

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
THOMAS J. LUCAS, JR.
Paratrooper, Army, Korean War
2005

OH
1041

OH
1041

Lucas, Thomas J., Jr., (1922-). Oral History Interview, 2005.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 43 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Thomas Lucas, Jr., describes his Army service during the Korean War as a paratrooper with the 187th Regimental Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division and as a forward observer with the 674th Field Artillery, Battery B. In 1950, he recalls being recalled from the Reserves and shipped to Korea in just a month. Lucas describes assignment as a replacement officer in the 187th Regimental Combat Team and details his first jump in Sukchon (North Korea), which dropped him into hostile territory where his unit was outnumbered. He recalls that first jump being the worst, speaks of being a team leader, and touches on his increased responsibility. He mentions getting support from Republic of Korea armed forces. Lucas describes the composition, capabilities, and briefing methods of the regimental combat team. He characterizes the aggressiveness of the North Korean and Chinese troops and touches on their combat tactics. Lucas talks about his reassignment as a forward observer, the drop as a forward observer at Munsan-ni, and its high casualty rate. He explains he kept his head down because officers often became sniper targets. While stationed at Kyushu (Japan), he speaks of doing practice jumps. Lucas states he would try and keep his family out of his mind while in combat, and contrasts his being a single soldier in World War II to being a married soldier during the Korean War. He states ammunition was not a problem, but they would often rely more on grenades, bayonets, and knives than on rifle fire, which would give their position away. Sent home, Lucas discusses the relaxing boat ride, the troop train, and returning to work. He discusses the ages of the enlisted men and officers he served with.

Biographical Sketch:

Lucas served as a paratrooper in World War II and the Korean War. After serving from 1941-1946 with the 82nd Airborne Division in the European theater of World War II, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in psychiatric social work and worked as a parole officer in Milwaukee. Called back to duty in 1950 for the Korean War, he served with the 187th Regimental Combat Team before returning home to a career with the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Service. Lucas currently lives in Monona, Wisconsin.

Citation Note:

Cite as: Thomas J. Lucas, Interview, conducted May 4, 2005 at Vilas Hall, Madison, 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 WCKOR094 and WCKOR095.

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 4, 2005.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

Transcript edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

- Mik: You got out of World War II, war was over, there was going to be no more war. What happened?
- Tom: Well, you know, I was a reserve officer and I went back to school and comfortable. Just got a new job, I was a parole agent in Milwaukee and I get a letter from Uncle Sam telling me to report for a physical. My wife was just ready to have a baby and so--unfortunately, I passed the physical. I was on my way to Korea. It doesn't take long.
- Mik: Did you suspect it was coming?
- Tom: No, we came back from vacation and there was a registered letter for me and that was it. We were living in Milwaukee and, of course, my home and her home is in Madison so we had to move back and I had to report to Fort Riley, Kansas for a brief stay and then went to officers' refresher course in Fort Benning and got my orders at Fort Riley and shipped out to Camp Stoneman, California and they flew us over there.
- Mik: When was that?
- Tom: That was in early February--in '50. It was about, oh, between the time I got called until I shipped out was about a month. Pretty fast.
- Mik: Wait a minute, early February of '50?
- Tom: Yeah.
- Mik: So that was before the invasion?
- Tom: No, invasion of what, Korea?
- Mik: Of the North Koreans—didn't they come down in June of '50?
- Tom: No, our jump in Sukchon near Pyongyang. That was in October 21st of 1950. So, that was a first engagement for the--a unit. And then that was followed in '51, March 23rd, Easter Sunday, that was the second that we had.
- Mik: So, they flew you first to Japan?
- Tom: Yeah, we--Tokyo and uh--we were there, I was there about two days. Some of the other officers that I served with, there was a large number of 'em and got other assignments, some went to the infantry. I'm the only one that I know of, of the group, that came back. There were several others, I know a couple of 'em that were killed almost right away. They did not have--came out of university ROTC or OCS

[officer candidate school] and this was their first combat experience. It was a altogether a different kind of war.

Mik: So how long were you in Japan putting the outfit together?

Tom: No, I was a replacement.

Mik: You were a replacement so they were already there?

Tom: Yeah, they were already there. And I, I got assigned to the unit, I arrived there in early February. The next March 23rd, as I indicated, was our 1st jump. Had a chance to get to know the organization and get my assignments. I was a platoon officer in the infantry.

Mik: And what was the unit?

Tom: 187th Regimental Combat Team. And this was a regiment of the 101st Airborne. To make a combat team they pull a regiment out and reinforce it with artillery, batteries of artillery, medical company and just increase the personnel. So they call it a combat team. The unit right now, I think, is over in Iraq fighting for the 101st.

Mik: So, take me through that first jump from when you woke up for the mission?

Tom: The one in Sukchon we jumped--that one was 1400 hours which would be two o'clock in the morning, you know. The objective there, there were two cities; Sunchon and Sukchon and it was just east of Pyongyang. It was MacArthur's intention the Koreans were going north and taking American troops. His idea was to put a noose around 'em by dropping the Airborne Units in. We had two different drop zones; one unit would stick to high ground and the other would take the railroad stations. Unfortunately, the North Koreans got through and crossed the Yalu River and we hit the engagements of the remaining North Korean troops. It generated some real serious fighting and lots of casualties. It's all together different kind of fighting that we had in Europe. The North Koreans were real aggressive enemy. A lot of the Chinese with 'em. They did a lot of frontal attacks, repeated attacks, repeated attacks. The Sukchon one, we had some movement of assignments of a couple of companies to a city south, Opari and we were in conflict with two platoons and we were involved with a battalion of North Koreans. We lost about, we were overrun and lost about ninety men. So we generated a lot of casualties. Now that includes wounded as well as civilians killed.

Mik: Now, is that because you're dropping right in the middle of the hostile territory?

Tom: Well, part of it was. We weren't necessarily in the middle of 'em but they were adjacent. We talk about seventeen miles here and six miles there. There's a lot of mobility in the infantry units. The terrain is a big factor. Plus the large number--we had a ROK unit on our flank. They were coming up from the south behind the

retreating North Koreans. We linked up with them but it just gave us a better position on defensive--but it was all together a different type of ground warfare.

Mik: Tell me more about that, why it was so different?

Tom: Well, as I said, the North Koreans and Chinese are a formidable enemy. They would attack in frontal assaults and preceded by heavy bombardments of howitzers and mortar fire that generated a lot of casualties and that was strewn rock terrain. You either have hills or rice paddies which don't give you much cover.

Mik: I'm a little confused, is this the one in March?

Tom: No this is the one I'm talking about--

Mik: October.

Tom: October. October 21st. We had resupplied the next day and it was interesting that they brought in another twelve 105's, and howitzers, and additional ammunition during the operation. They dropped over 600 tons of ammunition and resupplies. So that was really not a problem, it was the engagement with the enemy and the tactics that we had to use.

Mik: And the numbers of the enemy?

Tom: You can't pick your enemy.

Mik: So that's what made it a regimental combat team, was when you dropped in the artillery and all that.

Tom: The one at Munsan-ni, we had seventy aircraft drop us. I might mention that at the one at Sukchon preceding the drop, the Air Force were supporting aircraft and clearing the drop zone and giving support during the whole engagement. So this helps, but jumping at 1400 hours, at night. The first and third jumped at 1400, the third jumped about twenty minutes later. Down near Sunchon. We had actually two different drop zones.

Mik: And was it pretty clear? Did you have time to get organized?

Tom: We had--you always have ground fire, you know what I mean, but we were able--the units took--moved out and took--one of the missions was the high ground at Sukchon, and the railroad station, and the railroad lines to keep 'em from moving, you know. We did those missions but it was holding 'em, you know, and holding the ground that we really got the engagements. And there were units that were behind us and ahead of us, basically we were surrounded. Our mission was to take those and originally it was also to secure the prisoners--American prisoners but we missed those.

Mik: The--was the idea then that you would hold that area and then when reinforcements come up from the south?

Tom: I think it was the second day--third day, we hooked up with that ROK unit. I don't remember the name of it but--and--they were helpful and a lot of support in covering the line that we were trying to hold. 'Cause we only had about, 3,000 men, that was what the combat team was. Some of those were the medical, some of those were in artillery. Basically an infantry. And with the artillery--because we were moving north and some units were moving south to Opari, it made difficult for fire control for the big artillery. They were real effective, you know. When you're attacking, artillery is better than on the defensive--and the mortars as well.

Mik: And when you talk about the big artillery, you're talking about the ones that are way back behind the line? It's out there with you?

Tom: Yeah, they're not way back. There aren't any, really, any lines.

Mik: You're creating the line.

Tom: In the artillery, in the Airborne, some of the artillery, the generals felt that the forward observers should not be in the rear but should be up with the assaulting units. So we lost a lot of our forward observers. After the Sukchon one before Munsan-ni, I was reassigned to forward observer. So I went from the frying pan into the fire. I think, really, my survival on that was the fact that I served in the infantry. I handled everything as an infantryman. My judgments and the forward observer was more of a mechanical deal. Calling for fire and things like that. So really, I was in front of my previous position as a platoon leader.

Mik: In that first jump at Sukchon, how long did you stay with that? You said you were advancing?

Tom: We took our objectives and held 'em. These Korean assaults, North Korean assaults, they just come in waves. You'd have maybe 400 men on the line and you would have 2,000 or 1,500, the enemy coming up a hill at ya. Blowing bugles and yelling, and with the artillery fire coming in and you don't dig deep foxholes like we did in Europe because--stone and that. If you can't dig one you build one for protection. They just overwhelm a position, just like we lost those two platoons that ran into maybe four companies of North Koreans and they just overrun the whole position. So you have to retake the position--and hold. That's basically what combat is, it's a real estate, you know, game. Take the high ground and hold it.

Mik: So how long were you there?

- Tom: Oh gee, I think we were there about three--four weeks, maybe not quite a month. Some of us, the units moved out and as I said, the ROKs replaced us on the line for the most part. Then we went back in the reserve in Korea.
- Mik: And then did you stay in Korea or did you go back to Japan?
- Tom: No, we stayed in Korea. You know, once you're on the ground, Airborne, you're just another grunt. You're an infantry officer or infantryman. So, we did reserve, in reserve and support. Part of the available personnel for the assault of North Korea.
- Mik: And then how do you become Airborne again?
- Tom: Well, they just developed, the commanding general develops the plan, whenever the assault comes down the chain of command. They pick the units, they pick the objectives. Each organization, the regimental combat team put together a--most of us had big sand tables. They take you to an airport or someplace where we're all put in a hangar and go through the briefings. In addition to that, the artillery component will go to the airfield and prepare the vehicles for heavy drops, that's the 105's, Jeeps, 3/4 ton trucks. They're tied to platforms and then they're loaded on a plane. That is time consuming, long hours, night work and get 'em in the planes and hooked up. And when they're ready to go, they set the target date and departure time and identify the DZs [drop zones] from all available intelligence information. So most of the soldiers and the platoon leaders and officers focused on the individual briefings. And you have more than one briefing. You're briefed by the--officers are briefed, and then the non-coms are briefed, then the enlisted men are briefed--on their particular areas of the drop zone. So when you got on the ground even at night you get some idea from the terrain where you are. Which is north, which is south, east and west and what the roads are. This was a lot easier than it was in Europe, you know, Normandy. We were brought in on the DZs, where some of the previous jumps we missed 'em completely.
- Mik: So there wasn't the kind of antiaircraft?
- Tom: Well, there was fire, yeah, yeah, there was fire from the ground at aircraft. Cause we were flying over North Korean country. We were surrounded, you know, on all sides.
- Mik: And how many planes did you say were in the 2nd attack.
- Tom: I'd say there were about seventy--119's and C-47's. A lot of the 19's, they carried troopers, but was that was for all our heavy drop. The resupplies came in the next day. Additional guns, I think it was. Like twelve more howitzers and about 600 ton of supplies. And out of that was artillery shells, everything, you know. And we carried rations, I think, for three days. You give up things to carry more ammunition, you know. Cause you can't send a runner out to get another box of machine gun rounds.

Mik: And is that the resupply that comes in the second day, is that more ammunition or--

Tom: Yeah, more ammunition, well, hand grenades, rifles--

Mik: And a little bit of food.

Tom: Yeah, yeah. No, there might have been. We just used what we had and sometimes if you could find something on the ground, you know. You just have to look for surviving that way too.

Mik: Now I remember, you were pretty good at that. I remember you talking about Normandy that way, you spent a lot of time looking for something to eat.

Tom: Yeah, well, I found out you couldn't find a chicken in Normandy.

Mik: Could you find rice in--

Tom: No, they had big rabbits. They had rabbits there that weighed thirty pounds. I think they were Belgium hares, they called 'em. But they taste good if you made it good. We ate a lot of Germans' black bread, they called it. We all survived. Lost a little weight but you manage. In Holland we had a lot of apple trees and orchards.

Mik: That second jump, what was the name of that, Munsan-ni?

Tom: Oh, Munsan-ni, yeah.

Mik: Munsan-ni. Was that one as successful? Did that go pretty well?

Tom: It was a good jump. We took lots of casualties there. We took about 2,600 casualties. Out of about 3,900 men.

Mik: Wow, that's high.

Tom: Lot of 'em, you know, a lot of wounded, you know what I mean. You don't have anyplace to evacuate to. If you can still fire a gun, medics patch you up and you take a defensive position someplace, even around the medical area for security or you go back on the line wherever you can. You don't want to just sit around an aid station. They're vulnerable targets for artillery and mortars just like anyplace else.

Mik: Did you get wounded either time?

Tom: No. I should knock on wood. This time I didn't. Four purple hearts is enough.

Mik: And what was that, mentioned a third jump?

Tom: No.

Mik: Just two?

Tom: Yeah, two. We took the casualties at Munsan-ri and then they moved us to Japan. Down in the southern island of Kyushu. We were there, stationed there and I think it was in November of '51 we made a jump in Korea and were never sure if we were going to stay or come back. We packed up everything, just like we were going into combat. We didn't take the refrigerators for the medics but we took everything we could. But we came back that next day. We took a jump, hiked about thirty-five miles to an airport and they brought us back. Then they shipped me home. I was on twenty-four months, twenty-eight months and they shipped me home. Came back to Madison, went back to work.

Mik: So that was twenty-eight months from the time they had called you back?

Tom: Uh-huh.

Mik: You were over there that long? So it was what, '53 when you came back?

Tom: Yeah. Well that was what they were calling the reserve officers up for, and they could have extended it.

Mik: So, when you were called up again, how long had it been since you had jumped out of an airplane?

Tom: Five years.

Mik: What'd it feel like?

Tom: That was the hardest, hardest one. That was really hard, you know, but I got out of the plane. That was worse than the first one. I was team leader, a lieutenant and I was first in the door and I had twenty-four men behind me and when I got the green light I shout, "Push!" We all went. It was all over, it wasn't any problem.

Mik: What are you thinking, "I'm too old for this."

Tom: No, no, no. I think I was more worried about what I want to meet on the ground then getting out of that door. But in Japan, we were in Japan, we made quite a few jumps. They took us up to Fukuoka Airport then we'd fly down to Nepo and then we'd--little peninsula out into the ocean and then we would either walk back to the camp about ten miles or else they'd truck us back. I was sometimes doing two jumps a day. In Airborne you used to just make one jump, each, once a month. I had some assignments and so I ended up making a couple of jumps in a week and things like that.

- Mik: Was that because you were an officer and--
- Tom: Well, it was the assignment I had, you know.
- Mik: So when you said that jump was the worst, were you talking about the first Korean jump?
- Tom: The first jump, yeah, after going back in, called back in. I think the anxiety I had was cause--for myself, could I get out of that damn airplane. Everybody has that but it was five--six years after the last one and--I had no trouble getting into the chute and I didn't have any anxiety, I didn't lose any sleep. It all hit when that amber light came on and then the green light. But it happened fast and I just went out. I said, "Oh, hell with it."
- Mik: Did you actually jump or did you just yell, "Push".
- Tom: No, I jumped, I jumped. I was the only one that did jump, I'm afraid, all the rest of 'em--once that line gets going it's dangerous. We've had cases in Europe where the crew chief would try to get through the line to reach for something they'd get caught and went out without a parachute. So, you just can't stop 'em. Everybody wants to get out of that airplane and especially if there's ground fire, antiaircraft, 'cause they're shooting at the aircraft they're not shooting at them. So, if you can get out, and get on the ground--you have some security, you have some options.
- Mik: What was your rank in Europe?
- Tom: I was a sergeant.
- Mik: You were a sergeant, so was it different being an officer? Did it feel different? Did you just think about different things?
- Tom: No. You just had more responsibility. You didn't have to write, when it was over, sit down and write letters home to their parents. That was hard, that was one of the hardest things. Cause you live pretty close together and you train together. That's hard. It wasn't like it made much difference. You just had more responsibility. In Airborne units, you're a pretty tight group. With Munsan-ni, I was a forward observer, so I didn't have any men to worry about, I just had to worry about myself.
- Mik: Yeah, tell me about that. About how that happened, how you became a forward observer.
- Tom: Well, they took so many casualties on forward observers and the previous one. Army units in its traditional way, went through their records and they say, "Now here's a guy who was a six-inch gunner on a tank. Took his basic training in the armor." A gunner on a tank is training in many respects the same as artillery. You fire patterns, you fire orders and everything. So they call me down to headquarters

and said I'm assigned to 674th Field Artillery Battery B. I'm a forward observer. I asked for a copy of the training manual and I sat and read some of that. You have a radioman and a driver. The radioman got on the line and they use a whole different fire pattern. They have what they call an M-10 plotting board. You did your fire missions by azimuths. You do base points. It was easy to pick up. In retrospect, when we were at the officers' training course, I think we had an hour on that M-10 plotting board and to be quite candid, I think I didn't pay much attention. I should have. I'm just sitting in a foxhole, on the line with a radioman and learning the M-10 plotting board. Direct experience is probably the best way to learn. And I had a little more motivation.

Mik: That's a pretty vulnerable position there.

Tom: I thank my infantry training and sheltering tactics. Somebody said, "Hey, look at that." I, just by instinct, didn't even get out of a hole. A lot of 'em would stand up and look and get shot in the head with a sniper. I didn't go out and say, "Follow me" and wave my arm. I'd say, "Sergeant, get the men movin'." Lot of 'em, they picked on the officers, the snipers, and there's quite a bit of that. Even when you were just sitting on the line in a holding position, they kept you down pretty much from just getting up, walking around. You stayed in your hole, where it was secure--just waited. And that's a lot of the Army time, you just wait. You know they're gonna attack or you're gonna attack. **[End of Tape WCKOR094]**

Mik: What you were saying about the difference between being eighteen years old and single?

Tom: In Europe--you know, I was married when I got called. I graduated from the university and got my degree in--and got married and I was working in Milwaukee as a parole agent. In Europe I'd be with these fellas and the married men, they had families and be showing pictures, but I was single and all I had to do was take care of myself and that was all. In retrospect, a lot of these fellas were either killed or wounded. I never gave much thought to it until about thirty--forty years later. When I found out when I was in combat that, going into combat, I had to just think about myself. Had to put my family--and I had--we had a daughter who was nine days old when I left. So I just couldn't bring that element of my life into the hole and on the line. It was a mental process. Then when--get out in reserves, then it's another matter. But it got so that I could do that pretty good. That and hesitation are two deadly enemies for a person. There's no time to hesitate, you have to react by instinct immediately. That's one of the things they train all the men. Sometimes something gets in the way, you say, "Gee, should I go." Well then all of a sudden maybe your wife, your family or something will come in and it's too late. Everybody develops some habits and techniques on how to handle fear and everything else. In Europe one of the things I did is when we have these long barrages of five--six hours. Every shell sounds like it's coming right in your hole, I'd put myself to sleep. To this day, I get in bed, insomnia is nowhere around. I can go

sit down, lay down someplace and just put myself to sleep. Other people have other techniques. If you don't, then you have some real problems.

Mik: But that doesn't work when you have 3,000 enemy charging at you.

Tom: No, you can't go to sleep, but you'd be surprised how exhausted you are. Cause there's no physical labor loading a gun and firing. It's a real-- People want to talk about reality, you know, movies, it's a real stress. And that's right, even parachute jumpers and how people—you can just make parachute--take a truck ride, put on a parachute, make a jump. And you're sleepy, you're tired so there is an emotional stress there.

Mik: Did you guys, when you were just so surrounded, was ammunition ever a problem?

Tom: No, we--when you get these breaks, officers do an ammunition count. Your hand grenades, a lot of hand grenades cause sometimes you can give a--use grenades you're not giving your position away or exposing yourself like you are with rifle fire. There's all different kind of grenades. There's phosphate grenades, and smoke grenades, and concussion grenades, and fragmentation grenades, and there's rifle grenades that gives you a little more distance. You try to use those kind of elements rather than rifle fire. They were pretty close, pretty close. They overrun these positions and you'd get so you're using your bayonets and your knife. That's always a strong probable situation. You're on the defensive most of the time. Once you take your objectives and hold 'em, you're in a defensive mode rather than attack. In Airborne, that's just what we did. You take a bridge and hold it, you take a hill and hold it and wait for support to come up.

Mik: So is taking it the easy part?

Tom: Well, the first time. Every time you have to retake something, you get overrun. It's costly, it's costly in lives. For that reason, you make a judgment, is it better to really stay and hold it and take your casualties or pull out and then knowing you're gonna have to come back and get some more. In Airborne we usually opted, really, staying in there. That's why, like I said, down at Opari the positions were overrun. Men stayed in their holes and fought and they were overrun.

Mik: What was that that you said on the—something about what were the number of casualties out of the number that went in?

Tom: About 2,200.

Mik: Out of how many?

Tom: About 3,900.

Mik: That's over half.

- Tom: Yeah. Well, you know, lot of 'em weren't carried out on a litter. These were reported casualties. There were deaths and there were wounded. We had some of the fellas got Congressional Medals of Honor. In Airborne, you don't have much choice. You have to fight, to stay alive. They know that. And there are some positive things, the element of surprise, esprit de corps of the troops, the quality of training. The Airborne, they're all volunteers. It makes a real formidable unit. Just like these situations that MacArthur wanted to do. He wanted to put a noose around the North Koreans and also pick up our American prisoners that they were taking north.
- Mik: And you didn't miss 'em by far, did you?
- Tom: No. Yeah they were already across the Yalu River and we got the tail end of 'em. I think it was the tail end of 'em.
- Mik: Geographically where were those two places that you jumped?
- Tom: Sukchon one is right near Pyongyang, just west of Pyongyang. Where they have the rail going through and then out.
- Mik: That's the capital right, of North Korea.
- Tom: I guess it's in--and the other one was farther west. The Sunchon one was north of the 38th. It was unusual in the fact that we had two drop zones and split the units but we had 2 objectives and they were thirty-five--forty miles apart. Troops can't land and cover forty miles or thirty miles before morning. The tactics of it were that, I think it was the 2nd Battalion took Sunchon and we took Sukchon.
- Mik: How'd you feel when you got back to your family?
- Tom: Well, went back to work.
- Mik: Hope you don't get any more letters.
- Tom: We came home by boat. I got a boat ride. We got to San Francisco, yeah, San Francisco and I got the chore of taking the troop train home. The boat ride was nice. You get a chance to relax, it was slow, it was five days. Just read, lay on the decks. Got a sunburn. I got a troop train home from San Francisco to Camp McCoy. That was where I got discharged. I got to Camp McCoy and I called home and my mother and dad came up and picked me up and this was in February so it was February to February. I brought the troop train home and all the fellas on it. We didn't have any problems. 'Cause these are all soldiers going home, they're not like the ones that are going. They celebrate. When the train stops they all wanna get off and if you lose some-- It was quiet. They played cards, just altogether different atmosphere.

Mik: And you're back to parole officer.

Tom: No, I went back to corrections but I didn't go back to Milwaukee. I worked with the state there then I retired about eight years ago.

Mik: Did--were you with a bunch of young guys in Korea? The majority of them--

Tom: There were eighteen year olds, nineteen year olds, twenty--twenty-five. Even the senior officers, battalion commander, they were well below retirement age. Wars are for young people. Who can run fast and react fast. You have to do it to stay alive.

Mik: I guess they look up to you as the experienced old timer?

Tom: Well, I guess they did.

Mik: They should have.

Tom: Yeah. There were other officers there just like me. They were somewhat older than I was. They were reserve officers. One was from Chicago, he was with the Chicago Transit. The other was a school teacher from Dubuque, Iowa. One was a petroleum engineer from out in Utah. He got killed. I think first, second day he was on the line. You get it pretty much across. That reserve, you know, is made up of the older officers. When I say older, twenty-five--twenty-four--twenty-six, in that age.

Mik: As opposed to eighteen.

Tom: We had quite a lot of Mexican boys in there. Quite a few, well not quite a few but a number of Black soldiers, all good troopers, all good troopers. When you get on the line, color and things like that don't mean a damn thing.

Mik: Just watching each others' back.

Tom: Yeah. You're willing to share a hole with anybody. You get two in a hole, you take times during the night, you have to trust somebody, you know.

Mik: Gosh, I can't thank you enough.

Tom: It's alright.

[End of Interview]