

Wisconsin Public Television  
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

LEROY E. SCHUFF

Machine Gunner, Marine Corps, Korean War  
Electrician, Marine Corps, Vietnam War

2005

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Madison, Wisconsin

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**Schuff, LeRoy E.,** (1932- ). Oral History Interview, 2005.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 50 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

LeRoy “Lee” E. Schuff, an Oshkosh, Wisconsin native, discusses his Korean War service with Dog Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines and his Vietnam War service with the 2nd Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion. He speaks about joining the Wisconsin National Guard at age seventeen and enlisting in the Marine Corps in February of 1950. He talks about diesel mechanics school at Camp Lejeune (North Carolina), taking a troop train to Camp Pendleton (California), forming a relief company, and arriving in Kobe (Japan) one day before Typhoon Jane hit. He comments on serving alongside experienced World War II veterans. At Pusan (Korea), he states he was assigned to a machine gun squad in Dog Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment. He describes the landing at Inchon: hearing the first incoming round, seeing Inchon burning, moving towards Seoul, and seeing General MacArthur comment on a successful engagement with enemy tanks. He talks about securing Kimpo Airport, crossing the Yellow River, and being shot through both legs on the day his unit was to enter Seoul. He describes another Marine, Paul Tipton Baker, getting shot and killed as he was checking on Schuff. He details recently seeking out Baker’s family and visiting his grave. On the battlefield for eight hours after his injury, he portrays receiving treatment from a corpsman, evacuation, initial treatment at an Army hospital, and eventually being flown to a Naval hospital at Yakuska (Japan) where he spent five months. He talks about being put on guard duty at Camp Otsu and then rejoining his unit in the “Punchbowl” (Korea). He recalls a flash flood washing away equipment and uncovering North Korean bodies that had been buried in shallow graves. He mentions guard duty at Great Lakes (Illinois), getting married, reenlisting, working with the Marine Corps Reserves, electronics school, fire control school, instructor staff duty in Pasadena, and learning the Hawk Antiaircraft missile system for antiaircraft weapon in Huntsville (Alabama). The day he was assigned to the 2nd Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion, he reveals he received secret orders to go to Vietnam. He describes his job providing maintenance at Chu Lai and discovering that his hearing was not good enough to be in a combat area. He reflects on the effects moving from base to base had on his family. He characterizes his homecoming from Korea as apathetic and his homecoming from Vietnam as hostile. He speaks of his civilian career and going back to South Korea.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Schuff (b.1932) served in the Marine Corps from 1950 to 1967. While in Korea, he made the landing at Inchon, was wounded by sniper fire, and was deployed to Korea after his recovery. He was deployed to Vietnam in 1965 and was medically discharged in 1967. In 1969, he earned a bachelor’s degree in industrial education and a Master’s degree in audiovisual communications from the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Schuff became the director of media services at Fox Valley Technical College (Appleton, Wisconsin) until 1984 and worked as a training and

development consultant at Kimberly Clark Corp. until retirement in 1994. Married in 1952, he and his wife, Darline, raised three children and currently reside in Neenah (Wisconsin). Schuff was elected as commander of the Department of Wisconsin Military Order of the Purple Heart in 2005.

**Citation Note:**

Cite as: LeRoy E. Schuff, Interview, conducted May 19, 2005 at Appleton, 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 WCKOR107 and WCKOR108.

**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).

**Videotape Note:**

There are missing audio segments! The WVM copy of the interview is missing a few words between the first and second tapes. Wisconsin Public Television should have complete audio of the interview, but there was a problem during the reproduction of tapes for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. The missing parts are italicized as a means of indentifying them in this transcript and the actual tape end and start in the WVM copy is clearly noted.

Interviewed by Mik Derks, May 19, 2005

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

Transcript edited and reformatted by Wisconsin Veterans Museum staff, 2010

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010

**Transcribed Interview:**

Lee: And I graduated from high school when I was seventeen, and wanted to join the military at that time, and my parents wouldn't sign for me. So I did join the Wisconsin National Guard in 1949. Made one annual field training with the National Guard at Fort McCoy in the summer of '49, then I was eighteen in February of 1950, and I joined the Marine Corps. Went to Parris Island for boot camp in February, March, and April.

Mik: Why the Marines?

Lee: Why the Marines? You wanna hear that story? Actually, I went to the post office to join the Air Force. I had a couple of cousins that were in the Air Force during WWII and heard a lot of interesting stories, and of course, flying was real--kind of romantic in the late '40s. And I went down to join the Air Force and on the way past the Marine Corps recruiter, a friend of mine was in taking a test. And I stuck my head in and said, "What are you doing?" And he says, "Well, I'm taking an exam to go in the Marine Corps." And he says, "Just wait awhile." And the recruiter came over and said, "Be quiet." So I said, "I might as well, I'll take the test as long as I'm here and waiting." So I took the test and the way it worked out, I joined the Marine Corps and he didn't. He didn't pass, he had a police record, actually, is what it was. And was disqualified. So I never regretted it.

Mik: Best of the best.

Lee: Best of the best, and stayed in for seventeen years. At any rate, after boot camp, I went on recruit leave back here--to Wisconsin for ten days and then was assigned to Camp Lejeune to go to diesel mechanics school. We were waiting for a class to form at Lejeune--they put me on mess duty. On the thirtieth day of mess duty, that was my last day, I went back to the barracks and everybody was packing up and I asked the corporal what was going on and he says, "Are you all packed?" and I says, "No." and he says--used some flowery language and told me to get my stuff in my sea bag, we were leaving in about thirty minutes. And we got on a bus, and went to Norfolk, VA at the Naval Air Station. We recruited the--sorry, we relieved the detachment there that mostly were older, more experienced Marines, and they flew out to the West Coast and then flew over to Korea. We were there six days, and they formed a troop train on the East Coast, and went cross country, picking up Marine reservists in cars all the way across country, and our train went on Marine Corps base at Camp Pendleton, California.

Mik: And you had found out by then, what this was all about?

Lee: I found out that there was a Korea somewhere. Yeah. I'm sure that before that I had heard about Korea in school and the division of the country after WWII. But no idea where it was, what the people were like, at that time. So we formed a relief company at Camp Pendleton and boarded a ship in San Diego, and sailed for Korea.

Mik: So the experienced guys, they flew them right over there.

Lee: They flew them right over, yeah.

Mik: Put them right into Pusan, I suppose. But then they were getting everybody else together because the Marine Corps was pretty downsized by then.

Lee: It was in the 70,000 numbers, and as a matter of fact, Harry Truman was the president at that time, was threatening to disband the Marine Corps. Because it was-- there was no longer a need for it. Course we know what history has proven there. We formed that company and sailed--and about sixty percent I would say, about sixty percent of the troops that went aboard the ship to go to Korea were WWII veterans that were called back to active duty and of course had experience and were trained and took leadership roles. So we had some pretty experienced people along with us. We sailed to Japan and we docked at Kobe the day before Typhoon Jane hit Kobe. History will show that General MacArthur had a real tight timeframe for the landing at Inchon. It was impossible to send the ships to sea to weather the typhoon, so we stayed in the harbor at Kobe, offloading the ship. The ship that I was on almost sunk. I found out that what happened is the cargo shifted from the strong winds and the pitching of the ship. Almost sunk the ship against the pier. It was leaning at about a forty degree angle in the morning when we got up. Then we loaded our combat equipment aboard another ship and headed for Pusan. The 5th Marine Brigade was very active in the Pusan perimeter, in the early parts of the war. In late June, July and August. They were pulled back off of the lines, and most of us went as reinforcements to those companies. I joined Dog Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines at Pusan, on the docks. I was assigned to a machine gun squad. It actually was a volunteer position because that was the work I did in the National Guard for a year back here in Wisconsin. I was in a heavy machine gun squad in a weapons company. So I--in retrospect it probably was a foolish thing to do because machine gunners did not have a long longevity. And it proved to be the case for machine gunners in the Korean War too. We boarded a ship at Pusan and sailed up to Inchon for the Inchon landing. I was on the *USS Cavalier*, so it was an attack transport. Went down the rope nets into landing craft at about five o'clock in the afternoon and headed for the beach. We landed shortly after that, probably between five thirty and six o'clock.

Mik: Do you remember that ride?

Lee: I remember that ride very clearly. Yes.

Mik: What's it like going into what you suppose is gonna be combat?

Lee: Well, the sea was pretty calm, so people were too. And we, like you see in the movies, we circled, and rendezvoused, and then started heading toward the beach and we heard a snap sound, and one of the guys says, "Uh, oh, somebody's nervous

and cranked off a round." And one of the old salts from WWII says, "No, that's incoming." And it was, it was rifle fire going over the top of the LCDP. And we were cautioned then that because of the tides at Inchon that we might have to land on mud flats and we--two-by-twelve planks that we could lay out that we could go ashore on. You can imagine how we felt about that, how vulnerable you'd be to the enemy. And in other places they had a stone seawall and there was a very famous picture of some Marines going up over the seawall, from a landing craft. However, the landing craft I was in was the fifth boat in the first wave and our coxswain [boat captain] from *Cavalier* found a way to get into the sandy beach. And was able to drop the ramp in about two feet of water and we were able to walk ashore without too much trouble. A little small arms fire but not a great deal of resistance.

Mik: Good.

Lee: Yeah, that was good.

Lee: After we got ashore, then we formed and things get pretty mixed up--when you got different squads, and different platoons, and different boats and coxswains trying to find a place into the beach and back out again. So it probably took forty-five minutes to get the platoon all together again, and get all of our weapons together. We moved on into the city. Inchon was burning. It just was like one big inferno from the ship to shore bombardment, rockets, ships and aircraft. We moved through the city, like I said, it was mostly rubble. And we got in maybe 1,000--1,500 yards into the city and we hit some pretty stiff resistance--took a couple casualties up in the front, so they pulled us back and put us in position to hold for the night. We were on the side of a road, and we set a machine gun up on the road where we could field the fire out towards the enemy. The next morning, as soon as first light, then we headed east towards Seoul, which was our objective, was to take Seoul. We hit minor resistance; mostly the resistance was encountered by the rifle platoons and squads that were out in the lead. The enemy was completely surprised, and they were routed. They just had no idea of what kind of force they were up against. The third day after the landing on D plus three, we took positions on a hill--the road went through a cut in a large hill and there was a--big high voltage transmission line towers on each side of the road and we took positions on those hills on each side of the road. The following morning we woke up to the sound of tanks. No mistaking the sounds of tracked vehicles coming up the road.

Mik: Coming toward you or from behind you?

Lee: They were coming right straight up in front of us.

Mik: They weren't your tanks.

Lee: No. We were overlooking Ascom City, which is a small city just east of Inchon. It turned out to be six enemy. It was Russian tanks, and about 250 troops, and they were led by a truck--that was loaded with soldiers. And they just came up the road in

the cut between the two hills. I have to say the fire discipline was just amazing. No one made a sound. No one appeared over the top of the hill, just waited for 'em to get in between us. And when the truck got around the corner by the hill, we had a tank on the road around the hill and the signal to open fire was when that tank opened fire on the lead vehicle. And he did. After about a thirty minute firefight, we had no casualties and all of the enemy were dead. All six tanks were destroyed. About a half hour later, General MacArthur and a bunch of his aides appeared on the scene. This was very interesting, not many people see such an impressive person as him. He walked up, he had corn cob pipe and--think exactly what he said. He mentioned to one of his--one of his aides was a medical officer. He says, "Well, there's one casualty you won't have to treat in your hospital." It was then run over by a tank. An enemy. And then he turned away and he actually had tears in his eyes, he says, "And this does an old soldier's eyes a lot of good." When he saw the results of that battle. A few minutes later, when he left that area, some of the South Korean soldiers that were along with us had jumped down in my culvert that he was over, and shouted in there, in Korean, and took six prisoners out of the tunnel, out of the culvert. They had taken cover there, you know, any one of them could have reached out and thrown a hand grenade up and got himself a lot of brass. There were admirals and generals and quite a few, quite a bit of brass up there. That was our first major encounter with the enemy.

Couple days later, I don't have the days firmly fixed in my mind but our company, Dog Company was given the mission of securing Kimpo Airport. Just a major international airport serving Seoul. We advanced to the airport, took cover for the night and began the attack the next morning. They had a little resistance and some casualties but it was a piece of cake. Interesting afterthought there is some forty years later when I was working for Kimberly-Clark I was on assignment to Yuhan-Kimberly, which is a Korean joint venture with Kimberly-Clark. I met the mill manager and we were talking about that time, the Korean War and found that he was thirteen years old and living in Seoul and his parents were evacuating the city with their family and he remembers going past Kimpo Airport towards the American lines and seeing the Marines going across Kimpo Airport. So we kind of passed in the night. We formed a very close friendship. Not just with him but with a lot of Korean people. My wife and I have traveled there frequently and we find them to be very cordial and kind.

Mik: And they're very appreciative, aren't they?

Lee: Very, very appreciative. Yeah. Especially the older ones, you know, the ones that remember the atrocities under the Communists. So, after Kimpo, then we encountered the Han River. The Hangang River is a main river coming from mountains through Seoul out into the--what sea is that?

Mik: The Yellow Sea?

Lee: The Yellow Sea. And all of the bridges were down. So we sent an advanced party swimming across to check the enemy situation. A couple of hours later our amphibious tractors came up and we loaded up and crossed the river on Amtracs. We got formed again on the other side and continued on--heading south into Seoul as a spearhead force. We hit resistance almost immediately after beginning the push to the south. This is now maybe a week after the initial landing, they had an opportunity to assess the forces that they were against and to marshal some of their own forces and bring 'em into that area. We encountered some artillery fire and that's a new experience for a young eighteen year old. We called in our Marine support aircraft with their napalms and rockets and eliminated that resistance in a hurry.

On the day that we were to enter the city of Seoul, it was early in the morning and the night before taken up again a position at the top of the high ground. Each night we dug temporary foxholes, not six foot deep foxhole kind of things, just gonna scrape a little dirt together and get it between you and the enemy and we did that. At about five o'clock in the morning we got up and were ready to move out and ordinarily at night when defensive positions are set up, machine gun squads are brought forward and the machine gun positions have a field of fire out to protect against any advance by the enemy. So we were right at the front lines and the riflemen hadn't come up yet to continue the attack. I got up out of the foxhole and got my coat on, or whatever I had to put on, and went over, reached down to pick up the machine gun and at the time I stood up then I got shot through both legs. It's presumed by a sniper. Knocked me down and I think I said something real clever like, "God I'm hit." [laughs] You don't have a script to go by. I went over to the same foxhole I had spent the night in and just laid down and a Marine came over to stop the flow of blood to see how bad it was, and that Marine's--Paul Tipton Baker, is his name, was killed, probably by the same sniper. As he was kneeling in front of me he was shot in the head and fell on me. Someone came and pulled him out, a corpsman came shortly after that and looked at him first and said that "Nothing I can do for him." Put a bandage around one of my legs that was bleeding the worst and gave me a shot of morphine and left a couple of more syrettes with me and he had to leave cause there was a lot of activity going on. I was on that hill for about eight hours. They came by to get--once, to ask if I could walk and I said I would try, but I didn't know what the bullet had gone through, the bone on one leg and that bone was fractured. Only took a couple of steps and couldn't go any further. Then they said there was other casualties further up the hill that had stomach wounds and chest wounds and needed attention very quickly. If it was alright, they would go get them first so I said, "Okay," and they did that. That probably delayed my getting off the hill a couple hours too.

Eventually they come up and carried me on a stretcher and carried me down to the base of the hill. Laid me across the hood of a Jeep and we went back to where the Amtracs, dropped us off the day before at the Han River. Transferred to the Amtracs, went across the river and got in field ambulances, went back to Kimpo, and was there about eight or ten hours and got aboard a plane and was flown to



Japan to a Naval hospital at Yakuska. Spent about five months in a hospital in Japan and reconditioning and went back to Korea to continue my tour until September of 1950—1951

Mik: What was the damage to your legs, once you found out what kind of--did you have therapy?

Lee: I was, of course, a dead patient for quite a while, couldn't walk. But the damage was minimum to my right leg where the bullet entered, it didn't have time to expand yet. So it entered by my shin, just made a little, blue spot is all that's left there now and came out about the size of a quarter. It didn't do a lot of damage to muscles or tendons but then it went through the calf in my right leg and by that time the bullet was expanding and did a lot of nerve and muscle damage to that leg. So it took a long time for that to heal. I have a little bit of restriction and movement in my left leg but no after effects from the right leg at all. Like I say, I spent another fifteen years in the Marine Corps after that, so it had to be okay.

Mik: When you got hit, and it started that whole period of the other guy coming over, and then the corpsman and so on, is that kind of a blur or is it just very sharp in your mind? Everything that happened?

Lee: Yeah, it's very clear, it's very clear in my mind. I think about it frequently. I think about the Marine that tried to help me when I was in the foxhole and was killed. I mentioned to you once before I've got that opportunity to visit his grave a couple of weeks ago and that's the first time in what, fifty-five years that I had any contact. I met his sister and was able to talk to her. So, I thought it would bring closure to a--an episode but it hasn't really. It just continues.

Mik: What was it like talking to his sister? How did she respond to that?

Lee: It was very unusual, this was his older sister. She was what, eighty-five or eighty-six years old. Slightly senile. Had been living alone, lost her husband many years ago. Had been living alone, this is a very poor part of Chattanooga. Her memory was not real sharp so it was very difficult talking to her. Now trying to get in contact, he had four other sisters and they were all younger than her. Trying now to get in contact with some them to get more information. And it was nice talking to her. I think she was comforted, a little bit, knowing what the circumstances were of his death. But I'm not sure that she fully comprehended what I was telling her.

Mik: Have you talked to the other--

Lee: Haven't found 'em yet. I've got a very good friend, historian, working on it for us. My daughter is very active in trying to find some more of his sisters.

Mik: So when the corpsman comes over and the syrette of morphine, did they just stick that in ya, is that how that works?

Lee: Well no, as a matter of fact, it's just a little thing that's flexible plastic with a needle on the end. Broke the needle off and stuck it in my forearm and squeezed it in and-- it's just a matter of a minute or two and the pain was eased. It was never gone, of course, but it was eased.

Mik: And while you were laying there, was there a battle going on with—

Lee: Oh yes, and--matter of fact, must have been the same rifleman--I felt like he was trying to get me again. I was laying down in this shallow hole with a pile of dirt and shale that I had scraped out the night before and the bullets were hitting that, that pile of shale. I would hear the rifle fire moving on down the hill a little bit then I'd take my helmet off and I'd pile that pile up again. Did that several times until finally, I don't know if he got discouraged and went somewhere else, or what happened, but it was a pretty hairy time.

Mik: Just really wishing you'd taken more time the night before, dig that a little—

Lee: I wish, yes.

Mik: What happened when they sent you back to Korea?

Lee: I was on guard duty in Japan at a--what the Marine Corps calls 'a casual company' at Camp Otsu. It's a place where wounded go to get reconditioned. Sometimes they're evacuated back to the States and sometimes go back into Korea. I happened to be on guard duty, they find something for you to do and I stood honor guard for a commanding general in the Pacific and he stood in front of me and he said, "How long you been in Japan, son?" And I says, "About five months, sir." And he says, "That's too long for a Marine to be anywhere, isn't it?" And I said, "Yes sir." Hot dog, I'm going home. The next day me, and almost all of that guard platoon were on a plane headed back to Korea. So they landed at Korea, at one of the airports on the East Coast, and went by truck up to our company right on the lines at that time.

Mik: And where was that?

Lee: Our company was at the Punch Bowl at that time, and actually it's when the first peace talks started. In the Spring of '51. And the Chinese were on the north side of this Punchbowl, big valley, and we happened to be on the south side. And we had combat patrols, and recon patrols out into the valley periodically while we were there, but no major confrontation. Until about the time I came back to the States in September, then the peace talks failed, and the war got hot again. And then most of the attacks took place and there were more casualties.

Mik: Okay, cause I knew there was some pretty nasty action in the Punchbowl--

Lee: Oh yes.

Mik: So that was after--

Lee: That was after I left.

Mik: And up to that time, it was just sort of a stand-off?

Lee: It was a stand-off.

Mik: Feeling each other out--

Lee: Yeah, and our Air Force bombers would come over so high you couldn't see 'em or hear 'em and you'd hear the bombs detonating on the other side of the valley. Keeping the enemy from moving about, I suppose. All of the sounds of war were there, but not the hazards that you get after an amphibious landing.

Mik: And were you back on machine gun then when they sent you--

Lee: Right back in the same machine gun squad I had left earlier. Yes.

Mik: When you were moving, after you landed in Inchon, the infantry's out in front and the machine guns are a little ways behind, aren't they, and then as you say, they come up.

Lee: Right.

Mik: And that's when there's an attack, that's what they go for.

Lee: That's right. Oh yeah because that's a lot of firepower and they do a lot of damage. Okay?

Mik: No, we're just gettin' started. What happened after you were shipped out of Korea? And then you say you continued in the Army?

Lee: In the Marine Corps.

Mik: I'm sorry, my gosh.

Lee: You can edit that out. I came back to the States, and came back by ship, to San Francisco. And then was transferred to Great Lakes, Illinois for guard duty at Marine barracks. That was in 1951. In 1952 I married my current wife, fifty-three years ago and we had two children there at Great Lakes. I finished my first four year enlistment and I reenlisted for six years. I was still there. I worked with the Marine Corps Reserves for a couple of years and then went to electronics school and learned basic electronics at the Navy School at Great Lakes. We were transferred to San Diego, and I went to fire control school on a 75 mm antiaircraft weapon. And then I

stayed there and taught a school on that system for about a year. Then I reenlisted again, I finished ten years there at that time. Reenlisted again and I got instructor staff duty in Pasadena. When we were there about two years and that system that I was trained on was phased out of the Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps adopted the Hawk Antiaircraft missile system for antiaircraft weapon. The nearest school for that was in Huntsville, Alabama; Army Ordinance and Guided Missile School. So I was transferred there to the CW RADAR School. **[End of Tape WCKOR107]**

Mik: *That sounded really interesting about what [start of new tape] happened when you were evacuated to Japan. Why don't you take us step by step through those [unintelligible]*

Lee: Okay, let's see--jump right in after I was evacuated from the lines and across the Han River to Kimpo Airport, the aircrafts that evacuated me from Korea landed at an army base in Japan, and the first hospital I went into was an Army hospital. What they did is they took a scissors and they cut all my clothes off and laid them aside and lifted me out onto a bed. I was still filthy from being evacuated. I was blood from my neck all the way to my waist because I was underneath a couple of stomach and chest wounds in the ambulance and they bled through onto me. And--a matter of fact the doctor at the airport first tried to treat the wounds to my chest and I had to stop him and say, "I'm okay there". But I went to the hospital in Japan--Japan Army Hospital--and they did mention amputation, which was kind of disheartening to me and of course, I had no idea how much damage was caused to both--either one of my legs. They cleaned me up and the next morning I was put back in an ambulance, and taken to an airport, and flown to Tokyo, and then taken to the Naval hospital at Yakuska--where I did most of my recovery time at the Naval hospital in Yakuska.

Mik: But you had that in your mind, that you were maybe going to lose that leg?

Lee: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, that, yeah, sure. I suppose from the time I was wounded until--you know you have pictures of--of other combat veterans, wounded veterans with one leg, with one arm or some kind of prostheses. Yes, it bothered me.

Mik: That must have been a great relief when you--

Lee: Certainly was, yes, yeah. First couple of steps I took with the crutches were very rewarding.

Mik: And you thought they were going to send you home, when you were still in the hospital?

Lee: I thought so, yeah. I saw casualties coming through that appeared to be less wounded and--you know would have recovered a lot quicker--than I would have, seen them come, and be transferred back to the ward where they're evacuated to the United States. So I was expecting that, but I was disappointed and I don't know

why, you know. No one has to explain to you why they make decisions that they make.

Mik: Now were these all Marines there, in the Naval hospital?

Lee: These are almost all Marines, yeah, yeah. Some Navy that were wounded during the Inchon landing--a few Navy there--but mostly Marines.

Mik: When you were air evacuated over to Japan do you remember, was there a nurse on the plane with you?

Lee: Yes there were. Yeah. There were two or three Air Force nurses caring for us on the plane.

Mik: We interviewed one, an Air Force nurse whose job it was to fly back and forth. [interview pause for audio problem]

Lee: You know, you're hearing something that I don't hear. I left with, in the machine gun emplacement, I left all my high frequency hearing so I don't hear bells and whistles and--you hear water running? I don't hear that.

Mik: We interviewed a couple of ball turret gunners from B-17s in WWII--they thought that for some reason those two .50 cal's right next, on either side of their head had something to do with the fact that they couldn't hear. [interview resumes]. And she said everybody was kind of subdued on those flights--why wouldn't they be?

Lee: Why wouldn't they be?

Mik: That's pretty traumatic to be wounded.

Lee: I didn't--I don't recall there being any whimpering or--we were very well cared for, you know? If someone was in extreme pain, why, they were right there to treat them for that pain right away. And I can't complain about that treatment at all.

Mik: You had some more stories about the Punchbowl while you were stationed there.

Lee: We were--just before the--peace talks broke down and the attack started again, we were pulled back off the lines. And--our regiment was placed on the Injin River. It had a long sandy beach down to the water off the mountains. And it was kind of a nice place to be. It was warm. This was in probably May or--May or June. So it's in the warmer part of the summer. Mountainous area; nice beach, nice swimming in the river. And an unusual thing happened to us. During the night they had a storm in the mountains. It was so far away we didn't even hear it. We didn't even know it was thundering and lightening, raining. But the water washed down to get to the river as quick as it could and it made a trench right through our bivouac [encampment] area. And it happened so fast that we--we didn't lose any people but

we lost weapons and tents and gear. And one of the things that happened is--a short distance away from where we were encamped a stream formed and it eroded the sand away and turned up some North Korean bodies that had been killed on the river, you know, by aircraft or whatever and they had dug shallow graves and buried them right there on the beach. They were exposed and they had been there for some time. And I still, when I still think of that very--very clearly whenever I smell dead animals on the road or decaying flesh anywhere. That's what--it was just awful. And they came in with--the Korean work parties came in with bags of lime and spread it all over to prevent disease from spreading, I suppose. And then dug some deeper trenches and reburied them. Horrible experience.

Mik: War is a strange thing isn't it?

Lee: Yeah it is.

Mik: The things you see--

Lee: Never know what to expect.

Mik: How did you end up in Vietnam?

Lee: Well as I mentioned earlier, I did go to Hawkeye Aircraft Missile School in Huntsville, just on one of the radar systems. And was transferred to twenty-nine Palms where the battalion was stationed, and was there about a year and a half and was promoted to gunnery sergeant, and was transferred back to Huntsville to go to the supervisor's school. It was a one year long school on each of the major systems of the missile--of the anti-aircraft missile battery. When I finished that school then I took a short leave and came back to Wisconsin to visit with family and then took my family again out to Twentynine Palms to join the 2nd Light Antiaircraft Missile Battalion at Twentynine Palms. And the day I reported in, I got secret orders to go to Vietnam. So my family had to go through the motions of moving into staff quarters while I was making meetings and making preparations to leave for combat again. Our batteries left almost immediately by LSTs and I was in battalion maintenance and we were there about a week and then we loaded everything up on trucks and waved goodbye to our families at the drill field at Twentynine Palms and headed for Long Beach.

Mik: What year was this?

Lee: That was in 1965. And went to Long Beach and boarded a landing ship dock and the landing ship dock--it had all of our equipment we were able to drive the equipment into the LST. And then when we got to Vietnam, then we lowered the ramp in the back of the LST and then smaller boats came up and tied up on the back and we'd drive our trucks off onto the boat and that's the way we went ashore. We went ashore at Chu Lai and set up our missile battalion at Chu Lai and we had batteries up and down the coast of the South China Sea for about forty or fifty miles.

While I was there, my job was to provide battalion level maintenance to each of those batteries. We never fired a missile in anger and we liked to think it was because our presence was too threatening to the enemy, so they never sent a plane our way. I was there until Christmas-time of 1965. Went on a R and R to Okinawa and--I was having problems with headaches from the sounds of artillery fire and other noises in that area, and I went to the hospital to have my hearing checked and they wouldn't let me go back to a combat area; they said, "Your hearing is not good enough." And I suspected that because a couple times we had alerts and we had enemy infiltrations and people had to come, and shake me awake. I couldn't hear the whistles or the signals to take cover. I came back to the states and was given opportunity to continue my military service on limited duty in a non-combat area and decided against that, for many reasons, and not the least was my family took my absence very hard and I thought it was time to move onto something else.

- Mik: I was going to ask you, when you were--before you were shipped over to Vietnam, when you were going from camp to camp on different assignments, would your family usually go with, or did you spend a lot of time apart.
- Lee: My family always went with me. Yes. And we come to enjoy moving very much. We always--we decided we were going to enjoy living wherever we were stationed, and we did. And made new friends and whether it was in the heat of the desert or the suffocating heat of Alabama, it didn't matter. We just enjoyed where we were and we're a very close family.
- Mik: Do they have Marine brats that are a counterpart to the Army brats? I've heard of people somewhat proudly proclaim, "I was an Army brat." If the Marines had the same term--
- Lee: Sure, sure. My two older children were born when I was stationed at Great Lakes and, of course, they went through the service with me and my youngest son was born after I got out of the Marine Corps and was in college. I think they enjoy, they enjoy being a Marine brat and he isn't, you know. And I think sometimes he wishes he was. He asks a lot of questions about that part of our lives.
- Mik: They seem to always be well adjusted people, and I think it's cause they learn how to go into a new situation and make new friends.
- Lee: Yeah. It doesn't affect them all the same but they learn to adapt.
- Mik: In the last interview we had--we were talking a lot about post traumatic stress disorder and going through a combat experience like that. Did you have any problems with that?
- Lee: You know, I think the person that has that is the last person to recognize that it's present. My family tells me I have some residual effects from the trauma of being in combat. And in thinking about it, I think I probably do, you know. Being wounded,

being exposed to the bloodshed, to the death, to the consequences of this is it--I'm not going to go any further, happening frequently. You know there has to be some disorder associated with that. And it comes in all different degrees, you know. And you see the homeless, alcoholics probably at one end of the continuum and the potential suicides and the others that are just bothered by it at the other end.

Mik: A lot of the people who--once they were done with their tour of duty and left the military, seemed to be a little bitter about the Korean War. I think they felt like they weren't appreciated or people weren't paying attention--and maybe you didn't experience that as much, staying in the military where obviously, everybody appreciates--

Lee: Yeah I did experience that too. You know I'm young enough--I'm old enough to remember the end of WWII and the return of the soldiers and sailors from WWII and the celebrations and the attention they got. Then, I remember coming back from Korea into--we were on a troop ship and Landed at Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay, and there was a Navy band there and there were all kinds of people shouting and waving and I found out that the band was there for the crew coming back off a sea duty, and the civilians that were there were the families of the crew members that were coming back to the States. So it wasn't a big welcome home--you know, there were about two--three thousand Marines and Navy corpsmen on that ship that I came back on. So that was kind of a disappointment. When I came back home, I came first into Oshkosh, by train, and my mother and dad met me at the train station and welcomed me with open arms, of course, and that was my welcome home from Korea. I'd like to say my welcome home from Korea was kind of apathetic. Was--how do I always say that? Was--I met apathy coming home from Korea. When I came home from Vietnam I experienced hostility. I mean real hostility. I was medevaced out of Vietnam, also to come back for an evaluation of my hearing. And when our plane landed in California, and we had some serious casualties on that plane too, you know, arms and legs missing, and some had even died on the way. I remember the colonel coming aboard the bus, the Air Force colonel coming aboard the bus, and explaining to us, first of all, welcoming us home and thanking us for our service, and explaining what the civilian reaction may be when you first hit the streets after being home, and that you should be aware of that, you should be conscious that there's a possibility of some hostility and how to conduct yourself during that. And although I never experienced any real strong hostility but a lot of indifference, you know--you know, more than half the people felt that that was an unnecessary war, so therefore it was unnecessary for you to be there, so whatever you did was unnecessary, ad infinitum.

Mik: As you look at the Korean War it almost seems to be divided into the two parts and you experienced both of them. The first part after the invasion of the North Koreans you were there for a job and there was a goal and that was very much like World War Two. And then when you came back it's that second part of the war when there's a line you're holding and there are talks going on. Did you sense that as you were experiencing it? That shift?



Lee: I guess I didn't, no. I guess I didn't think about that much at all.

Mik: You had a job to do.

Lee: I had a job to do.

Mik: And that's what you were focused on.

Lee: Mm hmm.

Mik: Anything else that we forgot?

Lee: Oh god, I forgot a lot of stuff, sure. So I started a new career when I got home, I went to college, got a bachelor's and master's degree in communications, and my last job was working for Kimberly-Clark as an internal consultant. I got to go back to Korea quite a few times, and that was rewarding. That was rewarding to see the contrast between North and South now. Of course, I've not traveled to the North, but there's plenty of evidence of what life is like in the North in the media. I don't know how they can tolerate it. And South Korea is so prosperous and so independent. And so grateful.

Mik: And did it make you feel like what we've done there, what the military had done there was--

Lee: Every Korean War veteran should go back to Korea. Everyone. We went on a military historical tour. They met us at the airport and from the time they met us at the airport until they took us back to catch the plane home we were in their care. And they took us to commemorations at cemeteries and at museums and they had banquets for us. They presented us with medals, they were just wonderful. Just wonderful.

Mik: Do you have any sense today that people have forgotten the Korean War?

Lee: Well, I think they're remembering it more and more. Mostly because it's been--it had the stigma of being a forgotten war, and it's more and more in the public eye. And also the Korean War veterans now, like myself, are moving up into positions of authority in veterans' organizations. And now, I just read recently that there are more Vietnam veterans living now than there are WWII veterans. That just passed that. That number. If the Vietnam veterans--

Mik: Vietnam or Korean?

Lee: Vietnam. Korea was a limited war, only three years. Had lot of casualties in those three years, but not as many individuals involved as veterans from Korea, as there are for Vietnam.

Mik: Well in fact, wasn't the number of casualties in those three years almost equal to the Vietnam--

Lee: Yes.

Mik: Which was what, eight years? ten?

Lee: Yeah, eight--ten.

Mik: Well, thank you.

Lee: Okay.

**[End of Interview]**