure pile, and I hit wood. We uncovered it, and here was about a half a dozen or more cases of ammunition and machine gun barrels. So--but we always swept a village. Very rarely that we would encounter North Korean's Army, they'd always be someplace else, you know and—

Mik: What was the general flow at this point of the war? Were the North Koreans still coming down, or were you starting to push them back?

Don: They still coming down in early August, and then I was in the Regimental CP one day, and that's when I was still in the--it has three sections. General Walker came in, he was the commanding general at that time of the 8th Army. And ah, he says, "We're going north," and he told us about the Inchon invasion. He didn't tell when it was gonna be, but he says, "Soon." So we started moving north, and we crossed the Nakdong River, which is south of Seoul, and went into a village there one night and we camped in an area that had been a missionary school, I think. And we found a big trench, and it was full of children and a nun. They'd had all been shot. They'd been there for awhile because they were starting to rot, which kinda got us a little bit mad. So anyway, we got up towards Seoul, and we parked the whole regiment, I think it was, battalion was lined up on a road, and we actually watched the Inchon invasion. When the *Missouri* was shelling up place, and the Marines came aboard and, they--the people in the village were running out all over the place and we had these guys coming in--we thought they were Korean soldiers, because they were known to put on civilian clothes, these white sackcloth things and these big black hats. And some of the guys started shooting at them, we didn't really know. We suspected they were North Korean soldiers trying to escape. So after the Inchon invasion, we went through Seoul, and it was almost deserted. It was very, very few people, there was couple of kids standing on a corner selling pears, and that was

about it, ya know. Then we crossed the 38th Parallel. I remember it was around the end of August, first part of September, and we started heading north. We had very little contact with the North Korean Army at that time cause there were really moving out, they were bugging out. And we got up to Pyongyang, which was the North Korean capital at that time. And ah, they told us the war was almost over, ya know, there was rumors about we were gonna turn in our ammunication. We're gonna go to the States, we're gonna have a big parade in New York and all this kind. As far as we knew the war was over. And then they told us, well, Bob Hope was having a show. And in Pyongyang. So they selected a number of people from our company, and I was one of them, and we went up and we watched the Bob Hope show. And there was thousands of troops there at that Bob Hope show. And that woulda been the place were the North Koreans to hit us that day, but they didn't. So after that--I don't exactly remember, it was sometime in October they told us, "We're going north, we're going to the Yalu River." So we were on a three day force-march. I mean, we walked almost twenty-four hours a day. We'd get breaks every once in awhile, and one night we've been walking for, God I don't know how many, ten, twelve hours or something like this, and they told us take a break, we got some trucks coming up. We'd actually out marched our supply lines. And I laid down on the side of the road and almost got run over by a truck. And I'd fallen asleep as soon as I hit that ground. And we got on these trucks and which some of 'em were North Korean trucks, or they Russian trucks actually which was-- we had confiscated and they were using them up to haul supplies and troops on. So we were going up the road and it was about middle of the night, and we stopped and they said, "We're gonna stay here for the rest of the night." So my buddy and I, Clark, what if there was a cotton field there and we went up in this cotton field and we laid down, ya know. And all of sudden there was firing down on the road. There was tracers going all over the place. We didn't know what was going on. So then we found out that the first--there was a truck behind us with the North Korean soldiers, and they hooked onto our convoy. They must have thought we were part of the North Korean unit because we had Korean trucks, and so they got most of them. And ah, after that we kept going north, and we were almost to the Yalu River. And somebody-- there was a rumor going around, the Chinese were gonna enter the war, ya know. So they said, "They're stock piling supplies on the other side of the Yalu River." So they pulled our regiment back, I don't remember how many, to a place called Sinanju. And I don't know how many miles, this, maybe fifty, one hundred miles south of the Yalu River, and we dug in. We were in a horse shoe perimeter. And in the opening of the horse shoe, down below, there was a Korean village. And so we set up our positions, and my buddy and I were in a forward position called listening position. And the rest of our platoon was in back of us, higher up the hill. So just before midnight, somebody started shooting-- one of our mortar units started sending up star shells. They was a real bright magnesium coming down in parachutes. And we looked down in this village, and there was just literally thousands of Chinese troops coming up that valley. And we had set out mine fields down below our positions at that time and--. So we started shooting, and they just kept coming and kept coming and--they finally overran our positions, but-- I don't know how many rounds I fired that day, in that twelve hour period, but I ran outta ammunication. And I called ammo.

I says, "Somebody gimme some ammo," ya know. And next thing I know, I got three Chinese troops standing in front of me, and one of 'em shot my buddy in the head. And ah--he was reloading and I didn't know what to do. I was outta ammo, and I didn't know what to do and there was an entrenching tool lying behind me. So while he was reloading, I picked it up and I smacked him in the head with it and he went down. Then one of his buddies shot me in the thigh. And ah, earlier that night, Clark and I were standing up, we were firing down the hill, ya know. And the grenade went off right in front of our foxhole. And I was hit with it, but I didn't realize it. My adrenaline was flowing so high, you know. I didn't realize I had been hit. Clark grabbed me by the back of my pistol belt, and pulled me down into this little foxhole, ya know. So then we just stuck our heads and were shooting down the hill every once in awhile. And then these three guys jumped us and ah, when the other one he had shot me in the head, I-- shot me in the, in the leg, I hit *him* in the head with the entrenching tool, and then I jumped out of the hole. And I was gonna try and get back up the hill. And another one of these little twerp, like a little Chinese guys grabbed me, and we were wrestling. And I had him in front of me, and another Chinese soldier came up and he pointed a rifle right up my head. He wasn't more than three feet away from me, and he fired. And that's the last thing I remember. But, lucky for me, I guess I had a helmet on, and he must've hit my helmet, cause I got a one inch scar right here. And I had blood trickling down my forehead, but it wasn't very--it was just a graze. So when I woke up, I'm laying with my legs--my head's down the hill, my legs are on top of this guy that I had been wresting with, and I didn't know if he was dead or not. But my bayonet was laying right there so I grabbed it and I was gonna hit him with it, and I realized he was dead. So I started crawling up the hill, and some of the guys up on the hill were shooting over my head, ya know. They said, "Are you hit?" And I said, "Yeah." So they came down and they pulled me up. And when they got me on top of the hill, they cut my pants off my legs, and I realized had about a ten-inch gash in my right leg. And they found out I had a grenade wound, which I was completely surprised. It was about two inches in diameter. Look like somebody had taken an ice cream scoop and just scooped the meat outta my hip. So they put me on litter, and we had a litter Jeep there. They took us to a battalion aid station where they cleaned up my wound, ya know, put a bandage on it. And from there, they sent us down to division aid station, which was farther back. And ah, we were in this old Korean school house, and I'm laying in the corner on a stretcher. And guys started running down these steps, they were hollering. Somebody--there's a airplane shooting at it. You could hear the bullets ricocheting off the roof. They had this tile roof on this building, and you could hear the shells, the bullets ricocheting off. And we didn't know what--I couldn't move, you know, and finally, they found this--somebody says it's a Mig. It went away, it never came back. So after they dressed my wounds up there, looked at 'em again, they put me in an ambulance, and took me out to this airfield. It was an old Gooney Bird. DC-3, I think it was. And, it was warm inside. I hadn't been warm in weeks, ya know. And ah, I fell asleep, and I remember this guy pushing on me and he says, "Hey, this guy's dead." And I'm trying to say, "No, I'm not," ya know, but I can't, so I open my eyes and he says, "No he's not." So then they flew us down to Seoul, and we went to this 8th Army field hospital. And I got



in there, and this nurse took my boots off, and I says, "Hey, those are new boots." She says, "Don't worry, you won't be needing them anymore." So the next day after, they sent out to this Navy hospital ship. And I spent two weeks on that Navy hospital ship, where they operated on me and then they flew us to Japan. And to make a long story short, I was in three hospitals in Japan, I wound up in the island of Hokkaido and Sapporo. And ah, we were the first fifty Korean wounded that had been in--. They opened that hospital just for us. And they treated us like royalty, they really--course all of us were infantry guys, and we sat around all day playing cards, and one day this lieutenant comes up, and he says, "I need somebody, any of you can type?" And nobody said a word. Back in them days, if you're in the infantry, you don't volunteer for anything, ya know. So after the couple days I decided-- I got in a wheel chair. I had one of those Japanese nurses take me down to the hospital headquarters, and he says, "Can you type?" And I says, "Yeah, I can type a little bit." So he says, "I'll tell you what," he says, "If you work for me," he says, "I'll see that you get a class-A uniform and a pass," he says, "And you can go out at night." Well at those—at that time I was still on crutches, I still couldn't walk. So anyway, I started working in the registrar's office, work--filling out our own medical records. Casualty reports and stuff like that. So I did that for oh, about a month I guess. And then this warrant officer comes up to me one day and he says, "I heard you can type?" And I says, "Yeah," I says, "Why, what do you need?" He says, "I need somebody to help me with the personnel records." I didn't know anything about personnel, ya know, but he put me down there in the personnel office, and he showed what to do. He trained me in what to do. So I was there until May of '51. So I had been in the hospital six months, and they were getting ready to discharge me. And this warrant officer says, he says, "You don't wanna go back to Korea?" I says, "Not really," ya know. This was '51 and things were pretty hot over there at that time. And ah, he says, "How'd you like to be assigned to the hospital here?" And I says, "Yeah, I'd like that." So they assigned me to the hospital, where I worked in personnel. It was in February of '52, we've got a new hospital commander. He was a full colonel, medical officer. And I'm walking down the hallway one day, and he says, "Good morning, Sergeant Kostuck." And I says, [Japanese greeting] which is Japanese for "good morning." Maybe I shouldn't have bowed, but anyway, he tells his captain, he says, "How long's that son of a gun been over here?" He says, "I think it's time he went home." So he sent me down to Camp Drake in Tokyo in the replacement depot. And they asked me, "Where do you wanna be assigned?" And I says, "I wanna stay in Japan." They says, "You can't, you have to go home." So they put us on planes, and sent us over. We debarked in Seattle at the Army base there, and I got there and they asked me, "Where you wanna be assigned in the States?" I says, "I don't wanna be assigned in the States. I wanna go back to Japan." They said, "You can't, you have to stay in the States." So I didn't pick any place. And then from there they sent us down to Fort McCoy, and we stayed there for a few days, and then they asked me again, "Where do you wanna be assigned?" I says, "I wanna go back to Japan." They said, "You can't." So I went home on a thirty day furlough in Wausau here, and went back to Fort McCoy, and I had an orders for Fort Ord, California. So when I got to Fort Ord, I went through the same routine again, ya know, "Where do you wanna be assigned?" I

says, "I wanna go back to Japan, I wanna volunteer for Japan." They says, "You can't." I says, "How about Korea? Can I volunteer to go back to Korea?" And they said, "Yes," ya know, so I says, "Okay, I wanna go back to Korea." So they sent me up to Camp Stoneman, California, which was a overseas replacement center. They got on a ship, and within ninety days I'm back in Tokyo. And I called the hospital, and this Captain Ingersoll, who had been our detachment commander, answered the phone. I says, "This is Sergeant Kostuck." He says, "Oh, he's not here anymore. We sent him back to the States." And I said, "Like hell you did," I says, "I'm back in Tokyo." So I spent about two weeks there on the repo depot. And they didn't know what to do with me. And they called in personnel one day and they said, "Did you sign a waver to come over here?" And I said, "Are you crazy?" I said, "I don't wanna go back to Korea." And they says, "Well, you can't stay here." I says, "Well, what are you gonna do with me?" And they didn't know, and so anyway, couple days later they sent me down to Hiroshima. There was an island at Niijima was a Far East Command Specialist School. And I was assigned there as one of the field 1st sergeants. That's how I got back to Japan.

Mik: Why didn't they want you back in Japan?

Don: Well, the Army regulations at that time were you had to spend eighteen months in the States before you could volunteer to go back overseas. But then in 1955, I was at Fort Benning, Georgia; I was going through advanced infantry training. And ah, there was three guys in, in my class that had been in my company in Korea, which was really surprised me, ya know. And when they seen me, they were really surprised. They thought I was dead, cause I was the only survivor outta my squad, outta nine guys. And two of 'em were twins, the Mercy[?] brothers were twins. And then Duane Olm[?], who I went to school with here. We were all in the same class, it was really weird ya know. So—

Mik: Where were you when the Armistice was signed?

Don: I was in Japan, I was in Camp Covi[?]. And ah, our personnel officer came up one day and she says, "You've been in Korea before?" And I says, "Yeah." She says, "How'd you like to go back?" And I says, "Are you kidding?" ya know. And they says, "Well, we need some people to go over there to process the American POW's." So I said, "Okay." They said, "Thirty days, and then you come back to Japan." So I went over there, and I don't know how many people were on our team. We had medical team, and intelligence teams, and we were processing the American POW's. And after we'd been there about a month, they said, "You guys, we're gonna put you on a ship and send you back to the States. We can finish the processing of these POW's on the way back to the States. Or you can go back to your units in Japan." So they asked me, "What do you wanna do?" And I says, "I wanna go back to Japan. I don't wanna go to the States, I don't want a thirty day furlough," ya know. So they, they said, "Okay, you can leave." Just like that they left us on our own. So we went down to Kimpo Airbase, and we managed to get a flight back to Japan and-

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Mik: What condition were the POWs in?

Don: Overall, I'd say they were pretty good physical shape. They'd lost a lot of bit of weight. They all had stories to tell, ya know, about collaborators and things like this. You didn't know who to believe, or what to believe. Well it's--but the intelligence people sort that information out, but we had this one colored PFC came in one day, and he had khakis on, and he had ribbons from his breast pocket almost up to his shoulder boards, ya know. And I says, "Where'd you get all them ribbons." He says, "I bought 'em in the PX." And I says, "You're not entitled to all them ribbons." He says, "Yes I is." He says, "I bought 'em," he says, "I'm wearing 'em," [laughs]. So there were some humorous--. But they had us locked up. All the people that were on a teams that were processing these people, they locked us up in this barbed wire area in tents. They wouldn't let us out. But the POWs, they could go wherever they wanted [laughs].

Mik: So why were you locked up?

Don: They didn't want us talking to anybody. So—

Mik: You liked Japan?

Don: I like Japan. I like the people; they were very, very friendly. My military pay went twice as far because things were real cheap at the time. And ah, that's one reason I liked it over there.

Mik: What was Hiroshima like when you got down there?

Don: Well, I'd been there oh, maybe a couple weeks and one weekend. Me and a buddy of mine decided we were gonna go to Hiroshima. So we took a ferry from our island over to a town called Kamakura, I think it was. Got on the train and went down to Hiroshima, but they wouldn't let us off the train station, yet we were on a platform. And we could look over the city, and it was practically flat. Everything was just black. And there was a few structures that had been severely damaged, but then we were there maybe an hour, and then they put us back on the train, and we went back up north again.

Mik: Was it deserted at that point?

Don: No, I didn't see that many people. But we weren't allowed to go into town, so I really can't say.

Mik: When you were first evacuated over to Japan into the hospital, what was giving you the most problem? You had a head wound? You had a big wound in your leg?

Don: Well, they had me on morphine. So I didn't have a lot of pain, but I couldn't move, ya know, I couldn't walk. Cause I was in the hospitals or--I think I was in there about three months before I was able to get around on crutches or a wheel chair. We used to race up and down the hallways on wheelchairs [laughs].

Mik: That's pretty amazing, you were pretty banged up when you were crawling up that hill?

Don: Yeah, I didn't realize how bad I'd been hit. And I didn't realize I was the only survivor out of my squad. My squad leader, Sergeant Harrington, was one of these-- he was a tough old dude. He was veteran of World War II, and he had seen a lot of combat in World War II. And when I was talking to these guys down in Fort Benning, they said when they went back up and after they had driven the Chinese back, they said there was about a dozen guys laying around his foxhole. But he had been killed. And I was really surprised that I was the only guy that got out alive.

Mik: A dozen Chinese dead around the foxhole area--?

Don: Around his foxhole, yeah. And ah, they hit us pretty hard that day. We had a whole Chinese Army hit our battalion. It was foggy, drizzling, rainy. We couldn't get any air support. Didn't have any artillery support. And we had an Australian brigade, armored brigade, I think they had a light tanks. And they made mounds, and they would drive these tanks up these mounds. They were using tanks for indirect fire, which in a tank is not an indirect fire weapon, but they were firing over the top of the hill and lobbing shells into the village, into the Chinese troops that were down below.

Mik: So is that just a blur? From the time you were overrun--?

Don: I remember it just like it happened yesterday. And I dream about it almost every night, in some phase of it, yeah. But it--I don't have stress syndrome, I don't think I do. It doesn't bother me that much. Never really thought about it. I never talked to anybody about it. When I was overseas, ya know, we'd go to our clubs at night, that was part of our entertainment, and guys were always telling war stories, ya know. You didn't know what to believe, or who to believe, and I just kinda got tired of hearing about it, so I really never talked to anybody about it. **[End of Tape WCKOR044]**

Mik: Did you see any similarities between the two conflicts [Vietnam and Korea]?

Don: No.

Mik: Totally different?

Don: Absolutely, totally different. The VC were--they'd come in every night, ya know. And ah, you never know who to trust. I stayed out of Saigon as much as I could.

The time I had a--when I was promoted a sergeant major, we had seven companies in our unit scattered around the Saigon area, and I had to go visit 'em, ya know, at least one unit every day or so. And we had a company down there, it was called D-Company, it was--they received all our incoming perishable foods, and supplies came in there. I'd have to go down there, and I didn't really enjoy it. One day we were coming back, and you always had flak jackets and helmets on and weapons loaded. We're coming down the road, and here's this scroungy looking guy in a black pajamas, and he had a real heavy sun tan, and I says, "That sucker's gotta be VC." So I put my rifle on it, kinda it had it in my lap, and I kinda pointed it at him, and he watched us go by, and he had an old dirty bag, in his hand. And I just knew that sucker was gonna hit somebody. I'm sure he had a grenade in that bag. But we went passed him, we never--. So, I didn't go to Saigon if I could avoid it. But they always hit us; we were mortared every night, just about. Somewhere on our perimeter was hit every night. In fact I'd been there--when I got my company I was 1st sergeant, Saigon support command. I had to put duty roster, guard detail out every night, and the guards had instructions. They were not to shoot unless they got permission from the officer of the day. So this was about three weeks after I got there, in the middle of the night just kaboom! With the biggest explosion, and I thought we got hit. I figures our company took a direct hit. So I jumped outta bed, slipped on my pants and put on my helmet and ran outside, and everybody was mingling around and I says, "Hey, get in the bunkers." Ya know we had several bunkers in the company area. The guys just stood there looking around. Well, we found out that the guards on their perimeter seen these VC coming through the wires. They couldn't locate the officer of the day. He was in the mess hall having a cup a coffee, and they couldn't get permission to shoot. If they did, they probably would've been in trouble, ya know. So anyway, these VC sappers came in, they blew up an ammo pad, and went back out the wire. Never had a shot fired at 'em because they couldn't get permission to fire. And I told my guys, ya know, I might of got in trouble for this. I says, "If you're on the perimeter and you see suspicious activity out there," I says, "You shoot the SOB." I says, "And you tell him I told you so." But we never had a problem with that.

Mik: We heard something similar about up on the Yalu from a Marine tanker, who said that they were under orders not to fire at the Chinese, even when they came over, it was awhile before the orders came through that they could fire. And they were taking fire. You didn't have anything—

Don: No, we never had orders not to fire. We were on patrol one day, we were kind of half way up a mountain side, and looked down on the road, and here come, oh, I don't know, maybe a couple dozen North Korean soldiers were marching on the road. So we kept low profile, we hid behind some bushes, and the sergeant that was in charge of our patrol called in a airstrike on 'em. Not airstrike, but artillery started pouring in. They hit 'em pretty bad, they wiped 'em out. But we didn't have any contact with 'em. We were too far away for one thing. And then on that same patrol, we found a train that had been hidden inside a tunnel in a mountain, and the train was full of weapons and ammunition. So they called the engineers in, and they

blew the train up, and they blew the tunnel up, closed it. And then another night we were on patrol, and we came up to this old Korean house up in the hills, and this woman had a bunch of rabbits, so some of the guys were gonna take some rabbits. We were gonna have rabbit. And this old lady came out jabbering away in Korean you know, "No, no, no, no," I think she was saying. She had tears coming down her eyes and I says, "Guys, we can't do this." ya know. So we let her keep her rabbits. But we never let a chicken get away. We had a lot of chickens. I think when we left a village, there were no chickens left [laughs]. We used to cook 'em in our mess kits. We had these little gas burners, propane stoves.

Mik: Now how do you do that?

Don: Well, we go to the mess tent, and the mess sergeant give us a canteen cup full of lard, and then we'd go put that lard in our mess kits, we cut the chicken up and we'd fry it in the mess kit.

Mik: A piece at a time?

Don: Yeah, a couple pieces at a time. No salt and pepper, of course, but we didn't care [laughs]. In fact we were in this one village, and we bivouacked out that night, and there was a big, oh, almost like a barn, warehouse. It was full of rice. Big hundred pound sacks of rice, and some of the guys got an idea. They took a bag out, and they cut it open, and they spread it around, and they pulled the bag back into this barn, and they were chasing the chickens. There was maybe a half a dozen chickens or so. And the chickens got inside the barn, one of the guys threw a grenade in there [laughs]. And we went in and picked up chicken pieces [laughs].

Mik: You hunt with what you have available right?

Don: That's right. And ah, that fried chicken was a real treat over there because of all the - well, we had mostly was C-rations, and we'd get a hot meal once in awhile.

Mik: Tell me about night patrols, what are those like?

Don: We'd just go out looking for enemy troops. It's a lot walking. Very rarely, at that time, did we ever run in, or encounter, any North Koreans. They were running. As far as they were concerned, the war was over, ya know. And ah, we had the war won.

Mik: I found that pretty interesting when you got to Pyongyang.

Don: Well, MacArthur wanted to bomb the Chinese staging areas, and Truman wouldn't let him, cause he was afraid, I guess, that he would start World War III. Well, at that time the Chinese didn't have the atomic weapons and I think it was a big mistake, cause if the Chinese hadn't entered the war, Korea would be a free country today. It'd be unified. So I blame Truman for that. I also blame him for killing half

the people in my company. Ya know, we had a three hundred man company and I think--when I had left, over half of the company had been wounded or killed. And I still blame Truman for that. I don't think the politicians should get involved in a military war. They oughta let the military, who trained to fight the wars. That's what happening to us in Iraq right now. The politicians are trying to run the war. So what are you gonna do.

Mik: That's what happened in Vietnam too.

Don: That's right.

Mik: Describe for me the terrain when you were in the horseshoe perimeter. I mean, you talked about hills, but were they really steep?

Don: These were mountains. Yeah, I mean, well, probably couple thousand feet. Up and--we were in a horseshoe perimeter at that time, and we had Easy Company was on our right and--H Company was a heavy mortar company was behind us, and then we had F Company, I think it was on our left. So we had three rifle companies dug in on the ridge, and looking down into this valley.

Mik: You were on that line?

Don: Our company, G Company, was right in the center. And so--

Mik: And you lost everybody else in your squad on that night?

Don: I found out, yeah, five years later, everybody in my squad had been killed.

Mik: And what were the casualties like on the rest of the perimeter.

Don: I have no idea. I guess they suffered quite a few casualties. I understand that earlier--later on that day, when the skies had cleared that the jets came in, and they napalmed the whole area. And ah, but I wasn't there at the time, which—but, apparently the Chinese, they drew back at that time, and I guess they--the UN forces started what we called strategic withdrawal. An advance to the rear.

Mik: But you missed?

Don: Yeah. Thank God I missed it [laughs]. So anyway, they were drove all the way back to Seoul. You know, all the way back across the 38th Parallel, and that's where it ended.

Mik: They actually went below Seoul, and then came back up.

Don: They were right back where they were on June of '50.

Mik: When you were wrestling with the Chinese—

Don: Chinese soldier, yeah.

Mik: Do you have any idea how long you were out after you got shot?

Don: I don't remember, but I remember when I woke up, or when I came to, it was real quiet. At least at that moment anyway, it was real quiet. And ah, I was kinda afraid to open my eyes because I didn't know if there were any Chinese soldiers around, and if I'm sure if they could have seen I was still alive, they probably would've shot me again, and I avoid that. So after a few minutes, I kinda moved my head and looked, and my feet were laying on top of this guy that I'd been wrestling with. And all the other Chinese soldiers, there must have been, half a dozen of 'em, were all laying around, they were all dead. The guys on top of the hill had shot 'em. So that's when they came down and pulled me up off the hill.

Mik: So you think that's what happened to the guy you were fighting with?

Don: I think he got hit. I think the guy that was shooting at me hit him, cause he was in front of me.

Mik: That's what I wondered. If he—

Don: I often wondered about that too, ya know, cause I don't really remember what happen. Although I know, when I got down to the hospital in Seoul, the field hospital, the nurse says, "You're bleeding from the--you got blood on your forehead, you know." And I didn't realize that, but I had a scrape about a one inch, I still got a one inch scar there. And the bullet had just grazed me. I don't know it was from that shot or another shot anyway. I was very fortunate. And you heard about foxhole religion, boy, I had foxhole religion. And I think a lot of other people did too. So I don't know if that had anything to do with it, but I like to think it did.

Mik: Well, I can only imagine what that must have felt like to be in your foxhole looking at just thousands and thousands of enemies pouring in and knowing they're coming at you.

Don: I don't know how many, I must have shot almost a couple thousand rounds of ammunition. There was no single shots. It was M-1 rifle, eight round clips, ya know. You fire until the clip bangs out, and you load another one in. You just keep shooting. You couldn't find enough targets, I mean, you didn't have to look hard, you know. There was always somebody in your sights. And when the star shells went, when it got dark, you didn't have any, we still kept shooting. But they would send star shells up every few minutes, you know, so we could see what was going on.

Mik: And there was a lot of incoming fire as well?



Don: Oh yeah, yeah.

Mik: I've heard that the Chinese had more soldiers than weapons?

Don: Their first wave didn't have weapons. Some of 'em didn't have any weapons, so they had sticks with knives, or rubber band that's tied on the end of them. And then the second wave would come through, they would have weapons, and then the third wave would come through, and they would pick the weapons up off the soldiers that had already been killed. And that was their--. Somebody in our company had gone down a hill earlier the day before. And they'd taken a gas can, and tied a grenade around it with some camo wire, and he set up a trip wire. And I can remember during the night, I was standing up, shooting down the hill and this kaboom! And this huge flash of flame went up in front of me, and I knew somebody had tripped that wire. So I knew they were Chinese troops, at least within twenty-five yards of our positions. So we just kept shooting.

Mik: You talked about on the trip up, and on your patrols, not seeing very many North Koreans. Had you been in firefights before that night?

Don: Once or twice. We were--but they were a long way off. You know, we never had no close contact, cause they were trying to avoid us. And they just disappeared.

Mik: Yeah, one of those affairs is enough. Being overrun.

Don: Well, I was, I think the Chinese hit us the same day they hit the Marines. Or maybe it was a little later they hit the Marines. But anyway, we were one of the first units to be hit by the Chinese. As I understand it, looking back at the information that's available, there was--I think it was the 18th Chinese Army. You got a regiment, you know. And, it was awesome.

Mik: Been carrying that with you, so I think a testament to your fortitude that you were able to deal with it as well as you do.

Don: Well, my wife says I have a strong constitution [laughs]. I can't say I was really scared until after I got hit. When they were pulling me off the hill, some mortars were coming in. And I can remember at that time, I got scared. But before that, I don't remember being scared.

Mik: Were you afraid that your wounds were fatal? Or were you afraid of getting hit again?

Don: Never even thought about it. I was afraid that we'd run into some more Chinese troops, you know, when we were going out on this litter Jeep. And I remember the driver handed me a .45, he says, "You know how to do this?" So I grabbed it out of his hand. [laughs] And ah, but we didn't encounter anybody going out so--

- Mik: Were you feeling like you were in shock or anything? You must have had a lot of blood lost.
- Don: No, I don't remember.
- Mik: Just things weren't working right?
- Don: Just ever--kinda confused. Didn't really know how bad I'd been hit. And they told me in the aid station that if that grenade had hit me two inches to the left, it would hit my main artery, and I woulda bled to death. So I was that lucky.
- Mik: And did you have any trouble with your--after you healed up? Any lingering trouble.
- Don: I still have trouble with it. I get cramps in that hip. Especially if--it depends on how I'm laying in bed at night, but I do get cramps on it. And for four or five years after that, I had trouble doing running, and I had trouble doing calisthenics. Especially when you have to do squat-jumps, I couldn't do 'em, and even today I still have some limitations, nothing really bothered me. I still play golf quite regularly and--
- Mik: That's pretty amazing that you were able to stay in the military because that's a pretty physical way of life.
- Don: I enjoyed the military. Of course I went in, ya know, when I was seventeen, I really didn't-- It was my first job, so to speak. And I kind of looked forward to it. I really enjoyed the military service, except for you know, a few areas. I went back to Korea in '56. After I finished my training there at Fort Benning, and I went back to the same 24th Infantry Division that were up on the demilitarized zone, and I went to the 34th Infantry Regiment, and we were up there couple months before they pulled us back, and sent another regiment up replace us.
- Mik: Tell me about the occasion of that photograph. What was that situation?
- Don: Well, I remember this was in the fall of 1956. The regimental sergeant major, at that time, came down to the personnel office, and he says, "I want you to pull some records." "Not," he says, "Indiscriminately, just pull records out of anybody [who] had been in Korea, served in Korea back in the '50s." And ah, so I did, and my record was one of 'em. And somebody up at the regimental headquarters picked me to go down and represent the United Nations command from our unit. And there was people down there from all the units that were in Korea at the time. And we went down to the palace in Seoul. And for New Year's Day and we had a meeting with President Syngman Rhee and his wife, and they took our pictures and, so every member on that picture had served in Korea during the war.
- Mik: What did that feel like, meeting with Syngman Rhee?

- Don: It was kinda odd. Ya know, I never met a president before, and they briefed us before we went in there. Ya know, don't shake his hand because his hand had been crushed by the Japanese. And ah, so we just bowed to him, and he talked to us as a group.
- Mik: Thank you?
- Don: Yeah, he says, "Thank you very much for your service."
- Mik: When you were working at the hospital, it had transitioned into this sort of stalemate along the 38th Parallel.
- Don: Those were the days when they had Hamburger Hill, ya know. And ah, they had the big major battles in fixed positions. And so the fighting over there was quite fierce at that time, in '51.
- Mik: And you just followed the course of the war? Didn't have any thoughts about—
- Don: Only thing I knew was with we heard on Armed Forces Radio, and what was in the Stars and Stripes Newspapers. That's the only information that we had as to what was going on.
- Mik: And did you have contact with the other wounded that were coming into the hospital?
- Don: Oh yeah. The fact is for a while, they ran short of corpsman to look after these patients, and I was volunteered to serve as a corpsman. I didn't have any medical training, but I remember this nurse, I reported for duty, I was on a night shift, the first night I went in and the nurse says, "You've ever given anybody a shot?" And I says, "No." She says, "Well, I'll show you how to do it," ya know. So she got her tray with all the shots, penicillin I think it was, or other shots, and she got the first patient. She turned him over and patted him on the butt, and she stuck him with this needle and she says, "Okay, you do the next guy." I remember this guy looking at me he says, "Oh no," ya know. So I just put the needle to the rear end, and I pushed it in [laughs]. And the nurse says, "I think that'll be enough," [laughs]. So that only lasted only about a week, and I went back to my personnel duties.
- Mik: When you were typing up, you said it was casualty reports—
- Don: Right.
- Mik: --and things like that, what was in those records? It just described the wounds or--?
- Don: Yes, well, they had what they called the diagnostic nomenclature manual. And all the injuries or, ya know, it's just assign by number. So you look up the--the doctors fill out the medical forms, ya know, and they get-- they assign it a number, and

when you're typing up the records, you look up this number and it gives you a description of the wound, plus whatever the doctor described on there, and the information on the forms where you had the patient's name, and serial number, his unit, ya know, and his major injuries, which you'd fill out any and put the medical diagnosis--type 'em out on the forms. And I did that on every one of our guys that had been--including myself. Not very often you get to type up your very own medical records, casualty reports.

Mik: And what did yours say? What was your list of wounds?

Don: Well, mine was gun shot wound to the right thigh, and a grenade wound to the hip.

Mik: Didn't even mention the head?

Don: No, for awhile multiple retained foreign fragments was the medical diagnosis. And I remember I was in this--doctor was examining one day, and he had this red glasses on, and they were almost like an x-ray, I forget the terminology for it. And I says, "I must have a couple pieces of shrapnel in there yet." And he says, "More like a couple hundred." Well, it was a lot of sand, ya know and smaller grenade fragments in there, but that's the only thing I knew about.

Mik: So they took some out, and the rest came out by themselves?

Don: They left about--there's some that are in there pretty deep. I've got maybe five or six; I got a small splinter in my back that must have gone around my hip and into my lower back. I remember that cause I seen the X-rays. And when I had my retirement physical from the service, those shrapnel pieces were still in there.

Mik: And I saw the telegram to your mother and it said, "Your son was slightly wounded."

Don: Well, slightly wounded versus killed in action. I guess there was--if seriously wounded, you'd have been in deep trouble. So I think they probably used for anybody that wasn't critically injured or killed in action is slightly wounded.

Mik: To make the parents worry less?

Don: My mother did, my dad was deer hunting at that time. Deer season was--it was in the latter part of November, and ah, when she got my first letter, I told her in the first letter, where I says, "I hope this gets to you before the war department does." But it didn't, and I told I was fine, and I was in the hospital and-- She didn't open that telegram for a week till my dad came back from deer hunting, and I just can't imagine what she went through waiting to open that note, and what was in that telegram.

Mik: Did she know that it wasn't killed in action?

Don: No, she had no idea. So it must've been pretty traumatic for her. I had to make one death notification when I was in the Army and ah, I was 1st sergeant of a unit in White Sands Missile Range and ah, one of my master sergeant's son was killed. He was in the 1st Cav, Armored Cav over there, and he was due to rotate home. And he volunteered to stay a week longer so that he could go home--him and his buddy could rotate together. And he was killed by an RPG. He was on a weapons carrier or something, and he got killed. And I had to, I had to notify his parents. And that's one of the hardest things I ever did in my life. I get a lump in my throat, ya know, just even thinking about it. I felt sorry for his, for his wife, or his mother, especially, she took it really hard. But we went over, and I had the unit commander, and the chaplain was with me. I said to Captain Schroeder, I says, "I hope I never have to do this again."

Mik: Yeah, I think it sounds like when you were in that hospital recovering, you were more concerned about getting the word to your mom.

Don: Yeah, that was my main concern, cause she had no idea what was happening. She had--like I said, back in them days they didn't have TV and all. The only news you got about the war was what was in the papers and on the radio.

Mik: And did you say you told her you weren't in Korea?

Don: No, that's when I went to Vietnam. I didn't want her to worry. I told her I was in Thailand. In fact, as I was in the PX one day and they had a pamphlet about Thailand and I sent it to her [laughs].

Mik: Don, I interrupted you at one point, you were sort of moving from Japan to Vietnam, what did you do in that interim there?

Don: I was working in personnel most of the time. I was finally was classified as a personnel management specialist, and that's where I stayed until I was assigned to Hawaii from Japan in 1957. And ah, they were closing out my position, so I was an administrative aid to General Rume[?], who was the quartermaster general for the US Army-Japan at the time. And they called me over to personnel cause they were closing out my position, and they says, "How'd you like to come to Hawaii?" I say, "Yeah, that'd be nice," ya know. So I was assigned to USARPAC [U.S. Army Pacific] Headquarters, at Fort Shafter Hawaii in the personnel section. I took over the officers' records section. And they closed up, that's when the Army came up with a new E-8 and E-9 promotions, you know, when they came in. When they started the sergeant major program, E-9 program, and they upgraded my position. I was a sergeant 1st class at the time, and they upgraded it to an E-8 position. And they were bringing a WAC in from Washington to take my job. And this captain I worked for, she says, "Go find yourself another job," ya know. So I used to go fishing with this lieutenant colonel, his name was Levalle[?], and he was the Deputy Psywar Commander for the US Army-Pacific. And we always use to have coffee

breaks in the morning. I'd go over, and Colonel Lavalle and I'd shoot the breeze, and I says, "I'm going out to the 25th Infantry Division." I says, "I'm gonna see if I can get back into tank." Ya know, get in a tank unit. He says, "What do you wanna do that for?" And I says, "Well, I gotta get a chance to get promoted," because promotions were pretty hard to come by at that [unintelligible], especially for administrative people. And he says, "How'd you like to go to Okinawa?" And I says, "Why?" He says, "I need somebody in my unit," he says, "and I think you might fit in." So, I says, "Well, it's a job," ya know. So I was assigned to the, it was called Visual Broadcasting and Visual Activities Unit. It was an intelligence unit, psychological warfare unit. And prior that, when I'd been working the G-2 section for awhile as a security specialist and I was taking correspondence courses with the intelligence school, which I completed. So then I was given a military occupational specialty, which you call MOS, as an intelligence analyst, or intelligence specialist. So when I got into this unit in Okinawa, they interviewed us, because this was a pretty serious job. So I was assigned to the Korean-Chinese team, because I had been in Korea. And I don't think anybody else or had been in Korea at that time, and so that's--I stayed there for about a year, year and half doing intelligence analyst work. We use to get Federal Broadcasting Information Service reports, teletypes everyday. And we'd have to screen 'em for--we had areas of interest. They're called thin--and we had themes. Themes would cover a particular subject, and we'd screen those broadcast information reports, and we'd extract them, and we typed up intelligence summaries, which we'd send up to higher headquarters. And that's what I did while I was there. So when I left Okinawa, they assigned me to Fort Knox, Kentucky to the G-2 section, which is the intelligence section of the general staff. And I got into the headquarters, and this captain was there. He had been in that intelligence unit that I had been in, been in Okinawa. He had been assigned there. And he pulled me right away, he says, "I need somebody to run my classified documents section." And I says, "I'm supposed to go to the G-2 section." He says, "You're gonna work for me," he says, "How about promoted," he says, "I'll get you promoted." And I made master sergeant. I stayed there for a little over a year, I guess. So I got promoted. I got kinda tired of that, so I came up for reenlistment, and I wanted to go someplace else. I didn't particularly care for Kentucky, and so I volunteered for White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. I got over there, and they put me in classified documents section. So after I'd been in there awhile, they had the--I was kind of an extra hand in there, ya know. And he says--they had a unit over there, it was called engineering systems test office, which was, they were doing research on rocket engines. And that was part of the NASA component was there, was working with us. And they were developing rocket engines for the first man flight to the moon. And we had Wernher Von Braun, was a German scientist, was in that unit at the time. And I got promoted there; I made 1st sergeant at that unit. And then I volunteered for Vietnam.

Mik: What rank were you when you got wounded? I was just wondering what your rank was when you were wounded?

Don: I was a corporal at the time.

Mik: And then you were promoted to sergeant?

Don: I made sergeant in that hospital I was working in Japan. **[End of Tape WCKOR045]**

Mik: Was in a foxhole? Is that what it was? Was it a trench?

Don: It was a foxhole we dug ourselves. There was a lot of that rock and shale, so it took us quite awhile to dig that thing. And the fact is, we dug for quite awhile, and we got done, we sat down and our heads were still above the ground. And I says, "Clark," I says, "I don't think this thing is deep enough." So we dug some more and that's a good thing. We were taking the rocks and piling them around the edges of our foxhole. And ah, we went down another couple of feet. And good thing we did too, cause they threw more than one grenade at us, I'm sure, because the next morning, those rocks were gone.

Mik: And you said he was killed in the foxhole?

Don: Yeah, he had a couple rounds of ammunition left yet, and he had an anti-tank grenade. And I says, "He's always complaining he had to carry this anti-tank grenade around." And I says, "Clark," I says, "be a good time to get rid of that sucker." And I says, "Why don't you load it up." I think he was in the process of putting the blank cartridge in his rifle and putting that grenade on the end of his rifle when he was shot. I think that's why they shot him. I think if I'd had a weapon in my hand, they probably would've shot me in the head too. I don't know, if they were to taken me prisoner, I wouldn't have lived, I would've died.

Mik: Do you think that's what they were trying to do?

Don: I suspect that they were trying to take me prisoner, yeah, cause we were in a forward position. We were probably, at least in our unit, the first people that they were in contact with, cause I remember early, the star shell went up, this was just before midnight. And I seen a figure run across in front of me. And he wasn't more that twenty-five, thirty feet away. And I fired twice, and he went down. And that's when the shooting started. And ah, that's when all hell broke loose.

Mik: Then it was just steady?

Don: It was steady shooting all night long.

Mik: Does your rifle overheat when you're shooting it like that?

Don: I had several jams, yeah. But the fortunate thing, and I don't know if this was an act of God or not, or just plain good infantrymanship, but I just cleaned my rifle the day before. And I had greased it with graphite grease. And I think that's what kept me

going all night long was that graphite grease in there, but then later on in the night, early, almost towards morning, it started to jam up on me. And I was looking for spent rounds. You know, rounds that I had ejected to see if I could find something that I could reload my rifle when the Chinese jumped us.

Mik: And you only had the ammunition that you had in your foxhole with you?

Don: Oh, we had our regular, basic load, which was about a hundred rounds in a pistol belt, or I mean in a rifle belt. And then we had about, oh I guess, we both had about eight bandoliers of ammunition, which held, I guess, ten or twelve clips of ammunition. That's the only ammunition we had. Well, wait, plus our grenades, we got rid of our grenades early, ya know, we were just pull the pins and roll them down the hill. We only had four grenades. We use to carry them on our straps and our packs.

Mik: So you said you forgot to tell us about what happened in----.

Don: Oh yeah, back early in the war, when the first contingent went over, the 24th Division, the division commander, General Dean, Dean or Cain, I forget what the correct pronunciation was, he was taken captive in Taejon, which is south of the Naktong River; the first major city north of Pusan. And we went back in there, the end of July, first week in August, and we took Taejon back. It was deserted, and I wasn't in this group, but some guys in our company, they found six or seven GI's that were tied up with their hands behind their backs with camo wire in the school yard, and they'd been shot in the back of the head. And that kinda ticked us off. This was real cruelty. The North Koreans were not noted for taking prisoners or compassion at that time. They were brutal. So I had a compulsion about shooting them, in fact that at that same day, I was sitting on a case of Korean money that they had taken out of a bank, this was brand new money, and they had taken a bunch Korean prisoners and I was watching over 'em, watching guard, me and a couple of other guys. And this one guys started moving out, he got around the corner and he was gonna--he was walking away. And I went after him, I was hollering at him, ya know. I says, "Stop!" And he just kept on moving, and I hollered something at him in Japanese, I don't remember what it was, and he turned around he looked me, and I says, "You [Japanese language]," which I think is "A dirty-red-Communist" [laughs] in Japanese. And ah, he turned around and started to walk away again, and I went after him, I hit him in the back with my rifle butt, and he turned around, and when he turned around, my muzzle of my rifle was right up against his nose. And I marched him back. And I told the sergeant there, I says, "This guy tried to get away." So they took him away, I think he was a Korean soldier. But he was in civilian clothes. So—

Mik: Did you learn to speak Japanese while you were in Japan?

Don: Yeah, I became not fluent, but I could go any place I wanted to go, and just about do anything I wanted to do. I learned enough.



- Mik: No wonder they wanted you in G-2.
- Don: Well, I wasn't proficient enough, ya know, to do any translations or anything like that, but I could do what I wanted to do. Get in trouble. [laughs].
- Mik: Any Korean? Did you speak Korean at all?
- Don: Very few. I remember one day we had this Korean Army Unit attached to our company, and there was a lieutenant in there. And I got to talking to him one day, and I asked him a couple questions in Korean. Ya know, how do you ask for water, how do you say thank you, and I only spoke a few words, but that's about my extent of speaking Korean.
- Mik: But they all spoke Japanese from the occupation, didn't they?
- Don: Yeah, I suspected, especially the older people, I'm sure they all understood Japanese. I did learn to speak German. In fact, I went to the University of New Mexico, and I took a German language course, and I became pretty proficient in German. I could read, and write, and translate German. And I went to Germany for three years, and I was a t--. I was assigned to intelligence unit over there. I got to be quite friendly with the Germans. Ah—
- Mik: I'm gonna put you back in that foxhole one last time. Why do you think it was when you saw those three Chinese, why do you think it seemed like it was all in slow motion?
- Don: My adrenaline was just pumping so fast that--and I heard this happens, it just seemed like they were moving in slow motion. My reactions must have been faster and theirs was slower, or something like that.
- Mik: So it was not a blur at all? It was very clear?
- Don: Very clear, very deliberate. And when I hit these guys with the entrenching tool, I knew exactly what I was doing. And ah, cause you don't survive a blow with an entrenching tool across the forehead. I don't know if I killed him, or if I knocked them out, but they were down, and he didn't come back for seconds. But then this other guy jumped me, and then another guy came up behind him. That's the guy that shot me, shot at my head. I don't know if he hit me, or the other guy, or anyway the other guy was dead.
- Mik: So was he a fourth? The one that shot you?
- Don: Yeah, he must have come up behind these other guys after--this little guy and I were wrestling together. I don't know where he came--all I know is that all of a sudden he was standing in front of me.

Mik: You've got a huge muzzle pointed right at you?

Don: I won't tell you on tape what I said. I said, "Oh shit!" I figured that was it.

Mik: Thanks.

Don: Okay.

**[End of Interview]**