

Wisconsin Public Television  
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
JAMES J. MENDYKE, SR.  
Officer, Army, Korean War  
2004

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Madison, Wisconsin

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**Mendyke, James J., Sr.**, (1929-2009). Oral History Interview, 2004.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 60 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

James J. Mendyke, Sr., a native of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, discusses his service as an Army officer during the Korean War. Mendyke talks about attending Reserve Officers' Training Corps while at Ripon College (Wisconsin) and, after graduation, attending infantry school at Fort Benning (Georgia). Prior to shipping out, he recalls a weekend off in Chicago with his fiancée and getting escorted to the front of a long line by a police officer. Sent to Korea as a second lieutenant, he talks about assignment to the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 86th Regiment and promotion to first lieutenant. While on the landing ship tank, Mendyke recalls getting a bad impression from a terrible odor and departing soldiers singing, "You'll be sorry." He discusses being assigned as a platoon leader in Company B and losing a lot of men when the 45<sup>th</sup> National Guard withdrew. He states he called his group the "United Nations Platoon" because he was assigned sixteen South Koreans, four Puerto Ricans, and four Guam natives. He tells how his interpreter stepped on a grenade pin and lost his foot, leaving the platoon without any interpreter. Mendyke describes his duties on a hill called Checkpoint Easy and remembers witnessing massive casualties on nearby Old Baldy. He talks about becoming an executive officer and transferring to an area where there was an unofficial agreement that the North Koreans took a certain hill during the night and the Americans had it during the day. He tells of a colonel coming by one night and insisting that he and Mendyke go investigate the hill, and being relieved that it was empty at the time. Moved to the northernmost point along the line, he speaks about lecturing a group for setting up a rifle in sight of the enemy, and, ten seconds after Mendyke walked away, the group was wiped out by mortars. He describes arranging a warm turkey dinner for Thanksgiving and seeing well-fed North Korean infiltrators go back to their side of the line afterwards. Mendyke speaks of receiving orders from commanders in Japan to keep busy by laying barbed wire, losing men to mines, allowing platoon leaders to verbally tell him how much wire they laid without requiring proof it was actually done, and not losing more men after that. He tells of watching a Naval Air Force bombardment one day, seeing a pilot bail out behind enemy lines, and refusing to go rescue him without more men. Mendyke portrays playing volleyball 500 yards from enemy lines, wounding his hand during the game, and turning down a purple heart. He talks about being made motor officer for a month and making other officers mad by not allowing them to take jeeps without permission. After transferring to the rear to train incoming troops for two months, he states that as he was leaving he sang, "You'll be sorry" to the incoming troops. Mendyke states that while the peace talks were going on, troops on both sides were doing patrols and hoping not to run into anyone. He tells of a platoon leader sending a good soldier out on so many patrols that the soldier, nearing his time to go home, finally refused to go out and had to be found innocent of disobeying orders at a court martial. Mendyke reveals he could have been medically excused from service from the beginning but he begged the doctor to pass him. He reflects that many of the soldiers sent to his unit were problem soldiers, and he reveals that the married officers in his company tended to get killed while single officers tended

to survive. Mendyke explains that career officers would visit the front lines to earn combat badges, and tells of getting two full colonels to take cover in the mud during a scheduled practice fire.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Mendyke (1929-2009) served in the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 108<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment as a platoon company leader and executive officer during the Korean War. After honorable discharge at the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant, he married, raised six children, and worked as an insurance salesman at Sentry Insurance until retirement in 1995. He settled in his hometown, Stevens Point (Wisconsin).

**Citation Note:**

Cite as: James J. Mendyke, Sr., Interview, conducted October 12, 2004 at Stevens Point, 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 WCKOR073 and WCKOR074.

**Related Materials Note:**

Photographs of this narrator's military service can be found in Wisconsin Public Television. Wisconsin Korean War Stories records (VWM Mss 1389).

Interviewed by Mik Derks, Wisconsin Public Television, October 12, 2004.

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:**

- Jim: Well, I won't tell you--you'll be somewhat surprised, but--if you can lead me into that--it might be ah, how was the food--I'll get into C-rations--and yeah, okay--
- Mik: Well, to get started, why don't we just go back and hear how you got involved in the service to begin with--
- Jim: Okay. When I ah, graduated from high school, I was approached by several schools, one of them being Ripon College and they were interested in athletes. Now, Ripon being a Division III school, could not afford or was not allowed to provide athletic scholarships. So, you could only get a scholarship if you had need. Well, one of the representatives from Ripon came to our home and visited with my mother and she was asked the question, "How much could you afford for your son's education?" So, she was getting into the five or ten dollars a month situation and the representative was the happiest guy in the world because he found an athlete who wouldn't have that need situation, so I went to Ripon and they took care of everything because we had nothing. The, one of the conditions was that I take ROTC. Well, the first two years are mandatory at Ripon, to take ROTC and my third and fourth year, I took it because they paid twenty-nine dollars and eighty-five cents a month, which I needed to support my meager habits. So, obviously, upon graduation, I was commissioned. My first duty was at--I can't even remember, ah, the name of the base, but, I was at that base for about sixty days, and then I was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, which is the home of the infantry. Infantry people are trained there from all over the world and the U. S. Army is smart enough to know: Don't take people who are right out of college through ROTC--give them some real training. So, we went to the infantry school and that's the same program that all draftees are enlisted in, went into. The only difference was they had to treat us nicer, because we out-ranked them. And so, ah, from there, it was the case of either going to Europe or to the Far East Command, which we called FECOM and I kept saying prayers every night that I'd go to Germany, but, obviously, my past background didn't ah, count much in whoever I was praying to's eyes and I ended up in Korea, via Japan. And I truly loved the Army and I had planned to make a career of the Army. So, I knew it was good to go to Korea to get that on your record which might help in the future.
- Mik: So, when you went over, you were a first lieutenant--second lieutenant?
- Jim: I was a, we were all second lieutenants and eventually, I became a first lieutenant but, that's another story.
- Mik: How did you get over there?
- Jim: We took a liberty ship, and on that ship there were quite a few soldiers from Britain and uh, I don't know if it was New Zealand, or some other country also had it, but we had a full ship and surprisingly, on our return, I ended up on the same ship.

Now, I don't know what the odds are on that, because there were hundreds of liberty ships but, that's how we got there. It was an eighteen-day trip by sea.

Mik: And that was to Japan?

Jim: That was to Japan--and we spent three or four days in Japan--a group of officers was sent to a chemical school in Japan. I was not one of those. So, I ended up in Korea before they were and uh, I was promoted to first lieutenant before any of those, so, I was, at one time, the ranking first lieutenant in our regiment--which was a good spot to be in.

Mik: In what regiment was that?

Jim: I was in the 86th Regiment of the 45th Division.

Mik: So, tell me what your impression was when you arrived in Korea.

Jim: You want my background?

Mik: Your, just, what your impression of it was?

Jim: Well, it, my first impression was very bad, because we were on, I guess you'd call it a landing ship; a landing--LST--a landing ship tank. A whole bunch of officers were on that and as we're going towards Korea, ships were bringing troops back. And those troops on the other ships had a song and it's, "You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry!" I didn't appreciate that particular song. Secondly, the odor was unbelievable and somebody said, "The reason it smells like that is because they have human fertilizer." And I thought, how in the world can anybody live on that island with that odor, but it turns out, after, you're there for about a day or two, you don't notice it--so that was a plus. But, ah, we were not happy campers when these troopers were telling us that we were gonna be sorry.

Mik: Were you replacements?

Jim: Yes.

Mik: So you, you landed and had to--

Jim: We landed and uh, then you end up being assigned to a division. So, once you hit the division, they would then assign you to a regiment. So, I was at the regimental headquarters my first day there. And the colonel said that there were two openings. One was for the mortar platoon--81 mortar platoon and I was overjoyed because, I loved gunnery and I thought this would be right up my alley and the other was, in those days they called it the P&A platoon-- Pioneer & Ammunition Platoon, which consisted of people who were experts in mines, finding the mines, digging them up and things like that, plus other assorted things but, both of those were somewhat to

the rear and that's why I was kind a happy about that. Unfortunately, that night, there was attacks made by our regiment all along the line and two of the officers in one of the companies--I don't know, if they couldn't handle it anymore or whatnot, but, they bugged out so to speak--instead of continuing to fight, they were in--they ran back to the line. Well, they were promptly discharged and so, the colonel said, we've got a change in plan, you both, both you two guys will be platoon leaders in Company B. So, that's what happened from having what I considered a plush job, I ended up being a platoon leader, right on the front line with my other buddy. It was a coincidence we both were from Ripon. How you can go through all that stuff, and end up in Korea, and be in the same company is quite a coincidence. So, that's what I was--a platoon leader and I had to get accustomed to the men, and they had to get accustomed to me, and whatnot and everything was going fine until the 45th National Guard had now served as many months as they were supposed to in Korea, so, then they withdrew the soldiers from the 45th National Guard, which left us without many soldiers. Well, somebody said, "We know what we can do--we will give them South Korean soldiers. So, my platoon should be somewhere between twenty-five and thirty-two people. Well, they sent me sixteen South Koreans. So, I called myself the "United Nations Platoon," because, I had four Guamanians, four Puerto Ricans, sixteen South Koreans and uh, well, maybe I should call the Guamanians--Americans. I can't remember if they were part of our system or not, but I ended up with uh, four or five what I would call, "American soldiers," who could speak English fluently and whatnot and they gave me a--what's the guy who--oh, ah, the guy who can interpret---interpreter. Well, he wasn't the smartest. One night, we were in our bunker and he decided we needed a candle holder, so he took apart a grenade, put the candle in it, but---wasn't smart enough to throw the firing pin some place and later he stepped on it and lost his toes and his foot. So, uh, I didn't have an interpreter--and that is not easy--to have sixteen soldiers and they can't understand me or me them, but, we made it.

Mik: Describe your position--where you were on the line?

Jim: Well, when I first got there, there was a, there were fierce battles on one hill, it was called "Old Baldy," and if you see Old Baldy and then move backwards towards our line, maybe 200 yards, we were on a hill called, "Checkpoint Easy," but Old Baldy had fights on it nightly and it just turned out that it turned out to be one of--I think they even made movies about it, but I never ended up on Old Baldy, but I was Checkpoint Easy. We were there for a couple of days and I says, I don't know how one can survive for nine months or however long it'll take to rotate, because, the fighting was fierce and there were many troops that went through our point. Filipinos, and uh, I think the Turks went through there on one occasion--and uh, everybody was taking a shot at em at trying to capture Old Baldy, which they could not do and if they did, they were counterattacked unmercifully and they'd end up losing it anyway, so, there were hundreds and hundreds of casualties on that one stupid hill and I, as a young officer, kept saying to myself, "Why are we so adamant about taking that hill? Even if we have it, what good does it do because there's a

hill right behind it that's even higher--so even if you're on it, the enemy is looking right down your throat anyway."

So, ah, fortunately, the captain said, "Okay, we've got orders to move back. We're going into a reserve position, we call it a blocking position, so, in case, if there was an attack, there would be some--some forces to hold em back till more forces could come and help." We were there for perhaps two weeks and then we were called on to replace the third division and we made a night transfer--so that the enemy wouldn't see us doing it during the daytime, obviously, and so, when I got to the position I was in, I talked to the officer, I think, lieutenant who I was replacing there and he gave me a real good orientation and he said, "Now, see that hill--about 300--400 yards from here," he said, "It's been the practice, we'd send a patrol out there and they stay there all day and about five o'clock they come back and the enemy takes it and they stay there all night." And I kinda smiled and I thought he's kidding me and I said, "Are you serious?" He says, "Yeah," he says, "That way nobody gets hurt." I thought, "Well, what a way to run a war." So, in any event, I stayed up till probably three o'clock getting everything organized, three o'clock in the morning and finally, I said, "Okay, I'm gonna take a nap." Well, it was sometime around six-thirty, seven o'clock--all of the sudden, one of the troopers ran in, and said, "Lieutenant, the colonel's here." I thought, "What in the world is the colonel doing here?" So I quickly jumped out of my wire cot bed and the colonel saw me and started to chew me out cause I didn't have my flak jacket on, or my helmet on. So, I quickly ran in and got that and he said--he was not a happy camper. He was a lieutenant colonel at thirty-two and he must've thought he was--well, all colonels thought they were gods, I guess--but, in any event, he said, "How are things going and this and that?" And he said, "What's that over there?" And I said "Well, apparently, ah, we're--" I'd left the impression with him that I had a patrol out there--He said, "Let's go!" And I thought, "I wonder where he wants to go." And he says, "Right to that hill." And as I took my trusty carbine which wasn't really worth much--I had a couple of hand grenades with me--and as we got about sixty or seventy yards from the hill, I took one of the hand grenades and I had it in my hand and I was sort of doing the old combat trick, where you're down low and uh, you don't want people to see and finally, he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm not sure who's there." And we were then, now, within seventy or eighty yards off the hill and he said, "Do you mean you don't have troops up there?" I said, "No, I hadn't had a chance to send anybody. We just got here last night." He said, "That's right." But, he said, "Let's go see who's there." And believe it or not, all he had was a shotgun and I'd got a carbine. Now, had there been a squad, or two squads of men up there, we'd have been mincemeat, but, I said, "Okay, if he wants to die, I'll go with him." And so we went up to the hill and fortunately, nobody was there and we walked around and it was just a mess of communication wire, spent shells, oh, it was just a mess, but you could see guys would come there and then they'd leave--nobody policed the area obviously, so on the way back, he said, "Follow me." And I followed him and they didn't keep records of how fast you can run but we may have broken some records. Well, that was pretty good because, what that did--three days later, I was promoted to first lieutenant. I think he was

trying to bribe me so that I wouldn't talk about how stupid he was--for us to attack a hill just the two of us--or maybe he enjoyed telling a story as I'm enjoying telling it, too, 'cause we survived it.

So, then, from that point, uh, we moved into an area that was the northernmost point along the line. The line went like this and we were way up here. Nobody farther north and I was the platoon leader of the most northern--northernmost uh, part of the entire Army and uh, it was then that I was promoted but I was named the executive officer, 'cause our executive officer left and I had the highest rank, so, I felt pretty good about that. 'Cuz, uh, I now had a chance to visit with the platoon leaders and coordinate the raids as well as the patrols and things like that and I didn't have to go on any patrols. While there, we had an officer move in--transfer in--and he outranked me by about three months. So, the captain said, "Jim, you will now go back to your platoon." And the other officer said, "No, no, sir," he says, "I don't want to be exec officer, I want to be a platoon leader." Well, that's what we did. I stayed as exec officer. There were two things that might be of interest to you; on one occasion, I was going from my bunker to visit an officer in another bunker and as I was nearing his bunker, there were, there was an artillery officer, and three of my, three of the soldiers from one of the platoons--they had brought up a 57 recoilless rifle and they were setting it up. And I went--ran over there and did what I shouldn't of done--I started chewing out these soldiers for bringing something so--there would be silhouette of that gun. I said don't you realize the enemy hates those things. I bet it wasn't, after I gave em a good tongue lashing, I probably walked about thirty yards away and two mortars came in and hit those guys directly--killed two of em, and the officer, the artillery officer who was--ah, I don't know why he was even there, but he had shrapnel running from his heels up his back all the way through his head. They finally sent him, I ran into him when I was leaving Korea, he was a mess officer, in Pusan I believe it was. So, in any event, that taught a hard earned lesson for the troopers and everyone should have known that. And these soldiers should have known it too--and fortunately, I didn't stay there another ten seconds or I might have been one of them.

Now, the other interesting thing is--while we were there, it was either Truman or the Pentagon who decided--we're going to have a hot meal for all the troops including the front liners for turkey day, Thanksgiving Day. And when I heard that, being exec officer, I had to coordinate that for our company and I had to coordinate the whole thing and I says, "How are we gonna get the food up there." The captain says, "You'll find a way." Well, "finding the way," means that you have the--they call the official name was the "katusas." Now, I don't know what that all stands for, but, it was Korean--the helpers--These were obviously a whole bunch of very unintelligent people who didn't know anything other than they had to carry ammunition and do anything that the sergeants or officers said, and I felt sorry for em but, that was their job, taking the food in big containers up those hills. Well, while we were having our magnificent, warm dinner--so called warm dinner--it was fairly warm--I had a couple of soldiers run over to me and say, "There's a problem," and I said, "What is the problem?" and so I started running, we probably went seventy or eighty yards



and I saw a whole bunch of people walking down the hill--towards the enemy. And I said, "What's going on?" Well, it turned out that the enemy didn't bring any weapons, but there were at least twelve or thirteen of the enemy that infiltrated our lines and got in the line for eating and they had a warm Thanksgiving dinner. I don't even know if they liked turkey. [laughs] They say they liked fish heads and rice, but they came and ate and left. And I thought well, why didn't our South Korean soldiers fire at em? And one of em said, "Well, some of em might have been their relatives or how do you know?" So, in any event, somehow, that particular thing passed.

While in that position, 8th Army in Japan said, "Because of the lull in fighting, we must keep our troops active--we can't let them get complacent and whatever." So, they said, "We're going to ask that everybody start laying barbed wire." And I thought, well, we've got plenty of barbed wire in front of us, but they want more--well, the second night that we were laying barbed wire in the front, one of the groups ended up in a mine field and one, somebody stepped on a mine and was killed obviously--and there was some of that mine shrapnel hit another soldier. Well, the officer who had my platoon, who did not want to be exec officer, very stupidly ran like crazy into that mine field to help this guy--he stepped on a mine and blew his head off, and that's when I was rather sick, when I saw him and all that, but, we ended up ah, talking to the captain saying, "Captain, how can we possibly go out there and lay barb wire and we don't know where the mines are?" He said--he was a World War II officer, and he was getting ready to rotate and he said, "All I know is that I'm under orders to lay barbed wire and you are under orders to lay barbed wire." I said, "Yes, sir." So, I had my own little visit with each platoon leader and I said, "I'm gonna be calling you every morning to find out how much barbed wire you have laid that night" And that's all I said, but they got the drift. So, each morning, I would make a phone call. How many yards of wire did you lay? They'd say, "x-number" and then I'd add up the three platoon leaders' totals and go to the captain and say, "Well, we had a good night. We laid eight hundred and fifty yards of wire--double strand and all of that kind of stuff." He was happy and then send that report to battalion and each battalion then would send all of their reports up to regiment and regiment could do it to division and division could then call some nice general in Tokyo and say--we laid eighteen miles of barbed wire. And my guess is that if there was forty yards laid, that would have been a lot, but, we didn't lose any more men. And nobody attacked where the wire would have been important anyway, but, that's one of the things that you say; the people giving those instructions, they're giving those so that they'll keep the troops busy and that's a stupid way to run an Army in my opinion, but, that was when, that was only one of the many reasons I had for eventually not making a career out of the Army, which turned out to be a good thing for me. Well, after--then we moved to a new position. **[End of Tape WCKOR073]**.

Mik: We're ready:

Jim: While we were in this position, several things happened that I remember vividly. On one occasion, there was an air strike by the Navy. They were pounding one hill rather good and I was standing there with my binoculars alongside my artillery forward observer. I said, "Boy, they're really giving it to em," and all of the sudden, we both noticed something happened to a plane. It looked like something was shot either a rocket--and I said, "No, that wasn't a rocket--it must've lost a motor or something." Turned out something hit the plane because, all of the sudden, he bailed out and we watched him float right behind enemy lines. I don't think it was two minutes later, and I was on the telephone with somebody from the Air Force, cause obviously, the other planes signaled or yeah, they probably radioed in, and gave em the coordinates and they knew exactly where it was and they asked if I was, if I knew about the air raid. I said, "Yeah, well I was watching it and I saw one of the pilots float into enemy territory." And he said, "Well, can you round up a bunch of your guys and go get him?" I said, "If you gave me a half a division, we might be able to get that man." But I said, "There's no way, he is behind the lines." And they, for three or four minutes, were trying to convince me to send a patrol to go save the poor pilot. That was impossible, but that was my dealings with the Air Force, with the Naval Air Force.

Then, on one other occasion, I had a call from a battle ship. As I mentioned, we were at the farthest point north in Korea. I think we were seven miles from the ocean and we had a very nice talk and he was telling me about--he's the gunnery officer and this and that. He said, "Do you have any targets there you'd like us to zero in on?" I said, "How far are you?" He said, "Seven miles." I said, "Wow!" He said, "Well, these eight-inchers," he said, "They're accurate." He said, "If you give us any target, for instance, do you have any foxholes out there or bunkers you can see where there's an opening, we can put the shell right in that opening." I said, "Come on, you're kidding." I said, "Seven miles, that's a long way, isn't it?" He says --I said, "We're only 500 yards away from that bunker." He said, "Oh, well, we'd miss that." and I said, "You know, you're a really nice guy, but, I'm only the exec officer here, and I'm not in a position to authorize your shooting at our enemy." And uh, even if I were the commanding officer, I would not have let him because I had seen enough short rounds while I was there that, we didn't want any on us. Well, in any event, we left that position and the new position we took, there were no bunkers available for the officers, so we pitched a tent--obviously, behind the hill where the enemy couldn't see us, but, there we were in tents and I happened to walk out of the tent and I saw some guys playing volleyball. I thought, I was gonna start giving them a going over and I thought, no, this is too good to be true. I'll, if I live through this, I'll be able to tell people that I was playing volleyball within 500 yards of the enemy. As luck would have it, bad luck, I was reaching for one of the shots--it was low and as I bent over, I tore a pretty good---I had a pretty good wound in my hand. So, it was bleeding pretty bad, so somebody said, "Jim, you'd better run over to the Italian Aid Station"--shades of M.A.S.H. on TV. So, I got over there, and a guy sewed up, put some stitches in my hand and whatnot, and as I was walking out, one of the people on duty at the desk, said, "Lieutenant, do you want to sign these papers for the Purple Heart?" and I thought, "Wow, would it be

nice to get a purple heart!" I making no references to the current political situation but, I said, "No soldier," I said, "Purple Heart is for someone who's injured in battle where there is some enemy fire." I said, "There might be some enemy fire there, but they weren't firing at me and I don't think--you should not get a Purple Heart while playing volleyball," end of that message, and he was sort of disappointed.

Apparently, they weren't giving out too many and maybe had a quota, but, whatever it is, I did not go for the--what could have been a rather easy Purple Heart, cuz, I'd have to live with that the rest of my life.

So, it wasn't shortly thereafter, I had a call from the regimental colonel, a regimental commander and he said, "Jim, I have, I want to talk to you about your future--what are your plans? Do you plan to stay in the Army?" I said, "Sir, at one time I did, but I've had a change of mind," and he said, "Well, you're the ranking officer--ranking first lieutenant in our regiment." And he said, "I don't know what to do with you," he said, "I can't put you in a company, because they're all lieutenants and you outrank all of them," and he said, "I've got two openings coming and if you're not planning to make a career of the Army, I'd prefer to assign two officers to those companies--they're both West Pointers and it'll look good on their record. They're planning to make careers in the Army and it will not hurt them to have command of a rifle company during combat." I said, "That's fine with me colonel." He said, "I'm going to make you the motor officer of the whole regiment." I said, "I don't know a thing about it." He says, "You don't have to know anything. You've got all these guys who are mechanics and what not and—" I did that for about three weeks and his instructions were, "Under no conditions can any officer have a Jeep without my permission." Well, we were in a position where, if the officers, say a captain, came up, he'd say, "I want a Jeep, I wanna go get a shower, it's about six miles." He'd say, "You've got to have the colonel's permission." Well, I got into so much trouble with all the officers. I think the colonel really wanted me to let em have the Jeeps, but not let him know. Well, that wasn't working out so well so, eventually, the colonel says, "Jim, I think, ah, what we're gonna do is--we're gonna send you back to Inchon. We have an organization called the School of Standards and what you will be doing is training the new men coming in, and we'll be sending people from the front line, soldiers who are promotable, to be squad leaders--our assistant platoon sergeants and things like that--so, you'll be in training." I said, "Well, sir, I've only got one more month to go." And he says, "Well, I could put you on the line for a month." Then, it dawned on me, if I go back now, I might have to stay an extra month, but it's a sure ticket home and so, thirty days in one's life isn't that bad, so, I accepted the transfer to the rear. So, I stayed there for two months, instead of the one month I normally would have. Then, I jumped on a boat going to Japan and as I was leaving Korea, there were soldiers coming in, and guess what I did, I sang the song, "You'll be sorry." So, I got on the ship, went to Japan, for two days and pretty soon, we were on our way back to the States, and that was my tour.

Mik: Were you sorry?

Jim: Pardon?

Mik: Were you sorry, that you were in Korea?

Jim: Well, I guess, if I had been killed and happened to go to hell, I'd be sorry, but, if I went to heaven, I wouldn't have been sorry, but I guess, when it's all said and done, it was an experience. Ah, it was worthwhile.

Mik: When you were on the line, what was the presence of the enemy? I mean, were you aware of, generally, of where they were and what they were up to?

Jim: Yes, because, for that a, well forty-five days, almost two months, we were in that lull situation where there was simply; they'd send out patrols and we'd send out patrols and maybe, they were hoping, like we were hoping, that we wouldn't find anybody. So, nobody was interested in fighting when the peace talks are going on, you're saying, you know they might just settle up tomorrow. I'd hate to be killed tonight. So, there was that attitude that was running through the troops' mind. And uh, I can recall on one occasion, probably the best soldier in our whole company refused to go out on a patrol and I was exec officer then, and the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant called me and I went over and he said, "My time is up." He said, "I can not go on any more patrols." He says, "I know, if I go out tonight, I'm gonna get killed." Then I looked at the lieutenant and his sergeant and I said, "Uh, do you want to send him out or not?" "We gave him an order and he is disobeying it. We want him court martialed!" So, I said to him, "I'm going to repeat again or have the lieutenant repeat a direct order. If you disobey this, I have no choice but to recommend a court martial." And he said, "I don't care. I don't care if I'm jailed the rest of my life," he says, "But at least I'll be alive." He said, "I will not go." And he was truly a super soldier. Well, to make a long story, short, they did court martial him. He was found innocent, in fact, they were gonna reassign him to the same company and I told the captain, "We can't--don't get him back here, because somebody is gonna shoot him or whatever." So, he was assigned to some other division and I felt pretty good about that because I didn't want to countermand the order by a platoon leader but, they had been using him, because he was so good. He'd lead every patrol and uh, eventually, I think he got to the point where he was getting nervous about all that, 'cause they had some pretty good scrapes. But that was ah, in my opinion, a senseless exchange of--you patrol and we patrol. We had enough listening posts out there, so, if there was some kind of attack that was imminent, that would have been discoverable. So, it was one of those things, "eye wash" as I call it; laying barbed wire, that sort of thing. So, where was I? I guess, I'm back on the ship now. Back in the States. Oh, you had a comment there, I was answering one of your questions; that was it.

Mik: Yeah, we were, I was just wandering how familiar you were with what the enemy was up to. They were probably no more anxious to fight than you were.

Jim: They weren't. They--all I know is that ah, from what I learned later--that most of the Chinese--I think they were given seven days of rations and in their, let's say they

had a platoon sergeant and a platoon lieutenant, they'd also have a platoon political officer. He would fill them full of all kinds of politics, plus give them all kinds of drugs--get them really high and say, "Okay, when we blow the bugle, you go. When your food is gone, come back," and that's what they would do and you could hear those bugles and when you heard the bugles, you knew that somebody, somewhere along the line, was being harassed. So, we would hear those bugles, and we'd shoot off our mortars to prearranged positions and they had--we had rounds that would illuminate the area. And we were always delighted when we couldn't spot anything coming our way.

Mik: When you're up that far north, was that just not a very a--there was no benefit for them to attack up there? Was it just--

Jim: There was no reason why, why they would want the hills we were on. Because ah, as--the hill we we're on is lower than the ones they were on, and as you proceeded northward, the hills got higher and higher. So, no matter where we would be, you'd always be at a disadvantage, in terms of they're higher than we are; they can look down on us and uh, it was beautiful countryside, to go there, sit there; now, as a painter, for an example--you'd say, "Wow is this gorgeous." But, then it wasn't. It was terrible. There was nothing there, no homes, no little cities, nothing--it was just like the mountainous areas in the States where there's nobody around. If you fly over those mountains, they look nice but if you have to live in there, it's not really good and uh, they had nothing to gain. Because, uh--I think the peace talkers were trying to straighten out that 38th Parallel a little different and it was uh, it was getting near the end. I don't recall, after I left, how long it took afterwards, to end the battle or to sign the cease fire and peace agreement, but, it was good that it ended.

Mik: Did you think about the politics much or were you just waiting till your turn was up?

Jim: No, I really didn't, because, we had been so brainwashed from the time I was fourteen to nineteen, during World War Two, with all the movies we saw with John Wayne and Robert Taylor and all of the old time movie stars--were all heroes, even when they were killed in Bataan or Corregidor or whatever it was--and there was such a sense of patriotism, I couldn't believe it--and I was one of them, but, I recall prior to going to Korea, I was in Chicago, we had a weekend off, or a week off, and we went to Chicago and my fiancée met me there. We were planning to get married as soon as I got back from Korea and we were standing in line at one of the theatres and I can still remember, we were going to see the show, I don't know--I just forgot it! The show was ah, "The Death of a Salesman" with Frederic March, and there was a pretty good line--I'll bet it was a block long and the next thing I know, there was somebody tapping me and this other guy on the shoulder and they said, "Come on." I thought, "What did we do?" It was a police officer and he took us to the--I thought, "What's going on?" We got up to near the box office, and people moved and they let us go right in and buy our tickets and I thought, "Well, I'd heard of that in World War II," where they took care of the soldiers, but that was still prevalent in

Chicago--so, I was of that mentality then where, I thought, "Look what the guys did for us in World War II and World War I--I've got ta do my duty." So, I did exactly that and I don't tell this story, but when I went to ah, when I graduated from Chicago, I went to--I had to go to a medical doctor, a doctor, for my medical and he turned me down. He said, "You can't go because of your previous health." I had polio when I was age one, and I had one foot way smaller than the other, my hip was lower than the other and he says, "I can't approve you." And I begged him, I told him, I said, "How can I play two sports in college and you're telling me, I can't be in the Army?" He said, "You really want to go in?" I said, "Yes," and he said, "Okay, I'll pass you." So, I could've bugged out, if you want to call it that, out of the whole thing. I'm glad I didn't.

Mik: How did you handle the communication problem, when you had your--you and your platoon?

Jim: Well, it was okay, because, ah, we did not have any, any attacks or we didn't put them through any pressure and after we made one move, they finally took all of the Koreans out of our company, cause it wasn't working out and it was a stop-gap, uh, affair, anyway. There was just no soldiers available and uh, I found that all the soldiers that came to Japan, they must had a weeding out program and they kept all of the top notch soldiers in Japan and sent all of the untrained or problem soldiers to Korea. When I was interviewing guys as we'd get them for our company uh, say it's one fella, "You know, you're familiar with the M-1?" "No sir, I've never fired the M-1." I says, "Well, didn't you go through basic training?" "Yes, sir, but, I was on KP all the time." Then I'd talk to the next guy, "What, what are you good at?" He says, "I want to a chef." I said, "Have you ever been a chef?" "No," he said, "But I don't know how to do anything else." The next guy wanted to be a driver. Well, they all wanted to be drivers. None of em wanted to have an M-1 rifle and be called an infantryman and uh, it was a problem--getting good men. It was very seldom, that you'd ever get a two or three stripe sergeant that was really good. They kept em in Japan and maybe they had their reasons. Who am I to try to outguess the brass. But we didn't get many really top notch soldiers.

Mik: Which is okay, if you're not--

Jim: Yeah, if we were--

Mik: In the hot spot, it could have been a real problem.

Jim: Yeah, that's true. So, out of the nine months that I was on the line, I would say that at least three of those months were really not what war is all about. You're doing patrol work and this and that, but, the first few months were pretty bad. But afterwards, you just get accustomed to it and you accept the fact that death is inevitable for certain people. We lost, I think, ah, four or five officers while I was there--who were killed, and surprisingly, every one was married. Every one of those killed was married and not one single officer in our company was killed--and I don't

want to put any significance on that but, I often wondered if the Army ever studied the relationship between single and married officers in terms of how many deaths occurred. You see, if there was any significance to that or if it was just happened to be a coincidence in our company. But, sure, you thought about death every day, because, you never know when the shell is gonna fly in and uh, no, there is such a thing as uh, you have to, you have daily needs and you can't build a latrine in your bunker. Well, you have to go out someplace and do your routine and while you're doing that routine, sometimes you hear artillery rounds flying over. Once you've heard them, it's okay, cuz, they're long gone, when you hear the sound. But, I, I can still remember that one day, I said, "I'm gonna never forget this day as long as I live," but, I was doing my thing and artillery rounds were flying over and our tanks were firing at the enemy and there I am, observing the whole thing--so [he laughs] I thought that was kinda funny and I says, "I'll never forget that and I never will."

Mik: Well, there's always a time of contemplation. You just had more to contemplate, right?

Jim: [Laughing] Exactly.

Mik: Did you ever find out what was so significant about Old Baldy?

Jim: No, cuz there were others like it. There was one where uh, as I recall, the Filipinos were involved in that and there was a two squad attack against this hill and the Filipinos wiped em out. The enemy was not happy about that and they sent a company. Filipino wiped em out. Well, the Filipinos, in the meantime were losing some of their men, too, but they got to the point where they were actually attacked by a battalion and the Filipinos were running out of ammunition and what not, and they stayed there and they fought hand to hand and the whole works. Well, eventually, a short time thereafter, the Filipinos came back. They came through our, one of our checkpoints, which is where I saw those guys and I thought, "They're the bravest people in the world, cuz they fought for about three weeks. So, the enemies got the hill and so what?" All we did is say, "We made a magnificent show of defending it." So, but I didn't uh, the politics of it; I never really thought about it while I was there. My only concern was to make sure I'm doing a good job and to get home safely and that happened.

Mik: Was there ever a time when you thought you weren't gonna get home safely?

Jim: Yeah, the first two weeks I was there--I said, there's no way you could be that lucky to get through that, but, ah, eventually, you do. You catch on to what's happening--what's not gonna happen and what you have to do and we never had positions where we--where our unit had to go in--say, company size strength and attack and try to hold the position. We've had raids, where you go in and shoot up everything--but, then you're back in your own position. Then when you get back, you're all real happy and say, I wonder--did we accomplish much? You don't know if you killed anybody, you don't know if you scared the enemy away--they didn't run away and

uh, but, its now--goes down on the board as--yes, we attacked seven times, eight times, nine times and there were quite a few officers in. I guess that would have been the only politics I cared about there were a whole bunch of officers who during World War II, never left the Pentagon. So, they, they didn't have that beautiful combat badge that every infantry man wants--or any medals, or ribbons and in Korea, they said, to all these lieutenant colonels and colonels: "Here's your chance to get your combat badge." So, we had many, many visits from colonels who were in divisions and regiments where they were way back in safety, but they would occasionally come to the front lines and I had them come in our--when I was exec officer--I had to escort them around--and there were three of them and especially happy--because, ah, we had orders that we couldn't fire our weapons without approval and I had to give the approval. I'm talking about the machine guns, sometimes, it, the machine gunners would want to--they'd clean their weapons and whatnot, then they'd want to zero em back in at various caller concentrations where we might be attacked and whatnot--but we didn't have a lot of extra ammunition, so, we'd say, you can only fire a few. So, I gave this one machine gun crew, and said, "Yeah, you can fire at eleven o'clock for three minutes." Well, probably around nine-thirty or so, all of the sudden, there was two full colonels who were inspecting the front line. Now, [laughing] whatever inspecting a front line means. They were on the front line and nothing was going on, but in this particular situation, we had had a lot of rain, and the trenches were full of water and mud and all of the sudden, at 11 o'clock, that machine gun went off and all of the sudden, these guys were scared. I said, "Duck," and these two colonels dove into that mud and so did I, but, I knew what was going on but, I didn't want them to know that I knew what was going on. These colonels, I says, "You gotta crawl to safety." So, they crawl there and finally we got behind the hill and they said, "What was that?" I said it--the enemies forever have taken shots at us, when they see some activity--they may have seen some heads bobbing and what not. He said, "You mean we were under fire?" I said, "Yes, sir--combat badge." The colonels got their combat badges after all, cuz if you're fired on, and in front lines, you're in combat. So, there was that kind of politics, but, isn't it interesting, what goes around, comes around, sometimes--so, no, politics, I was uh.

Mik: I should change tapes.

**[End of Interview]**