

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JOHN R. REYNOLDSON
Infantry Officer, Army, Korean War.

1995

OH
629

OH
629

Reynoldson, John R., (1929-2009). Oral History Interview, 1995.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 96 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 96 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

John “Jack” R. Reynoldson, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as an officer in the 7th Infantry Division during the Korean War. Reynoldson details joining ROTC while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, attending college with World War II veterans, joining the 84th Airborne Division Reserve Unit, summer camp infantry training at Camp McCoy (Wisconsin), and being commissioned in the Army in 1951. Assigned to Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri), he talks about teaching basic infantry subjects. After receiving orders for Korea as a replacement officer, Reynoldson recalls being encouraged to spend extra time with his wife and then being flown via Alaska to Tokyo aboard an airplane that developed an overheated engine. He relates his positive impressions of the Japanese people and living in an old kamikaze base while attending chemical, biological and radiological warfare school in Gifu. Reynoldson discusses his arrival in Pusan (Korea), being given milk powder that was made in Madison, and seeing a P-80 airplane crash and burn. He reflects on feeling anxious when in a combat area except during actual fighting. Assigned to the 3rd Platoon in the 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Division, he describes meeting the men in his platoon and the defensive position they held in the Chorwon Valley. Reynoldson details two particularly memorable patrols: one when they were pinned by enemy fire and had to retreat through a minefield, and another when they retrieved decomposing bodies. He tells of seeing a soldier whose twin brother had been mortally wounded set down his brother’s body in order to carry a wounded soldier out of combat. Reynoldson describes seeing an impressive time-on-target artillery demonstration that would have resulted in friendly fire in actual combat conditions. He details his platoon’s assault on “Baldie Hill,” including getting in position under cover of darkness, participating in an intense firefight, seeing mortar shells explode around him, getting wounded, continuing to fight until everyone around him was wounded or dead, and being carried off the hill on a litter. He recalls regaining consciousness on a helicopter and being treated at a MASH unit. He analyzes the high casualty rates of front-line units and recalls the grim atmosphere of the MASH unit being tempered with the hope of being sent home. Sent to a hospital in Tokyo, Reynoldson recalls the surviving members of his platoon coming to see him and to return his personal gear while on R&R. After spending five months at a hospital in Fort Campbell (Kentucky), he touches on retiring from service. He describes the Chinese and Korean soldiers as “excellent soldiers” and addresses trench warfare, living in bunkers, human excrement fertilizer in the rice paddies, and fearing hemorrhagic fever. Reynoldson comments on the soldiers’ heavy use of alcohol and using juices donated by the Women's Christian Temperance Union to make mixed drinks. He reflects on the high casualty rates among first lieutenants and sergeants and states, “You recognize that eventually it's gonna get

you.” He describes the surrealistic nature of combat, including how time seems to slow down and the incredibly loud sound of concussions and bullets. Reynoldson reports his unit was successfully integrated without tension and relays the rumor about the segregated 24th Regiment being abolished after twice “bugging out” during combat. He portrays having a flashback in the States after smelling decaying skin outside a hospital but, on the whole, not having readjustment problems, partly in thanks to his close-knit family. He relates using the GI Bill to return to school for a teaching degree and reflects on the self-confidence he gained from his military service. Reynoldson reveals that soldiers were aware of the fight against communism, but that the greatest motivator in combat was that “no man wants to be seen as a coward by his friends.” He talks about recently joining the VFW and going to Washington, D.C. to see the dedication of the Korean War Memorial. Reynoldson declares the best predictors he’s come up with for effective combat soldiers are paratrooper training and punctuality.

Biographical Sketch:

Reynoldson (1929-2009) served in the Army from 1951 to 1953. He married Virginia in 1949 and started teaching junior high school in 1955.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1995
Transcribed by Carla Warren, WDVA Staff, 1998
Edited and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

Mark: Today's date is August the 10th, 1995. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. John Reynoldson of Madison, a veteran of the Korean War. Good morning, thanks for coming in.

Reynoldson: Good morning Mark.

Mark: On this very hot and humid morning. God, I can't wait for fall. I like to start the interviews by having the subject tell me a little bit about where they were born and raised and what you were doing prior to 1950.

Reynoldson: Well, when people say to me, "Have you lived in Madison all your life?" I say, "Not yet." [both laugh] I was born in 1929 in Madison. My dad had a degree in engineering from the University of Wisconsin. My mother studied practical nursing. They married, came to Madison, where my dad was a chief engineer for Oscar Mayer, and I went through the Madison public schools and the University of Wisconsin. And at the University of Wisconsin I took ROTC, was a regimental commander of the army ROTC that had about three thousand cadets in it. As a result of that, I received a regular Army commission in the infantry.

Mark: What year was that?

Reynoldson: 1951.

Mark: So the war had already started. The Korean War had already started by then.

Reynoldson: It started in 1950.

Mark: Right. I want to backtrack a little bit. You were in college during the late '40s then?

Reynoldson: Um hmm.

Mark: Now this is the time that a lot of GIs from World War II were on campus. Do you have any specific recollections of the GIs and as a young non-veteran student, a relationship to them?

Reynoldson: I think the returning veterans in 1946 and onward were probably the best students the University of Wisconsin has ever had. It wasn't unusual to sit in a class next to a man that might have only been seven or eight years older than you and he had been a full colonel in the Air Force or the Army, etc., and had lots of combat experience. They were highly

motivated, they were good students, they knew what they were there for, they all had an objective. In the words of the day, they were curve-raisers in the class because they studied so hard. We all had, I think, a great admiration for those who came back. They seemed to dress better than most of us. Often when they were wearing coats, you could see in their lapels the ribbons they had won, and sometimes you'd see a Purple Heart, a Silver Star and a Distinguished Service Cross on one individual.

- Mark: Now is it—as a young regular college-aged type, did you have much contact with them or did they stick to themselves?
- Reynoldson: My contact with the veterans was frequently through the studies in ROTC, where the combat veterans were brought back to talk to students in kind of monograph form as to what their experiences were in combat. Sometimes—in fact, one vice president of the University had been a member of the OSS and later the CIA and he was an occasional guest lecturer to organizations here on campus associated with the military. His name was Leroy Leuberg[?].
- Mark: Now as far as ROTC was concerned, in the '50s and early '60s that became mandatory at the University. Was that the case in the late '40s when you were in college?
- Reynoldson: Yes. In fact, the land grant colleges required that universities that were land grants had to offer ROTC and it was compulsory until—I think in the mid '60s it disappeared as compulsory and became voluntary, but at the time every freshman and sophomore male took ROTC, which accounted for the huge size. In fact, the University of Wisconsin ROTC was twice the size of West Point.
- Mark: This was just required for the freshmen and sophomores, but you stayed with it?
- Reynoldson: At the end of the sophomore year, if one chose to go on for two additional years, one enrolled in Advanced ROTC, whether it be Air Force, Army or Navy. Then you received a stipend of about \$100 a month to take advanced corp. At the end of one's junior year, whatever your branch was, you would go to a summer camp about six weeks long. And in our case, in infantry, we went to Camp McCoy and studied basic infantry, which was weapons, tactics, discipline and so forth.
- Mark: So in the summer of 1950 you were perhaps between your sophomore and junior year, or your junior and senior year?
- Reynoldson: In fact, I was at Camp McCoy in summer camp when it was announced the Korean War had broken out.

Mark: What was the—

Reynoldson: The North Koreans had crossed the South Korean border at the 38th parallel and of course rumors immediately spread through our barracks, and we had the entire 5th Army Infantry ROTC, which meant everything from Wyoming to Wisconsin and south into Indiana and Illinois, and there was all kinds of rumors that we would finish our summer camp and be sent to Officer Candidate School, OCS, for some training and then go over as replacement rifle platoon leaders. That never happened. We were allowed to finish the university.

Mark: After you graduated, you entered the Army right away?

Reynoldson: Yeah, I received a regular army commission. There was at the time a number of regular Army commissions given that equaled the number of graduates from West Point, who also then received regular Army commissions upon graduation. So in a way, we were kind of competitors of the West Pointers.

Mark: If you would, just describe for me your entry into the active duty Army. I'm sure being an ROTC student is one thing, but it's very different from being an officer in the Army, so if you could, just describe this transition. Where did you go and who did you see and what sort of indoctrination or training did you have?

Reynoldson: Perhaps it was easier for me because in my junior and senior years I had joined a reserve unit and had been in the 84th Airborne Division, which was a reserve unit that met here in Madison, so I had received a certain amount of reserve training in addition to ROTC training and summer camp. My first orders were to Fort Benning, Georgia, the infantry school, to go to Basic Infantry Officers class. My wife and I arrived there on, I think, the 5th of July, 1951, found housing and I then took the Basic Infantry Officer course in a company entirely composed of regular Army ROTC graduates.

Mark: After this training—it was in 1951 that you went to Korea, so it must not have been long after this training that you got your orders to go overseas.

Reynoldson: Well, it was then standing operating procedure for all graduates of basic schools such as infantry to have troop training experience before they would go to combat. So I had gone through airborne school by this time, becoming a paratrooper, and I was assigned to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where I was a training officer. And so by the fall—during the fall and winter of 1951 and '52 I was teaching basic infantry subjects at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, which was, of course, standard drill,

weaponry basics, light machine gun, M1 rifle, M1 and M2 carbine, hand grenades, use of bayonets, close personal combat—that is hand to hand combat—patrolling, night fighting and other such things as military teaching techniques and so forth.

Mark: Um hmm. Describe your steps from this point to going overseas, then.

Reynoldson: I didn't realize just how severe combat was going to be until we had a new training company commander, a black captain named McCoed[?], who was actually an architect in real life, and he had been seriously wounded in Korea, came back and took over troop command and became the company commander where I was one of the platoon leaders. When I received my orders for Korea to go over as a replacement infantry officer, McCoed immediately relieved me of all company duties and said I should spend more time with my wife. He was fully aware of what was going on over there and how high the casualty rates were, and it was his kind way of saying you better spend time with your family.

Mark: What was your—did you appreciate that at the time? Did you understand what he was trying to do or is it something that comes with hindsight?

Reynoldson: I recognized it as a bit of generosity, but I don't think I fully realized what he did until I began to see what combat was actually like.

Mark: So, you had to debark—you had to leave then from California, I assume?

Reynoldson: Then I received my orders and I went to Seattle, Washington to Fort Lewis, a magnificent post overlooking the Olympic Mountains. I had several days there getting organized and then we took a C-54, that is a DC-6, four motor, propeller-driven aircraft, flew to Anchorage, Alaska and then out to the last of the Aleutians, Shimiya, and then we flew down to Tokyo, which meant that we flew by Russian territory, and on the way down, the Russians were jamming the Lorraine, so that the pilots had to fly by "dead-reckoning." In about—just after we passed the point of no returns, one of the engines overheated and they had to turn it off and feather the propellers on that engine. It was a left outboard engine and we made half of that flight on three engines, landed at Tokyo airport with a considerable thud. But I know they were eyeing the baggage, the mail, etc., that we were carrying in case we had to jettison weight in order to make the flight.

Mark: Was this plane filled with other replacements such as yourself? Or—

Reynoldson: It was largely young replacement officers that were going over. There were some civilians on board, but the military had contracted with Northwest Airlines to fly this group over.

- Mark: Hmm. So you landed in Tokyo. What were your first impressions and what sort of processes took place to get you oriented?
- Reynoldson: Well, we were stationed in Tokyo at a camp provided for trans-shipment personnel. We had a chance to discover Tokyo and the Japanese and see the countryside. We spent about a week and a half there, and I found the Japanese to be absolutely fascinating people. They had had only five years since the war and much of Tokyo had already been rebuilt and it was all cleaned up. They were industrious, they were courteous, things were organized and systematic. They gave an impression of being highly industrious, well-organized and extremely courteous people. Their recovery was done well. It was very interesting to watch—for example, when we were on trains, to watch well-dressed Japanese schoolchildren standing in railway stations neatly in lines, carrying their little bucket with their lunch in it, but all neatly in lines, never pushing or shoving, waiting to get on the train that was going to take them downtown, or to school, or whatever.
- Mark: You were very impressed, I take it?
- Reynoldson: Very impressed.
- Mark: You went to Korea about two weeks after that, you said.
- Reynoldson: Well, we spent several weeks in Tokyo, but then all of us, because of the fear of the communists using atomic weapons against us or biological weapons against us or chemical weapons against us, we all went through chemical, biological and radiological warfare school which was in Gifu, Japan. That's in the vicinity of Sasebo, which is one of the largest Japanese navy bases, and so for two weeks we were stationed at what had been a kamikaze airbase and we lived in the same barracks that the kamikaze pilots had lived in. We walked through the base which had been discovered at the end of the war by aircraft carrier planes, strafed and bombed, and the hangers were pretty well destroyed. The runways were grass so that they would be more difficult to discover, and I remember each morning looking in the mirror as I shaved and thinking to myself that a number of times that mirror had had a kamikaze pilot gaze in it and shave himself for his last shave before he dove on an American ship.
- Mark: If you could describe your trip across the straits, then, into Korea.
- Reynoldson: They flew us to Japan; we took a troop ship out of Sasebo, which was a remarkable harbor. It's very much like San Francisco on a smaller scale with a very, very narrow neck. We could see the submarine netting held up by floats that still was capable of closing Sasebo. In a several-day trip

across the ocean, we landed in Pusan, Korea. As the ship docked, a band was there playing the then popular song "If I Knew You Were Coming, I Would Have Baked You a Cake."

Mark: Was this an American band or Korean?

Reynoldson: No, it was a military band.

Mark: I see. What were your first impressions of Korea? I suppose as compared to—I suppose inevitably you would compare it to Japan, but maybe you have some distinct impressions of Korea itself?

Reynoldson: The first impression of Korea was Pusan, which of course had not been occupied by or overrun by the North Koreans nor the Chinese. There was a great deal of commercial building, there was a lot of municipal structures, water breaks, breakwaters, roads, bridges, etc., and the story I heard at the time was that this had largely been built by the Japanese who had occupied Korea since the turn of the century. The Korean people appeared to be taller than the Japanese. They appeared to have better complexions, considerably better teeth, and I thought generally they were somewhat more well muscled than were the Japanese that I had seen. But in this case, I was probably running into more of the Korean military than I was passing the civilians in Japan.

Mark: When you got to Korea, I assume, and perhaps this is incorrectly, but you were not yet assigned to the 7th Infantry Division?

Reynoldson: No.

Mark: You were still just a general replacement officer?

Reynoldson: At the port we boarded a train which clearly had been overrun by the North Koreans because it had been recaptured, but the train had been shot up with 50 caliber machine gun fire and you could see these bullet holes all over the train where it had been strafed. On going up to the front line on this train, which was only a day's ride, we—they passed out sea rations, which had tins of meat and goodies and a package, and I remember sitting in my seat on the train, opening up this package and finding Sanalac milk powder, and it said the headquarters of Sanalac was Madison, Wisconsin, and I kind of shouted out with glee, "Here's something made in my hometown." People started throwing these envelopes at me made of powdered milk because they clearly didn't like it at all. Then we arrived at a replacement depot, a small tent city, where both enlisted men and officers checked through. At this point, they started up the pipeline, still with no assignment toward the front line. Our first day out of the replacement depot was at one of the airfields right back of

the front line. They were all designated as "K" and then with numbers. "K" standing for Korea, then the number was what the particular airfield was. I think this one happened to be "K2." We were there for a day and we had tents alongside one of the runways and there was strafing and bombing going off right at the end of the runway. Planes were taking off. We could watch the them—F-80s with wing-tip napalm tanks were dropping napalm, pulling up, coming back, and as we watched this show—and it was a tremendous show, watching rockets, listening to machine gunning, watching napalm going off, one of the F-80s got hit with ground fire and turned to pull back and it was smoking, and by the time it passed going southward along the runway it had actual flames coming out of the roots of the wings and the pilot banked, didn't put down his wheels. I think he lost hydraulic pressure and he made a wheels up belly landing, slithered by us on fire, skidded down the runway, came to a halt and the canopy never opened, he was still inside the aircraft and clearly he was burning alive. And I ran out on the runway, started to run down toward the aircraft, got about halfway there and the flames had pretty much enveloped the wings by this time and it shorted out the 350 caliber machine guns in the right wing. They started to fire, and the recoil started to spin this aircraft around, which was sitting flat on the ground, and I could see these three streams of tracers spinning around coming toward me. I couldn't get off the runway. I laid on the runway and these 50-caliber ball ammunition and probably armor-piercing tracers went over the top of my head, probably not more than twelve inches, maybe closer. Tremendous cracks and a roar as they went overhead. The plane continued to spin around until the left hand wing firing circuits shorted out and those three 50-calibers started firing, so then all six 50-caliber machine guns fired all the rest of their ammunition right into our hospital tents.

Mark: With tragic results, I'm sure.

Reynoldson: I didn't see, I didn't see what the results were, but kind of ironically, when I got back to Madison, the professor of Military Science and Tactics for the Air Force who apparently had been at the same location in the headquarters of the ROTC, mentioned an incident where he had been at an airfield, they described it as "K2," had seen a plane crash, the pilot was inside burning up, and he ran out pried the canopy off, pulled the pilot to safety, saved his life, and it clearly was a good chance that it was the same aircraft, that we were in the same location at the same time. For this, he received the Silver Star.

Mark: Hmm. [pause] And so this is your introduction to—

Reynoldson: That was my first observation of combat. It was kind of a grisly fascination with combat and seeing that kind of thing. There's a

fascination in watching what is going on. In this case, I was removed from it, but there's a fascination to see the mechanics of combat and what is going on. You find yourself just transfixed, fascinated, a little bit fearful, a little bit anxious, but a great fascination with the activities of war.

Mark: This is kind of jumping ahead a bit, but in a combat situation, where you're going out there, you're leading men into combat, is it different? Is there a fascination? Is there a different kind? Is it more fearful? How is it different when you're involved as opposed to being an observer?

Reynoldson: My experience was that before actual combat, for me there was always a gnawing anxiety, a gnawing fear that accompanied you just about every place you went when you were in a combat area. And by this I mean, in a place where you could be hit by a sniper, or you could be hit by mortar fire or artillery fire unless you were in a bunker or a good foxhole or a trench where you could feel safe, but when you were in the open, there was always an annoying fear that you could be hit. In actual fighting, when we were in an assault situation or were being hit by fire, where we could respond and do something, I never remembered being afraid. You're so busy at that time, there were things to do, you were shooting, you were throwing grenades, you may have been using a bayonet, you were moving, and I do not recall being afraid when actually fighting.

Mark: That's interesting, actually. Let's get back to where we were then. At the time of this fighter incident, you still weren't assigned to a unit yet?

Reynoldson: At that time I was assigned to the 7th Division and I was going to be assigned to the 17th Regiment. When I got up to the 7th Division area, I see signs, "You are entering the 7th Division Area" and here was a red circular patch with two black diamonds which turned out to be called a crushed beer can division, which really were two sevens, one inverted against the other, which created these two black diamonds on a red field. I went to regimental headquarters. There I met a regimental commander, was forwarded up to battalion headquarters and there I met a battalion commander, swarthy, a little guy who introduced himself as Colonel Nicoletti, and Nicoletti had three Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars, five Purple Hearts, two Combat Infantry Badges and clearly was a man's real soldier.

Mark: A walking parade, it sounds like.

Reynoldson: There wasn't anything Nicoletti would ask you to do he hadn't already done himself. When I introduced myself and he told me what my assignment was going to be, he said, "You're gonna take over the 3rd Platoon and Charlie Company" and he said, "I have particular affection for

that platoon because when the 7th Division arrived here in Korea, I was the platoon sergeant," and he had risen from a staff sergeant, that would be two bars underneath three sergeant stripes above. He had been a platoon sergeant and now he was lieutenant colonel, to give you some idea what the casualty rates were.

Mark: Yeah. Well, and his personal achievements too, I suppose?

Reynoldson: Quite remarkable, quite remarkable.

Mark: Now, I assume as a replacement, the other lieutenant had been killed. Is that correct?

Reynoldson: No. The other lieutenant had combat fatigue.

Mark: Oh, I see.

Reynoldson: He had come "unglued." He was a math major. Small. And my own reaction was "not suitable infantry material." In fact, when I saw him weeks later he was in a rear area and he was sitting on a cot on an air mattress figuring on paper and he was calculating a new logarithmic table based not on ten but based on three, and he did this to keep his mind occupied.

Mark: So there had to be a point where you went to meet the men in the company.

Reynoldson: That probably is as difficult as anything a replacement lieutenant ever has to do—

Mark: I'm sure.

Reynoldson: —is to walk into an experienced combat unit, introduce yourself as the second lieutenant who has never seen a day of combat and meet, first of all, your platoon sergeant, and then the question is, "What do you do?" And of course, you introduce yourself, and in my case, I said, "Okay Sergeant, take me around and let me see the position that we occupy and introduce me to everybody." The platoon was dug into a railroad, raised railroad track. It went across the Chorwon Valley and it was probably the most magnificent defensive area that's ever been prepared because there were railroad tracks on top, there were ties up above, we had dug in from the back, had our apertures out the front and we had fields of fire that must have been two miles long. And it was as flat as a pancake. But of course, we were right out in the open and everything we did when not in a bunker could be seen by the Chinese 'cause they were lookin' right down our throat from a mountain top to our right which was number 1062, was

called Papasan, and a major hill mass that we called “Baldie” which was off to our left, part of which I was later to take.

Mark: If you could describe briefly where the Chorwon Valley is.

Reynoldson: Chorwon Valley is also known as the Iron Triangle. It's in Central Korea, north of the 38th parallel, and it's bounded by Chorwon and Kumhwa, which are in the south and form the bottom of the triangle and Pyongyang, a city that was in Chinese and North Korean territory which was to the north. It's extremely hilly. In fact, it is the location of the MASH that you watch on television.

Mark: That's where the—

Reynoldson: MASH was in the Iron Triangle. In fact, I'm an alumnus of MASH.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

Reynoldson: Yes.

Mark: I'll ask you some more about that in a bit, actually. So, you went to meet the men in the company. Perhaps you could describe your impressions of some of the personalities.

Reynoldson: Well, in each case, I shook hands, I introduced myself, I asked the men what city they were from, how long they'd been in the Army. I looked at their position, I looked at their weapons, asked them if there was anything they needed, if there was anything I could get that they didn't have. They were getting good food, they were getting all the alcohol they needed, and believe me, that war was fought on alcohol.

Mark: Some people have said that. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

Reynoldson: Then we settled into—this part of the war was largely scouting and patrolling because the positions had stabilized by this time, each side was digging in, the negotiations were going on at the negotiating headquarters, a so-called peace village. Every once in a while, we would have to pull off a raid, a patrol or an assault on a Chinese position.

Mark: I was going to ask, this was the static part of the war. The [unintelligible] had stopped and the lines had pretty much stabilized. I was wondering what sort of combat missions you were sent on.

Reynoldson: Scouting and patrolling were probably the most nerve-wracking, in which case a telephone would ring in our bunker and I would get the message that they wanted to see me at battalion headquarters and I was going to

lead a patrol that night, so I would go back, get a briefing, often told that they wanted a patrol of at least so many men and that our objective was to—if it was a combat patrol, go out and get into a fight. If it was a recon patrol, to go out and gather information. And, of course, one of the worst of all patrols was a body picking patrol, which meant you were gonna go out and pick up bodies of men who had been killed on previous patrols.

Mark: Um hmm. And you would get these calls about how often? How often were you in combat?

Reynoldson: We could figure about one patrol a week, as we rotated patrols between the three platoons. We didn't patrol every night but our three platoons would rotate and then I rotated the patrols. If it was a single squad patrol, I would rotate among the squads I had.

Mark: Are there any particular missions that stand out? Or do they all kind of blend together?

Reynoldson: I would say two. One, I had a combat patrol of twenty-seven men and as dusk came, I got the men into an area where we had some cover, couldn't be seen, so I wouldn't alert the Chinese that there was probably a patrol coming. I gave everybody a briefing on what our objective was, how deep we were going to try to go behind enemy lines, and we set up plays, almost like football plays. I told the men that if we got fire from the front, the two rear-most rifle squads were to go to the left and to the right to give us covering fire to the front while the first squad would withdraw and then we would have a rallying point further back where we could reorganize, do what was appropriate and probably get back to our own lines. On this particular briefing, when I had finished, I said, "Okay, I want you to cover your faces with mud, backs of your hands, if you got a radium-dialed watch, take it off and put it in your pocket because we don't want to see you bouncing along with your radium dial showing. Take out your canteen, make a mud hole and start plastering your faces." And I thought everybody got down, opened their canteens, made a little mud hole. As I was covering my face, as I covered my face I looked up and I had four black soldiers who weren't doing it, and they were looking down at all the rest of us covering our faces with mud and they were grinning because they didn't have to do that. I remember saying, "And as for you guys, I don't want you to smile on this patrol." That patrol turned out to be kind of interesting. We had had a patrol shortly before that had a scout dog along with it, and they left our lines and within one hundred yards they got ambushed. Before the ambush occurred, the scout dog, a Doberman pincher, had stopped, telling his handler that there were Chinese present. He didn't believe that this could occur this close to our lines, and so he kicked the dog on and they walked right into an ambush and the dog was killed. The handler was one of the few people who had four wounds from

one bullet. He had one bullet enter one buttock and exit the opposite one. He had two entry wounds and two exit wounds from one bullet. We lamented the passing of the scout dog and felt badly for the guy who got shot in the keister, but everybody got out of that one alive. So when we left on this patrol, there was considerable anxiety as we went out through our wire. We had very sophisticated barbed wire entanglements in front of us and we had paths to go through to avoid the minefields. We knew that there was the potential even as close as a hundred yards from our own lines that we could be ambushed. After we had gone for about twenty minutes out, we were following a trail, and there were dried-up rice paddies on each side where we knew there were mines, could be ours, could be theirs. Ours were much more dangerous. So we stuck to this trail as we moved along and there was a five hundred pound bomb crater in the middle of the trail. We were close enough to our lines so that I felt that we would still avoid our mines by staying on the trail, but the bomb crater was filled with water and so I slithered down into the crater and it was about thigh-deep with water and there was lots of noise. The second guy that came down after me slid down into it, made a big splash and a shriek and I stationed men on each side of the bomb crater at that point and we helped each other down into the water, across it and up the other side and continued on the patrol. Probably thirty minutes after that we ran into all kinds of fire coming in on us. Got down in rice paddies, which were dried, and of course we all knew they were filled with human excrement as well as dirt. I can remember as this fire was going overhead pinning us down that I had two grenades on my flack jacket and they were in the area which would be your breast pockets on a shirt. It seemed like the fire was coming lower and lower and these two grenades—I was laying on top of these two grenades and they seemed to get larger and larger and larger as the fire seemed to get closer, and finally, it felt like I was laying over two watermelons. I remembered the famous Bill Malden cartoon of Willie and Joe where Willie turned over to Joe and said, "Joe, get down further!" and Joe said, "I can't Willie, me buttons is in the way." And it was true. Anything that was below you seemed to get in the way of getting down further. That patrol terminated because of the fire we were getting. I pulled my men back, we headed back, but by this time we were going back a different route. We couldn't follow the same route back, and when we got back toward our lines we had to enter a mine field. And of course, American mines that we were using were not only anti-personnel, which were block mines somewhat similar to Claymores, but bounding mines, and the bounding mines often had trip wires out from them, so if you hit a trip wire, and there were usually three out of each mine, and if you hit a trip wire it would fire about a 37-mm size shell up head high and it would explode at that. It had a killing radius of about fifteen yards in all directions. The way to get through mines like that, you soon learned, is to take a twig about two feet long and in the darkness have the twig down on the ground as you walk slowly along and when it hits a trip wire, the twig

will bend and alert you. Then you can follow the twig down in the darkness with your fingers, feel the trip wires, and at that point I would find the length of the trip wire, bring two men up, they would straddle the trip wire and everybody would step across the trip wire by putting their hands on the shoulders of the men on each side. I got everybody back on that patrol to the point where we had to get a password and a countersign. The password that night was "Bull." B-U-L-L. And if you were an English-speaking Chinese you might think the countersign was gonna be "shit." But, it wasn't; it was "Durham," like Bull Durham chewing tobacco. Soon I got the password, I was being challenged, I gave the proper countersign and we walked back into our lines, a different place, and we got everybody back alive.

Mark: There were two, you said, that stood out.

Reynoldson: Yeah. One other patrol was particularly grisly. We had had a lieutenant and an automatic rifleman killed on previous patrol about two weeks before and their bodies had laid out in the No Man's Land between the Chinese lines and ours and, of course, had rotted out there, and pretty soon the odor was permeating our lines. The odor of a battlefield is quite characteristic. Human flesh has a sweet sickening odor and nobody has to tell you what it is. It's almost as if innately you know; when you smell that, you know that there is a cadaver or parts in the vicinity. So in this particular patrol, our patrol went out, we found the bodies pretty much by smell, we had an idea of where they were located near a crashed F-51 fighter plane. And when we found the bodies, we were quite concerned because the Chinese would often booby-trap bodies by taking our grenades, putting them under a body and then pull the pins, so the weight of the body would hold the handles of the grenades down and the moment you would lift or roll a body over, the grenades would go off and those people who were trying to pick up a body would be killed by grenades. And so it was our practice to take along phone wire, wrap the phone wire around legs and then retreat about twenty yards and then pull the bodies off of their location. Well in this case, the bodies had been there so long that when the wires were pulled, the legs were pulled right off the bodies. And the squad formed a semi-circle for protection in the location and one of my men volunteered to take the body parts and put them in the two body bags we had brought along. In effect, he was just shoveling "jelly" and pieces of uniform into body bags. They were brought back, but the next day, this kid had such severe combat fatigue that he was removed from the front line.

Mark: Really?

Reynoldson: Yeah, it was more than he could—it's more than any one of us should have to handle.

Mark: It sounds like it. I've just got two more combat-related questions and then we'll get on to some other type things. You mentioned you took "Old Baldie?"

Reynoldson: Well, there were several baldies. There were several baldies. The one that was adjacent to us was a prominent rock outcropping into which the Chinese had dug a full battalion of Chinese soldiers. It appeared to be near impregnable. In fact, we tried to take it—another company tried to take it in an assault that failed and the company was really badly beaten up and what happened was that the Chinese listening posts heard this company coming at night, waited until they got within about twenty yards of their positions, jumped up and then with a volley of grenades and a volley of automatic weapons fire they just cut down the front assault troops in this company and, ah, the assault stalled. The only possibility at this point was to pull the remnants of the company off, and the practice is you never leave a body, you never leave a wounded man, and so covering fire was given to the units that were furthest up, they dragged and pulled as many bodies and all the wounded back, and it was quite a disaster. I think one of the most moving things that I saw in combat occurred then in this company, King company, was when a pair of automatic riflemen who happened to be twins, identical twins and black, were providing some of this overhead cover while King company pulled off of Baldie. They were the last ones left up there except the company commander, a captain named Simpson. And he finally gave the order for them to pull off, but before that happened, the loader on the automatic rifle got shot across the face and chest and received mortal wounds. His brother picked him up, threw him over his shoulder and started trudging down this mountainside when a white soldier who was out in the open in a broad, open space where he had been shot through the legs and he couldn't move, and he called out to this soldier carrying his identical twin brother, "Don't leave me, don't leave me." And this automatic rifleman, I think knowing his brother was dead or dying, put his identical twin brother down, walked out across, ran across, jumped across the craters and shell holes and picked up this white soldier, put him over his shoulders and carried him down to safety and left his identical twin brother up there.

Because of that failure, a little while later, I was given—or our company was given the mission of attacking one of the fingers that ran off of this large prominence. It was the largest prominence in the Chorwon Valley. There were ridgelines that ran off of it and we were going to go up one of these ridgelines and take what probably would have been an outpost situation manned by we knew not what. It could have been a squad, it could have been a platoon, you couldn't tell because everything was so carefully dug in. The Chinese were tremendous diggers and they had great tunnelers. Their replacements were always tunneled and

honeycombed with great underground work, so we knew what we had to take, but we had no idea what we were gonna take. So our company pulled off the line, the engineers in a rear area had found terrain that was similar although not as high and not as steep. They had constructed bunkers, foxholes and trenches that duplicated what we were going to see up there, and so we actually had a chance to practice an assault before we pulled it off. I had a chance to fly in an L-Plane over this terrain a couple of days before we were going to assault it. You have to be real careful that you don't alert a position that you're going to assault by too much preliminary artillery fire, etc., but I had a chance to fly over and look down and I saw in an adjacent ridge line what appeared to be a foxhole that might have contained an automatic weapon. I kind of put that in the back of my head so that when I gave my men my briefing, I would tell them to stay down on one side of the ridgeline and not be up on the top or on the other side so if that was indeed an automatic weapons emplacement, we would avoid fire from the side. About this time, we—all four infantry officers, the company commander and three rifle platoon leaders, all of us lieutenants went to an outpost that looked over on what we called Baldie and had a chance to look at it from a bunker. We walked into the bunker and we found a brigadier general and a radio man. Well, he turned out to be the Division Artillery Commander. When he learned that we were the assault infantry officers that were going to take this position, get prisoners and then retreat to our own lines, he said, "Well, I tell you, I can give you all the artillery support you need. I can call in seventeen battalions if you'll have artillery." That's a lot of guns, including 4.2 inch mortars, 105-mm howitzers, 155-mm long toms, and we even had some 240-mm cannons in the rear. He said, "In fact, I'll give you a demonstration of what I can do. I'll call in a time on target on top of what you're gonna take to kind of soften 'em up." A time on target artillery delivery is something you really have to see. In a time on target, you call back and give the grid coordinates of what you want hit. The general called in his own mission, he didn't let a forward observer call it in, he called in the mission. And he had his maps and he had a concentration numbered on top of this hill, a small mountain that we were going to take. It was numbered 404. And time on target means that guns from the greatest distance away fire first and then those closer next, and those closest, next, and they all program their time of flight so that every shell lands on the same second on the target and there's no warning whatsoever. He called it a mix of proximity fuse, that is, radar fuses that exploded above ground, instantaneous artillery shells that exploded the instant they hit, delay fuses that have a tenth of a second delay so that they would penetrate bunkers and then explode inside, and he also mixed in some white phosphorus. Our plan of attack was that my platoon was gonna attack up the front of this small mountain and the other two platoons were gonna assault from the left flank. The idea clearly was I was going to draw the fire, the other two platoons, the greatest strength,

would assault from the side and they would take the hill while I was—my men were gonna take the heat. So we were gonna be at the base of this mountain, get there at nighttime and when the sun came up, we would assault in the morning. So he said, "Okay lieutenants, it's on the way." And we waited expectantly and we watched this time on target come in and with a tremendous roar and a mix of high explosives it hit alright, but hit exactly where my platoon was going to be before it jumped off on the assault. I think it scared the hell out of the commanding general because we did the assault later with no artillery fire whatsoever. It never came in. It never—I think he just had misregistered that whole concentration, and I think they were afraid they were gonna kill us all. Do you want me to continue about how this assault occurred?

Mark: Sure, oh yeah.

Reynoldson: After we had finished our training and we had the day that we were gonna pull this off, which was the 3rd of July, one of the days of Gettysburg, and that was a bit of an irony, I thought, that here we were going to pull off a charge across open terrain much like Lee had tried to pull at Gettysburg, and we went by truck up to the main line of resistance. There we were joined by a group of Korean males who were litter bearers and they were attached—the first two platoons that were going to assault from the left were the first part of the column, then came the litter bearers, and my third platoon was at the rear of this column when we started snaking our way in the darkness across No Man's Land to get to our jump-off point. And it was black as pitch; you could see very, very little. Pretty soon the lines stopped. By this time, we were out in the middle of No Man's Land and I ran up to the front of the litter bearers and found out that they had gotten frightened and had stopped. The column had broken, the guys that were going to show us to our jump-off point were now leading the first two platoons, and I had no one to lead us to the point that we were going to start our assault from. Of course, maps were impossible to use. We'd never been in this terrain and I had to look up at the silhouettes of the mountains around us and try to pick the right mountain to get to the base of. Fortunately for the assault, I picked the right one. We angled off to the right, got the base of the mountain in the darkness. I had all my men spread out. Three rifle squads and a weapons squad which had two light machine guns. Our rifle squads had two automatic rifles each and M1 rifles and carbines. I carried an M2 carbine. And we laid in the bushes and whatever. My platoon sergeant and my radio man and my runner and I crawled into what I think was a burned out pig sty. It was a small building about—the walls were about three feet high, it had had a thatched roof on it which had burned off, but the poles were still up above it. We crawled in there and waited for sunlight to come, and pretty soon the radio crackled and said "GO!" So I crawled out of this little decrepit shed, stood up, and it probably was about 4:30 a.m. now. We could see the sun was

up over the horizon and I remembered the motto of Fort Benning and the Infantry School, which was "Follow Me." I remember shouting those words "Follow Me" and I started up the mountainside and I walked fifty steps before I dared to turn and look back to see if anybody was coming. And sure enough, here came my platoon. Two rifle squads, then a weapons squad and a rifle squad, and the sun was so low in the sky that you could see sunlight glistening off the bayonets that everybody had on carbines and M1 rifles, but not A.R.s or machine guns, and I can remember seeing those shining bayonets back of me. I joined the first rifle squad, they came up with me, and we started up and when we approached the top of this hill, we got into a tremendous firefight, and we got very, very close before this fight opened. We were throwing grenades back and forth. My first rifle squad was pretty badly shot up. There were explosions all around us and then one of the spookiest things I've ever had occur in my life. We were so close that there were mortars firing from the back of this hill or mountaintop and they were so close they were probably firing within twenty or thirty yards of us and they were firing nearly straight up and we'd hear this "cough" and we'd see this mortar shell shoot up in the air and it would get to the top of its trajectory, but instead of turning over and coming down nose first because it had some trajectory, it would hang motionless up above us and then come down tail first, and then the fins would gradually pick up air resistance and they would flip to the top and the mortar shell would fishtail back and forth and it was so slow, time seemed to elongate as you looked up at these mortar shells coming down. You actually could dive to the left or right and avoid them and hit the ground before they did, and there would be a tremendous explosion as they hit. I think at this time I probably was wounded by either a hand grenade or a mortar shell, but it just seemed like a real large explosion. And everybody who's wounded almost uses the same phrase: "It feels like you're hit with a baseball bat." A tremendous crunch and noise and a feeling of tremendous pressure. And I remember my ears ringing and I really thought it was just an explosion nearby, I didn't think I was wounded, but by this time I was left pretty much alone; everybody else had been killed and wounded that was up there. The wounded were still firing and there was one Chinese soldier left alive on the top of this mountain that I could see. He was slinging grenades at me, and when he would throw a grenade they were potato masher types. He would pull the ring at the bottom and then he would stand up and he would throw this potato masher grenade and they left a white trail of smoke in the air as they came, and it was a curly-q of white, kind of a pigtail curly-q of white smoke trailing off of this wooden handle and it would come looping through the air, land, and explode. I could jump left or right or dive left or right to get out of the way and I was firing at him when he was slinging grenades. In one exchange, I fired the last rounds I had in my two magazines in my carbine, one magazine facing up and the other taped to it facing down, and I had switched magazines so I had fired the last in one

and I dropped out the two magazines empty, and as I was reaching for another magazine to put in my carbine a dead Chinese soldier to my right turned out not to be dead at all. He was in a hole and he came swinging up with a burp gun at me and he was just virtually inches away and I had no ammunition in my carbine. I did have a bayonet and I bayoneted him right through the neck. I got the magazine back in my carbine and a soldier above me stood up to throw a grenade and as he pulled his arm back I was close enough and he was probably less than fifteen yards away and I shot him across the chest. And I actually could see the bullets—I couldn't see the bullets through the air but I could see the bullets when they hit him in the chest because I could see his uniform move as the bullets hit him. I moved on, staggering by this time; apparently I had lost quite a bit of blood, and I staggered on up to his position and suddenly I realized there was no more sound. There were no mortars, there were no hand grenades, there was no sub-machine gun fire, no carbines, no machine guns, nothing. It was completely quiet. The sky up above, I can remember, was a bright blue and big cumulus clouds were there, and I realized I was the only one left alive. Everybody else in that area was dead. Some of my men were further back down; of course they were alive. I staggered back down there. An aid man came up to me and said, "Let me put a bandage on you," and I still was unaware that I was wounded. I said to my platoon sergeant who was with the last rifle squad I had and the machine guns that they better get up there and get the dead and wounded because there were some people that needed help a lot more than me. But I was gettin' weaker by the moment. An aid man put bandages on my face and I got laid down on a litter and I can remember laying on the litter. Two men, I think, were kind of anxious to get off that potential impact area, and being trundled down the mountainside and I had my carbine beside me on the litter and the last thing I remember was being concerned I might shoot the guy that was in front of the litter because my carbine still was, didn't have its safety on, and I can remember reaching down near the trigger grip and—or trigger guard, and putting the safety on so I wouldn't shoot the guy ahead me.

Mark: Where did you finally wake up? At the MASH?

Reynoldson: I woke up in a helicopter. I went through a battalion aid station where they took off all my webbing equipment. They took my carbine. I carried my own personal civilian .45 caliber pistol, a Colt—**[End of Tape 1, Side B]**—short barrel .45 that was taken there. I was one of those individuals in triage. There are three classes of wounded: the first class, men that you could patch up and get back into combat; the second class, those men who you can give immediate care, later surgery, and they can recover, but they cannot be returned to combat; and the third class is those men who are probably going to die and don't waste your time on them. I happened to be in the third category, and in Korea those were helicopter patients. They

were flown to MASH, where you're fully aware from watching television of the complete surgical facilities that they had available, and so I woke up looking up through Plexiglas, I was on a litter underneath the bell helicopter blades that were spinning above me. We came in and landed in MASH. They put me off, put me on a Jeep hood and I got carried into surgery. I really lost—in that period of time, I lost about three days that I don't recall, but the opening sequence of MASH that you watch on television is precisely what happened to me. In fact, if you look carefully at MASH, that sequence—even the bandages on that individual they took off from the co-pilot's side of the chopper, that incident actually occurred to me. After surgery—[pause in tape] Okay, we left off in MASH. I think memories of MASH are interesting. I didn't watch the original MASH for years.

Mark: You mean the television show?

Reynoldson: I didn't watch the television series, because it made me kind of uncomfortable because of the lightheartedness and the humor, which I'm sure was there, but I didn't see it. MASH was a pretty grim place. Back of surgery there were stacks of body bags containing men that they could not save. The wounds there were all pretty serious. The impact of kindness—nurses—was tremendous. There was a feeling of relief, though. If you were in MASH there was a chance you were going home, and I think almost everybody felt that if they had been wounded and they were alive to that point, they may not have the million dollar wound but they were alive and they were gonna go home. The casualty rates were tremendous in Korea. The 8th Army never numbered over 750,000 men at any one time and yet the 8th Army suffered 250,000 casualties. We had 54,000 dead and 8,000 missing in action, probably all of whom are dead, and so those casualty rates occurred during two and a half to three years of warfare, which meant the casualty rates in front-line units were simply terrific. The story I heard in my platoon was, they had already had six hundred percent casualties, which meant that forty man platoon had—two hundred-forty casualties had gone through it. I know on the day that I was wounded, my unit had six dead and twenty-four wounded. So the fact that you were in MASH, there was a chance you were going home and there was a chance you were gonna live. I remember one particularly poignant situation. I was laying on a litter, I was about to be evacuated to Tokyo. I wasn't in a bed, I was on a litter on the floor. The sides of the tents were rolled up because it was early July, it was hot, and I watched a nurse walk above me carrying something on her two arms, covered in toweling, and she walked out the door at my feet around the corner of the tent to where the tent was rolled up beside me and she lowered her arms and a whole human leg rolled off of her arms down into a trench. So MASH was a bit of a grim place. I was flown by C—first by helicopter back to an airfield, was put on a C-54, the same kind of airplane I had flown over to Japan in,

although this was military, not civilian. Flown to Tokyo, went to Tokyo Army Hospital, had a second surgery there. I guess this meant about three surgeries, battalion aid station, MASH and then Tokyo, and was recovering there when one morning I had quite a surprise. The surviving members of my platoon had been given R&R and they had come back to Tokyo Army Hospital to see me. They brought my duffel bag and all of my personal gear, and it wasn't until I got back to the United States that I opened up my duffel bag and there in the top of the duffel bag was my .45 caliber pistol in its holster.

Mark: That says a lot about the men.

Reynoldson: They clearly had gone back to the aid station and said, "We'll take Lieutenant Reynoldson's pistol." Of course at aid stations there are mountains of weapons that have been taken off of wounded men and somebody certainly would love to have had that aluminum magnesium .45, but somehow they got it and it was in my duffel bag, and I did not discover how this happened until just last year when I was going through some letters. I had a shoe box of letters that my wife had kept that I had sent to her and I pulled out the last letter to read. It was the one that followed the telegram she got saying that I had been wounded. And in it, I described how my men had come to the hospital to visit me and they had brought my duffel bag. I had actually forgotten that. It just had disappeared from my memory. So then I came back to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. My wife came down there and I was at that hospital officially for five months and then retired from the service.

Mark: I was going to ask you if you got the so-called million dollar wound. You've kind of answered the question. I don't know if there really is such a thing as a million dollar wound, but your injuries took you out of combat.

Reynoldson: That's right.

Mark: Okay.

Reynoldson: It took me out of the service.

Mark: Yeah. I've just got one more combat-related question and then we'll move on to some other things. You were patrolling a lot. I would assume that the Chinese were doing the same sort of thing?

Reynoldson: Oh, yes.

Mark: So how often—your lines must have been attacked from time to time.

Reynoldson: Oh, yes. On occasion we would have a Chinese group that would get into our lines. They were excellent soldiers. Excellent soldiers.

Mark: The Chinese were—

Reynoldson: The Chinese were excellent soldiers. We had one case that occurred, not in my platoon, but down the line a little bit from us where a couple of Chinese soldiers got into one of our—they got through our wire, they got through the main line of resistance, they walked into a bunker, sprayed with automatic weapons and killed everybody that was in the bunker and then disappeared. And it was this kind of hit and run attack that we had to have outposts out for. I might comment that as a result of that assault I was given the Silver Star and also, of course, I got the Purple Heart and had previously earned the Combat Infantry Badge.

Mark: You mean the Baldie assault?

Reynoldson: Yeah.

Mark: As for the Chinese, now they're noted for this sort of human wave technique of assaults and that sort of thing. Did you notice that? Did they seem to employ a lot of bodies out there to obtain their objectives?

Reynoldson: By this time the United States had developed such tremendous artillery superiority and, of course, we had total air superiority that massed attacks by battalions and regiments were almost out of the question. They did occur at battalion-size level but they were so devastating to the Chinese that they had pretty much retreated into their positions, and it really was kind of World War I all over again.

Mark: Um hmm. That's the impression I get, actually. Okay, I'd like to move on to some of the other areas of the military experience. When you weren't in combat, what sort of activities took place in your—entrenchments, I guess, is what they were? I mean—

Reynoldson: Well, we lived in bunkers. Food was brought up to us in insulated containers by Jeep called marmite cans and we distributed food in a single location and men in small groups came back to get food and then go back to their bunkers so that we never concentrated a lot of men in a location because you could be sure there was gonna be mortar fire come in or artillery fire come in if you did that. Human waste and excrement was a major problem, and so we had created waste disposal sites, kind of like outhouses, where men were expected to put human waste, use toilets, etc., to control disease on the line. There was a disease that was quite terrifying; it was called hemorrhagic fever. It struck one man in my platoon. Their temperature would spike up to 104, 106 and then they

would start bleeding from all the orifices of the body. The 8th Army had eight thousand casualties of that nature, I read later. I'm not so sure but what that didn't hasten the truce arrangements, that they were fearful they were gonna have an outbreak of hemorrhagic fever throughout the whole 8th Army. It was a really horrifying disease.

Mark: It sounds like it.

Reynoldson: In the case of the man that had got it in my platoon, the capillaries in the whites of his eyes ruptured and his eyes were just bright red from blood. He was evac'd and I have no idea what happened to him.

Mark: Did you get much time off the line? Did you get to go take a week's leave in Japan or something like that?

Reynoldson: Never. Never. No. I never saw a man, I never saw a man that rotated home. Every man that went home that I know of went home either dead or wounded. The men that came to see me in the hospital were the only men I saw that got R&R. I knew there was R&R, but I never saw it. I might share something kind of humorous that nobody knows about, but there was a great deal of liquor on the front line and we could get it from Japan and we would send orders back.

Mark: I was going to ask, actually.

Reynoldson: Class 6 supplies. Class 1 is ammunition, Class 5 are minor things, but Class 6 was unidentified, and that was always liquor. I didn't drink at this time at all, I was a total abstainer. I think my men liked that because I gave away my liquor ration. I think they thought I was more generous than I really was. But the Women's Christian Temperance Union in the United States learned about all the drinking that was going on on the front line and that the best of whiskeys could be bought for a dollar and a quarter a bottle and as much as you wanted was available. Though I didn't see drunkenness on the front line, I did see plenty of it in the back. I think we were smart enough to know that if you're drunk you can't be a good soldier; you can't be on an outpost and be drunk. But the WCTU in the United States started collecting money and sending over great quantities of fruit juices, and so along with our Class 6 liquor would come the box from the WCTU of orange juice, limeade, lemonade, tomato juice, etc., and they had no idea they were creating the world's biggest party atmosphere, because they provided mix for drinks.

Mark: So, how was morale up there on the front line?

Reynoldson: I thought it was high. I'm sure there was grumbling. Our men were highly motivated. All the men I had were good combat soldiers. Some soldiers

are better than others and there are some men who really are not fighters. The best single predictor of who a fighter is, "Is he a paratrooper?" We had a sprinkling of paratroopers in all our front line infantry units. I was one. I had several in my platoon, and without exception, paratroopers are fighters. There is something about airborne training or the fact you volunteered for it or the fact you have experienced some of the ultimate fear, that of falling, and you have overcome that fear, that paratroopers are fighters. They're quite remarkable. The greatest casualties in combat occur among first lieutenants and sergeants because they are generally the leaders. They have survived long enough so that eventually their chances for survival become less and less. And every day you survive, you realize you've used up one day. Every hill you take, you know there's a river. Over every river, there's another hill. Every successful patrol means you've got another one coming later. And regrettably, if you're successful doing this, you have a tendency to be called on to do it again and again and again, and so you recognize that eventually it's gonna get you. If you're there long enough, it's gonna get you, because the odds are simply stacked against you.

Mark: So when you're up there, do you think that you're going to go home? Or you think that you're not going to go home? Do you think about it at all?

Reynoldson: I can't speak for others, but I never thought I was going to get killed. I did think I'd probably get wounded, but I think in all the cases I saw where men got wounded, the first reaction is identical and the words are almost always identical. A man is hit, his first reaction is disbelief and he uses the same words; in disbelief he says, "I'm hit!" as if to say, "My God, I can't believe it, I have been hit!" Because there's a certain dream-like quality to combat when you're shooting, when you're throwing grenades, using a bayonet, walking into an assault. Things slow down. Action that takes two or three seconds, such as a downward flight of a mortar shell, it seems like it takes a minute. Ah, grenades coming through the air seem like they're coming in slow motion. And there is a dream-like quality. I can remember thinking constantly "This can't be real." There is something surrealistic about combat. The one thing that's overwhelming and nobody is ready for it and that's the noise. The explosions, the automatic weapons fire, individual weapons, grenades going off, concussion explosions near you. I mean the feel, the feel of concussions. Sound is real. Sound is physical. It's not just conversation that you and I have. But the sound and concussions of warfare are just terrific, and it's something that cannot be duplicated. [pause] There is—when I got home, we returned to my parents' home, the home in which I now live, and in our recreation room in the basement we have a billiard table, a pocket billiard table, and I suppose one of the first days I was home, my dad and I said, "Let's go down and play a game of pool." So we went downstairs and racked up the balls and my dad broke the balls, the first one, and I was

just astonished. The crack of billiard balls to me was exactly the sound of a bullet passing right near your head. Because as bullets go by, there's a supersonic crack. There's not a whine and a twang; that's in Hollywood movies. It's a sharp, loud crack. The next time you play pool, listen to the crack of a billiard ball and multiply that by a factor of fifty and you have the sound of what a bullet sounds like when it goes by your head.

Mark: I'm sure I'll never play pool and think the same way again.

Reynoldson: No, I don't think you will.

Mark: That's for sure. [laughs]

Reynoldson: Even to this day, when I hear that crack of billiard balls, when you do it hard, it's just always there.

Mark: The Korean War was the first war that was fought by an integrated, racially integrated, American fighting force, in many cases. Parts of the military hadn't integrated yet. You've indicated already that your unit seemed to have been mixed as far as race was concerned.

Reynoldson: Yup.

Mark: This was a fairly new thing at the time. I was wondering if you could comment on, sort of, how people got along. Were there tensions?

Reynoldson: I never saw, I never saw, I never saw a tension between blacks and whites. I did see, I did see something that I thought was different between the black soldiers in my platoon and Caucasians. The blacks had a tendency to talk excitedly, more frequently than did Caucasian soldiers. In fact, it used to make me nervous, that I thought there was more talking than there should be. I can remember on patrol, I heard some of my blacks talking in back of me and either they were more casual or there was some other motivation. But as far as combat effectiveness was concerned, I did not see a difference between blacks and whites. The anecdote I told you about the twins on an automatic rifle I think is good evidence that when you're in combat actually fighting, there is no, there is no feeling of racial animosity. It is not generally known that there was a black regiment in the 2nd Division, the 24th Regiment known as—by the—it was all black, had a few white officers and probably a few white enlisted sergeants, but for the most part, it was all black. And on two occasions, the 24th Regiment pulled off of a ridgeline only when it received mortar and artillery fire but not an infantry assault and left all of its weapons. There was a general feeling in Korea that the 24th Regiment was abolished, and the story was the colors were buried because twice the 5-5-5 artillery battalion back of it had been overrun because they had "bugged out." In fact, they used to

have a marching song "We are members of the bug out Deuce-Four." They forbid them to sing this, but as a non-integrated unit, they were not effective combat soldiers. My own feeling was that one of Truman's motivations to integrate the armed forces was that these units simply could not fight well, as demonstrated by the 24th. What really happened, we really don't know. But the story is there is no longer a 24th Regiment.

Mark: I didn't know that.

Reynoldson: Nobody knows this story.

Mark: I was in the Air Force anyway.

Reynoldson: Nobody knows that story. You had to be there and supposedly the colors are now buried.

Mark: I've got one last question about Korea and then we'll move on to some post-war experiences. Now that involves your contact the Koreans themselves. I don't get the impression you had too much.

Reynoldson: No.

Mark: It was all business up there?

Reynoldson: No. The front line was all combat. I have no humorous stories to tell you about coming in contact with people in villages because my experience was entirely in a combat situation, and so I cannot comment except when I passed through Seoul, the city was flattened. The only thing that was left was a red masonry central railway station which I understand has been rebuilt and is still there. The Korean soldiers that I met were *excellent* soldiers. Absolutely first rate soldiers. I'm sure we can count on them if we have to in the future because they were fighters.

Mark: The only thing—the one thing that Korean vets always mention here are the honey pots. Now you weren't in the countryside too much, just getting to and from the front, I take it?

Reynoldson: No, we were—we trucked and then jeeped and then walked.

Mark: So this wasn't a big part of your Korean experience?

Reynoldson: Well, except that the rice paddies around us had been filled with human excrement and there was a certain odor about Korea. In the Chorwon Valley in particular, which probably was a great rice growing area when it was not a battlefield, there was a certain pungency about the battlefield

itself that was obviously human excrement. Mix that in with decaying flesh and it smelled very bad.

Mark: I'm sure it must have.

Reynoldson: I did have an experience back home in the United States. I re-enrolled at the University and one day I was going by the orthopedic hospital. I had worked in it when I was a teenager so I knew what was happening, and up on the second floor they have surgical rooms and often there they would take off full body casts that had been kids for six months or so and the odor from these casts is just terrible because of all the decaying skin that's on them. As I walked by the open windows of the orthopedic hospital, the same odor of dead skin came pouring out onto the sidewalk and I had this immediate flashback to the odors of the battlefield.

Mark: At this time, Korea was not an industrialized, modern nation that it is today.

Reynoldson: No, not at all.

Mark: I assume it had a much different appearance.

Reynoldson: It was, it was—everything I could see was that it was an agricultural nation. No factories that I could see, road structure was pretty primitive.

Mark: Very few paved roads, I take it?

Reynoldson: None that I saw. None that I saw. There may have been, but none that I saw. There was a railroad network that we did use, but the main supply route was probably one of their existing roads that we had improved upon and probably had hard surfaced in some places.

Mark: Okay. So I suppose it's time to move on to some of the post-war experiences. We've already discussed how you got to back to the States. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your re-adjustment back into civilian life. Now you had been wounded in combat very seriously, I take it?

Reynoldson: Um hmm.

Mark: So, for example, did you have any lingering medical problems after the war?

Reynoldson: [sighs] Oh, some, which I don't care to discuss with anyone.

Mark: That's fine.

Reynoldson: But no bad dreams. I've only had one nightmare in my whole life about combat and that was just after I got home and it was about throwing grenades back and forth. I don't have anxieties. I don't have guilt complexes over things that we did or things that I did. I've been fortunate to come back to a close-knit family. We have two children that are unusually successful and compassionate, good parents, and the fact that we have a close-knit family I think, is illustrated by the fact that this coming winter our whole family will get together at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, at Christmas time and we will ski together. These will be my wife and I, our two children and our grandchildren. This will be the twenty-fourth year in a row we have skied at Jackson Hole together and about the thirty-fifth year we have skied together as a family at Christmas time. We did a lot of things. We did a lot of outdoor things, camping, canoeing, backpacking, mountain climbing, etc. I think the fact that I came back to that kind of a situation made it an awful lot easier for me than if I had had to be on my own.

Mark: As far as your professional life, when you came back you had to establish yourself in a profession. Had you thought about what you —I mean, you were a young man and you just had to finished college so you hadn't been working at the time already, but when it came time to choose a profession, to go to school and these sorts of things, what steps took place here?

Reynoldson: Well, before I went into the Army, one of the other professions I considered was being a minister. I had never considered teaching, although seventeen members of my family had been teachers at one time or another. My dad had taught at the University of Wisconsin Engineering School. When I was in the service, suddenly I was thrown into teaching, and you know what, I was good at it and I liked it. I liked teaching. I taught stuff that was really interesting stuff for men. So now I'm home, I got to choose a new profession, the natural thing for me was to do what I liked to do. I couldn't be in the Army anymore so I went back to school, I got a teaching certificate, and in 1955 I started teaching junior high school.

Mark: What subject?

Reynoldson: English and Geography, or English, American History and Math, or some combination of those.

Mark: So for you the military experience was not hindering to your professional career? It pointed you in a direction?

Reynoldson: Oh, I think the military is a tremendous advantage. I think it teaches you self-discipline, it teaches you organization, it teaches you how to plan, it teaches motivational techniques to get men to do things, it gives you self-

confidence. I think those of us in combat, though, that I've had a chance to talk to, many of us think there is one thing you come back with if you survive that's a negative. The fact that you survived gives you a small feeling of immortality and a much greater likelihood to be a risk taker. The fact that I am a mountain climber and still a parachutist, I've climbed on K2, Mount Everest, half a dozen years ago I free-climbed Devil's Tower in Wyoming, that's 1000 feet straight up. And I think the military self-confidence that you bring home is a positive, but I think that self-confidence can be almost too much. I think in my case it was. I think I'm too great a risk taker.

Mark: Interesting observation actually. In terms of financing your education, there was a Korean War GI Bill?

Reynoldson: We had the—[End of Tape 2, Side A]—GI Bill.

Mark: Did you use it?

Reynoldson: I had the GI Bill. My family was reasonably well-to-do and so finances were never a major problem for us. My wife was a nurse, she could have worked. When I got home our family came along, our two children, a son, a daughter, in that order, and my wife gave up working to care for the kids and care for me and our household. I think it's paid big dividends for us.

Mark: I've got one last area I want to cover and then I had something else I thought of I want to go back to. Well, let's just cover that now before I forget it.

Reynoldson: Okay.

Mark: In Korea of course this was part of the larger Cold War and it was the war against communism, and I'm wondering how much that was discussed among the soldiers? Did anti-communism motivate soldiers to fight, like perhaps fascism did or something like fighting for democracy in World War I, or was it even discussed much? I'm interested in—

Reynoldson: It was. There's a troop indoctrination program that's run at all levels. It really was pretty accurate in predicting what the communists were trying to do, that they had overrun all of the territory and kept the territory their armies had occupied. I think the military was very effective in getting across the fact that there was an evil that we had to resist. I never met a man who didn't think we were doing the right thing. But you don't fight—you don't fight for your country, you don't fight against communism, you fight for your friends. The greatest single motivator in combat that makes men do things that are just *unbelievable*, I believe, is no man wants to be seen as a coward by his friends. I think most men will die rather than act

in a cowardly way. I might comment, maybe part of the reason Colonel Nicoletti was as effective as he was, before we pulled off this assault I have described to you he stood up in a Jeep and gathered the company around him, gave us a harangue as to how this was gonna be successful and so forth and so on, and his final words were, "And any man that walks off that mountain without being wounded is to be shot by the man back of him." I didn't think I would hear that in the American Army, but I'll bet ya that every man walkin' up that mountainside thought of those words. If he wondered should take the next step or not, he wondered if he did turn and run, would he be shot by the guy in back of him.

Mark: This is kind of changing gears again real quick. I just have one last area and it may or may not even apply to you. That involves veterans organizations and reunions and those kinds of things. Have you joined any of the major veterans groups like the Legion or VFW or anything like that?

Reynoldson: I belong to the VFW.

Mark: When did you start that? Was it right after the war or later on in life?

Reynoldson: No, two years ago. Only two years ago. I have never gone to a veterans reunion except I did go to Washington for the dedication of the Korean War Memorial.

Mark: That was two weeks ago or three weeks ago.

Reynoldson: I found it a very moving experience. My wife and I went; we had a lovely time. It was immensely impressive to see both the Vietnam Memorial and the Korean Memorial. My wife and I went together on one occasion to see these and spent a great deal of time there, but at another time I had to go alone. [pause] I found that very moving.

Mark: As far as the VFW is concerned, why did you join?

Reynoldson: I felt it was my duty. I felt it was my duty. I didn't do it because I thought they could do something for me, I did it because I thought I owed them something.

Mark: Would you describe yourself as an active member? Do you go to meetings?

Reynoldson: I don't go to meetings. I make contributions. I've made financial contributions. I've been to the clubhouse on occasion. I enjoy talking to other VFW members. I think probably one of the major motivations was that some of the nicest men I've known were VFW members.

Mark: Those are the questions that I have. Is there anything you'd like to add? Anything I skipped over? Anything you want to go back to?

Reynoldson: Yeah. I got a predictor in addition to being a paratrooper, the best single predictor of who a combat effective soldier is, is the man who in peacetime in garrison training is always on time.

Mark: Why is that?

Reynoldson: My theory is that being on time is a social contract that one has with another person and it's very minor, but if you arrive on time for whatever, whether it's a formation, whether it's a dental appointment, a doctor's appointment, a social engagement, whatever, you're saying, "I thought enough of you to be here on time." As a result of seeing that, I find myself having an absolute fetish about being on time to places. In fact, if I arrive early, let's say, at a doctor's office, I may sit in my car and listen to the radio or I may walk around the block, but I try to walk through the door at the time I said I would be there, as I did today. I still shine my shoes, peak press my pants, dress well when I'm working, try to walk and stand straight. I view the military as having given me far more than I gave it.

Mark: Okay. Thanks for coming in.

Reynoldson: Okay.

Mark: I absolutely appreciate it.

[End of Interview]