

Wisconsin Public Television  
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
STEWART E. SIZEMORE  
Machine Gunner, Army, Korean War  
2005

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Madison, Wisconsin

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**Sizemore, Stewart E.**, (1932- ). Oral History Interview, 2005.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 57 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

Stewart Sizemore, a Huntington, West Virginia native, discusses his Army service in the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during the Korean War. Sizemore touches on being raised in an orphanage, enlisting in 1948 because he had limited employment options, basic training at Fort Jackson (South Carolina), and embarking from Camp Stoneman (California) to Japan. Assigned to the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 34<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion as a machine gunner, he states he only had small platoon training, and he recalls the war breaking out while he was on maneuvers in Japan. Sizemore reflects on the regiment being under strength, both in personnel and equipment, but at the time thinking Korea would quickly be taken care of. He describes going to Korea aboard a Japanese fishing boat, being heavily outnumbered, and having difficulty dealing with enemy T-34 tanks. Sizemore details the battle at Taejon (South Korea): seeing the North Korean Army flank his division, being trapped by roadblocks, using a rocket launcher to knock out some tanks, falling back into the city, and escaping with two other men through the mountains behind enemy lines. He states that out of D Company's 206 men, he was one of only twelve men who made it to the rendezvous. Sizemore describes being at the Naktong Bulge, which was "just kill or be killed all the time," and seeing corpses from both sides get buried in mass trenches. He analyzes the high numbers of replacements, the piecemeal character of his regiment, and their role in delaying rather than stopping the North Korean Army. He reflects on becoming hardened against death and seeing men in his unit just give up. While retaking Taejon, he recalls seeing many American dead who had been executed with their hands tied behind their backs, being attacked by a sixty-year-old woman with a machine gun, and becoming desensitized to killing. Sizemore tells of finding a safe on the side of the road and blowing it open to find worthless North Korean money inside. While pushing further into North Korea, he discusses watching Chinese troops cross the Yalu River, being overwhelmed by sheer numbers, and falling back. He states he had some respect for the Chinese, but none for North Koreans. He relates being wounded by a concussion grenade, getting knocked unconscious with a rifle butt, and making his way back to American lines. After three weeks in a MASH unit, he talks about being spooked by the frequency of amputations and going AWOL to return to his unit. Sizemore speaks of the intense cold, losing weight from having dysentery, and sleeping with all his gear on so he wouldn't get caught unprepared to fight. He emphasizes the role fear has in survival and states he came to envy the dead for being at rest. Sizemore recalls the noise the North Koreans made when attacking, the propaganda leaflets they dropped, and listening to Seoul City Sue's propagandist radio show. He addresses the difficulty of carrying supplies up and down the mountains and often running low on ammunition, food, and bedding. He reveals his water-cooled machine gun would freeze and he'd thaw it by urinating into the tank. He comments that the attacking Chinese troops seemed drugged and would keep attacking even after being severely wounded. Sizemore contrasts the differences he saw during the Korean War and during another tour in Korea from 1963-1964. He talks about his return to the States, joining the Marine

Corps for six years, and switching back to the Army. He reflects on the positive aspects of having teenagers fight in wars, emphasizes the camaraderie that developed in battle, and comments that combat in the first months of the Korean War was very different from the bunker and defensive tactics that came later. Sizemore mentions keeping in touch with a comrade whom he'd thought was dead for forty-five years.

### **Biographical Sketch:**

Sizemore (b.1932) served in the armed forces for twenty years and retired at the rank of sergeant 1<sup>st</sup> class. He enlisted in the Army in 1948 and, during the Korean War, served with the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 34<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and the 24<sup>th</sup> Division, 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. From 1952 to 1958, Sizemore served in the Marine Corps, and then he served in the Army until his retirement in 1968. From 1963-1964, he served in the Korean DMZ as a radar site commander in the 304<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion, B Company. He worked at Trent Tube, a stainless steel tubing manufacturer in East Troy, Wisconsin, for twenty-five years, married, and had four children. He currently resides in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

### **Citation Note:**

Cite as: Stewart Sizemore, Interview, conducted May 20, 2005 at Lake Geneva, 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 WCKOR114 and WCKOR115.

### **Related Materials Note:**

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

Interviewed by Mik Derks, May 20, 2005.

Transcribed by Wisconsin Public Television staff, n.d.

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

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

**Transcribed Interview:**

Mik: Why don't you give us a little background on how you got into the military?

Stewart: Well, when I got out of high school I had two options. I was born and raised in West Virginia. So I had the option of either digging coal or running moonshine. So I elected to go into the service at that time, because they had more options. There were no jobs. All the veterans came back from the Second World War so, consequently the jobs were very far and few. So I went into the Army. Went into--they sent me to Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Mik: When was that?

Stewart: 1948. I came out of Fort Jackson, I went to Seattle, Washington--the port of embarkation there, Camp Stoneman. Went over to Japan on the General H. B. Freeman. Docked in Yokohama. Went to Camp Zama. Camp Zama--I was sent to Kokura, which was a 24th Infantry Division Headquarters. And from there I was sent to Sasebo, Japan which was the home of the 34th Infantry Regiment.

Mik: And what were you doing?

Stewart: I started out as a rifleman and ended up being a machine gunner, light machine gunner. In L Company, 34th.

Mik: And of course at that point it was all just training.

Stewart: Just training, but you know it wasn't--well let's put it this way. The regiments--all of our regiments were under strength to begin with. We were supposed to have had three battalions, we only had two. Both of them were under strength. And the companies were just filling up at that time, you know, with replacements cause the guys in the Second World War, like I say, were going home. So all we did, basically, was small platoon training, company level training prior to going on to Anabru, which was our maneuver area. And in January of '49, they opened up our 1st Battalion. I was in 3rd Battalion at the time, that's all they had. But then they opened the 1st Battalion. So, at that time I was sent to D Company, 1st Battalion, 34<sup>th</sup>, as a machine gunner. We got the rest of our replacements, a lot of 'em came from the Cav, 1st Cavalry Division in Tokyo. They disbanded or they broke up one of the troops, which was the 12th. So we got a lot of those replacements. And we got a lot of--from the 7th Infantry Division down there, to fill in. But when we went to Korea, well let's stop and go back. We were on maneuvers when the Korean War broke out--at Anabru. All during this period in time, all we'd been doing is just squad--platoon training. Which wasn't that intense, to be really qualified to go into combat. Our weapons were Second World War weapons. A lot of 'em were not very good. A lot of the barrels were worn out. Our weapons, our heavy weapons, we weren't up to P,O & E on the weapons which--P,O & E means the amount of weapons we were supposed to have. We didn't have 'em all. So we were on

maneuvers when the Korean War broke out, we were on maneuvers, we came back to Sasebo, packed up everything and was on our way to Korea.

Mik: Was it a shock?

Stewart: Well, you know, at the time we were packing up our footlockers in the day room. And everybody said, "Well, we'll be back." The life in Japan was a life of luxury, basically. That's why I say, we had very little training. It wasn't very intense. And all we were doing, basically, was just there. But when the war broke out, we were saying, "Well, wait'll they see the Americans and we'll be back in Japan in three days," and continue what we were doing. And unfortunately that wasn't true. Never happened. So we went into Japan--went into Korea. We went over on a Japanese fishing boat, from Sasebo, which is about forty miles from Korea.

Mik: Really? Japanese fishing--[videographer says something]

Stewart: Yeah, Japanese fishing boat. See, they were short of everything. So, we hit Pusan and we went off Pusan and boarded a train for a little place called Osan. In the meantime our sister regiment, the 24th had sent over Task Force Smith. They were ahead of us for about three days. Or they met the North Koreans up in Suan. And they didn't last very long because we had no armor and the T-34s, probably one of the finest tanks ever made, just ran right through 'em. Well, they did the same to us. It was pouring down, the rain, we dug our positions and the holes were full of water. We didn't stay there long because the North Koreans just ran us out of it. They just--they'd go around the flanks, you know what I mean? We were fighting--you got one battalion probably--our strength at that time was probably about sixteen, seventeen hundred men. And you're not gonna stop two North Korean divisions--roughly, 20,000--30,000 men. So what they do, they just engulf you to the right and to the left. They just walk around you, see? We could see 'em walking around us. But we weren't there--we found out after that battle, we weren't there to win the war, we were there to try to delay. They didn't expect us to stop 'em. Cause we had nothing to stop the T-34 with. We had the ol' 2.36 rocket launcher, which was totally worthless. That's the one they had in the Second World War. It just bounced off them T-34s. They just kept coming. We just kept delaying back. Falling back and delaying. And all we'd do, we'd fight and walk, fight, and walk. They came up our main line of resistance and we had a battle then we'd fall back again. Because that was the only option, until we hit Taejon. And Taejon was our downfall. We were out--our unit was out on the airfield at Taejon, and I can remember early morning and I remember looking around, just getting light and I see North Koreans walking on both sides. You could see 'em out there in the rice paddies walking around. And they got the word to fall back. Well unbeknownst to us, the North Koreans had thrown up a roadblock on the other side of Taejon. So our vehicles did not get out. So we were fighting there and at the crossroad they'd had T-34, well at that time the airplane came over and dropped two 3.5 rocket launchers. Well one of 'em, the sight broke on the drop. The other one was good. So, we knocked out three North Korean tanks there at that roadblock. They come up and when they came up, we hit one of

'em and rice paddies being on each side, they couldn't get around us. So we just knocked out the other two at leisure, you know. And killed the crew, of course. And then I fell back, my other guy, he left. But I fell back in the city of Taejon itself and it was a mess. There was MPs on the bridges and laying out of their Jeeps, they were dead, you know. I went into division clearing, that's where you took the wounded people, you know, and they were shot and killed and evidently the North Koreans had got in there with T-34s before we even got into the city. We fought along in there and then I come up against our convoy, we had a couple of trucks that are in this convoy, the 34th, 1st Battalion there and one of my guys, buddies there, I ask him, I said, "Well, what are you guys waiting on? We gotta get outta here." And they said, "Well, we can't leave this vehicle. We've gotta get out of here but their engineers are gonna blow that roadblock up there." Well, needless to say, the engineers didn't blow that roadblock. So then it was getting dark. So myself and two other guys started up into the mountains. We walked, oh, probably til midnight. We started up there around six o'clock in the evening. Bout midnight we got up in the, high up in the mountains and you could see down below Taejon, just burning. Just on fire--flames all over the place. Well, we walked for three days behind the enemy lines. And we came out into an apple orchard and that's where our regiment, what was left of it, was forming up. And at the time I can remember our company had twelve men left--out of 206. Course a few straggled in later, you know. I can remember the apple orchard because the South Koreans, on their apples, they wrap each apple in paper. On the tree. It was newspapers on the--wrapped around these apples on the tree. And that's why I remember that so clearly. Then they--after-- [videographer & interviewer speak to each other] Yeah.

After we left the apple orchard, we pulled back with what we had left. They said, "You're gonna go in reserve so we can re-supply everyone." But needless to say, that didn't work because the North Koreans were still crawling down the river. So we ended up on the Naktong--Naktong Bulge. That was a mess down there again. Here they got us in the Bulge, they're trying to shove us off into the ocean. That, basically, was the last stand for us. We either died or lived. We were there from--my biggest thing that I remember there was, the sun was 130 degrees in the shade sometimes. And just merciful. And I was down to ninety pounds because I had dysentery. I can remember these gooks, I call 'em gooks, they were North Koreans, they were killed. They lay out there all day and it turned black and they'd blow up the size of a fifty-five gallon drum. Just bloat. Stink. That smell will be with you the rest of your life. And GIs after a while, you couldn't tell a GI from a North Korean. What they did was they dug massive trenches with bulldozers. They just put these bodies in there and they covered 'em up. I think that was more or less to keep the diseases down, you know. But that's what I remember mainly about that because the fighting so intense down there, and bloody, that you just, just kill or be killed all the time you were there. And we were down there until we started north again, back up to Taejon.

Mik: Were there reinforcements coming in?

Stewart: There were replacements coming in and I can remember one place on the Naktong there were--they sent me back to bring up some replacements. We usually brought our replacements up at night. And if they lived to see the next morning they were normally classified as veterans. And I can remember when I went back to pick up three and the North Koreans had T-34s dug in on the Naktong there and they were shelling us back there in the CP [command post] and one of the replacements got so rattled he beat his head against a cement wall till there was nothing but a bloody pulp. And needless to say, he never did get there because he was not fit to go there. But they didn't last very long, those casualties were pretty high.

Mik: Well you weren't much more experienced. I mean you were just thrown into that thing.

Stewart: Well, you know, we were thrown in but--see that's the thing--you look back on it all and that was one of the problems we had with going over there. We were thrown in piecemeal. Like I say, each regiment was supposed to have three battalions, full strength. Our whole division, three regiments, only had two battalions each. We didn't have the right amount of artillery pieces. We had no armor. You don't fight T-34 tanks with rifles and grenades. But had they been able to throw more in, like instead of--I can understand now why they threw us in the way they did piecemeal like that, because you try to get anybody and everybody you could get there to try to slow 'em down. You knew you couldn't stop 'em, but to try and delay it until you got more forces there, see. This is what we were doing. We were buying time with blood, basically, is what it amounted to.

Mik: And you got experience real quickly.

Stewart: Real quick. You get a good lesson in a hurry. But it--I never thought of myself as a--anything other than anybody else there. You lived the same way, you know. You live like a rat. In the foxhole, course that was your best home. But we were all treated the same. You see a guy, he gets killed or he gets hit, and after a while when replacements start coming in, you never wanna know who they are. Of course, you don't want to make any friends, you know what I mean. The people you got, you went over with. You're stuck with them. But after that, you don't have to make friends. Cause it's too hard. But you know--you--I think you become hardened, you become hardened to deaths when you see it so often. And after a while it doesn't bother you any more. Like people ask me, you know, death--death doesn't bother me at all. I know we all gotta go sometime it's just a matter of time and a place. I don't know, I felt that way ever since I came out of the war. I don't know if it's wrong or right or whatever, you know, I'm not overly religious or anything like that, but that's just the way I feel.

Mik: Because you saw so much of it?

Stewart: I seen so much of it that it's just a natural thing. That's why when I came back, I went in front of a board of psychiatrists and they told me that you kill with no

remorse whatsoever. But you're conditioned for it. It's either you or him. A lot of people might not understand that, but that's the way it has to be. Either he's gonna walk away or you're gonna walk away. Or crawl away or whatever, you know.

Mik: And what's the alternative if you have to--

Stewart: Well, you know, I'll tell ya something, Mik, what I saw in our unit. When we were moving back from these positions, more than one guy would give up and say, "I can't go any further." And just give up and sit down on the side of the road. And there's no way you can stop and help this guy. And you know he's gonna die. But they just literally give up. But you have to wonder--and then you're amazed at how much punishment the human body can actually take. Of course, you're doing this day, after day, after day, you know what I mean? You're beat every way possible. That's why so many of these people just gave up and--especially your heavier, overweight people. They just couldn't go. Korea's all mountains, you know, you spend half a day climbing a mountain. And they'd just sit down and say, "I give up." I saw more 'n one guy do this. Then you got so many guys in my company, to this day I don't know what happened to. You know, we still have 8,000 men missing over there. And the bulk of 'em were from the first, I'd say the first eight--nine months of the war. Because the odds--see, the North Koreans didn't like to take prisoners and they hated our division with a passion. So, they'd just kill 'em. A good example of that was when we left the Naktong, headed north, we had the honor of retaking Taejon, that's where our unit was wiped out on the way down. And we found our guys, their hands tied behind their back with piano wire. Shot through the head, just thrown in the ditches on the side of the road. So, they're very callous, they--these people--they had no value of life whatsoever. They fight for the person who will give them the biggest bowl of rice. Until a person understands that, you know, you're in a world of hurt. They could care less about you. And they have no more qualms about blowing your head off with your hands tied behind you, than they will in front of you. We found many, many of 'em, still laying in their vehicles with their hands tied behind their backs. Shot through the back of the head. So that hardens you to--as far as--well, we didn't take many prisoners either. But that hardens you to this. You can't deal with these people. The only thing they understand is violence. They would take sixty-year-old women, I can remember moving back, sixty-year-old women, they wear this stuff on their head, these bundles that they carry on their heads, I don't know if you ever saw 'em. They wear white. One day we were getting' the heck knocked out of us. Shelled all over, couldn't figure out what was happening. Where's all this artillery coming from? Well, this woman had a radio in her--on top of her head. She was broadcasting our position to the North Koreans. See--sixty years old. Another time we're moving down the road and a lot of their places were on the side of the road, right off to the road there. And they, they were just a wooden porch like. And we were walking down the road--another time an old woman dropped behind a Russian machine gun. Maxima machine gun. Old woman. Never expect it. But see, that's why you couldn't really trust anybody over there. These people, I don't care, they just have no value of life. They can take yours, that's just one more American they don't have to worry



about, see. And this Mr. Nice Guy stuff doesn't get it. Because they're very treacherous--very treacherous people. But like I say, what we saw in Taejon, what we saw all the way back, but more so, we saw harder in Taejon. That's where we saw the bulk of our people laying there.

Mik: When you say you had the honor of retaking Taejon, now was that after Inchon?

Stewart: Yeah.

Mik: [unintelligible] pincer movement?

Stewart: Right, the pincer movement, we got it. Otherwise, we'd probably still been there. But that Taejon, never forget Taejon. Then we moved up, of course fighting our way, we were riding tanks. Then, we went into Pyongyang and I can remember--one of the funny things about the war was me and a buddy of mine--[unintelligible] Pyongyang, North Korean capitol, we were moving up on the side of the road. These barely draw mud, most of 'em. And what was standing on the side of the road was a big safe. Humongous old safe standing on the side of the road. And James says, "I think we outta open that baby. Might be some money in there." So, we took a 3.5 rocket launcher and blew the door off of it. There was North Korean money flying all over, you know. All of it in there wasn't worth ten cents. Cause it was all junk. But just one of the funny things that--quirks--you end up in war, you know. A little further up the road, the North Koreans were throwing apples at us. I guess they didn't care for us too much.

Mik: They weren't afraid to do that?

Stewart: No, because, you know, I don't care how the Americans react in any given situation. I think that people all over the world know that basically we are good people. And we don't kill people just to be killing 'em like they did, the North Koreans. North Koreans are acting up again, I'll tell ya something, these people are very vicious and treacherous. No way would I ever trust these people. When we went into North Vietnam, you could see the difference. See, South Korea is more agricultural. That's where your rice and your agriculture. North Korea is more your machinery works, in North Korea. We went all the way up to Sinanju. And that's when the Chinese crossed with their million men. And you know what happened there.

Mik: So you were involved with that? All of a sudden hordes of people were--

Stewart: One million people. They went through us like pouring water through a boot. Not gonna stop that. I can remember watching the Chinese cross the Yalu River. Columns of eights wearing tennis shoes, and it's below zero. That's another thing, you know. So that when they hit us, they just went right through us. Even with our weapons--later on in the war we were better but when the first of the war, they weren't that good. I always thought that the North Koreans had some better weapons than we had. But when the Chinese came in, a lot of them didn't even have weapons.

They attacked in waves. The first wave would have weapons. The second wave would have maybe a few weapons, then the third wave would come in, they'd pick up the weapons of the first and second waves dropped, see. Fourth wave would come in, they may have just hand grenades. Some of 'em even had rocks. But the Chinese were not as vicious as the North Koreans are. I didn't think anyway. I mean, they seemed to be more prone to take prisoners or be taken prisoner than the North Korean Army. They didn't like anything about America or anybody else.

Mik: What happened with you when you were just totally overrun like that?

Stewart: Well, I got hit then. I got wounded and they just ran right through me. I came to-- what happened? They threw a concussion grenade in the machine gun emplacement--blew me and my buddy out of it. We were bleeding from the ears and the nose and the eyes from the concussion. And then I got hit in the face with a Chinese rifle butt. They left us, they just went right on, they didn't even stop. So we came to, probably mighta' been a couple hours. But had it not been as cold as it was, and the blood congealed, I probably wouldn't be here today. And we made it back to our lines, went back to our lines and down to our own units. But they were all on the move back. Because that amount of men, manpower, you don't stop it. You have nothing to stop it with. Their casualties had to be horrendous. But it's a solid wall. You kill one and there's ten more coming, kill ten there's a hundred coming. There's no end to 'em. What did Confucius say, "March eight abreast the rest of your life and you'll never see the end of 'em?" This is what you're up against, see. I had a lot more respect for the Chinese than I did the North Koreans. I had no respect for the North Koreans.

Mik: What kind of casualties did you take?

Stewart: Horrendous casualties. Bad casualties. Where we took horrendous casualties down in Taejon too. And we took horrendous casualties up there also. You take a company of--should run about 200 men, most of the time it never had anywhere near 200 men. Some of your platoons run around, should be twenty-eight--thirty--thirty-two men or something. You'd be lucky if you had ten--twelve. Sometimes you couldn't even muster a good squad; which was nine men. You took casualties. Our medical service was good. Only thing is, if they had the helicopters like they had in Vietnam and that, our casualty rate would have been a lot lower. But you're on the mountains. Everything we had had to be carried up or down. Rations, ammunition, that all had to be carried up or down.

Mik: After you were wounded and you got back--

Stewart: I went to the M\*A\*S\*H Unit. Yeah, was there for about three weeks. Then went AWOL and went back to my unit.

Mik: You went AWOL from the M\*A\*S\*H to get back to your unit?

Stewart: Yeah, I remember laying in a bombed out church and there was no roof on it. And I kept seeing this guy, I guess I was in a daze. Kept seeing this guy come out and he had a basket. Carry his basket, and I got to wondering what this guy carrying in that basket? He was carrying body parts that they were amputating. Amputations was going on in the operating room. Legs, arms and whatever. I said, "I gotta get outta here." So I got up, there was a pile of weapons in the courtyard. Any weapon you wanted to get so I got--I found my weapon, headed back to the front.

Mik: Were you feeling bad?

Stewart: Well, my eyes were swelled up I couldn't see. My jaw, everything was abscessed in my mouth and that. Anything was better 'n laying' there and maybe have 'em cut my arm off or somethin' by mistake. I was up there, I think two days, and the MPs came up and got me. And took me back and they gave me penicillin to bring down the swelling cause then they had to cut all that stuff out.

Mik: And that was from the concussion or from the rifle butt.

Stewart: Rifle butts and concussion. Jaw cut from the teeth.

Mik: And then did you eventually get back?

Stewart: Oh yeah. I went back to my unit, yeah. War is hell. I felt that that was where I had to be because I was single at the time. I could say, being raised the way I was, I didn't really care one way or the other. Because after a while you see all these dead people, you might not believe it, but after a while you begin to envy these people. They got eternal rest and you're gonna keep right on going until you get it. And you know the odds are gonna catch up with you.

Mik: When you say raised the way you were, tell us about that.

Stewart: Well, I was raised in an orphanage. We were put out on a farm there with a--had an old woman, old man running it. And all we did was work. I had four brothers and a sister on the farm, and all we did was work ten--twelve--fourteen hours a day. We walked--our nearest school was seven miles away, we walked back and forth to school. And we just--all we did was work. We had no--we were involved in nothing else but work and--we had to make at least a B average in school. Course, one room school, you got eight grades in one room. And you go to high school and you got two grades, see. I mean two rooms with four grades. It was one of them old log cabin schools. But you--we basically had the three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic, and that's all we had. But you learned it real well. You knew when you come out of school. Better 'n a lot of these kids coming out of these schools today, I can tell you. We had none of the extracurricular activities that they have [unintelligible]. We had outdoor toilets and everything else, you know. What do you have in one room? Coal stove sitting in the middle of it.

Mik: Older kids and younger kids, I bet you learned a lot from that, didn't you?

Stewart: Yeah.

Mik: How long were you in Korea?

Stewart: I was in Korea about thirteen months the first time.

Mik: First time?

Stewart: Yeah, the second time I was there, a year.

Mik: What was the second time?

Stewart: The second time I was there, was after the war. Up on the DMZ--more North Koreans. Hated 'em--still don't like 'em. **[End of Tape WCKOR114]**

Mik: That's one of the things I wanted to ask you about, was the cold that first year.

Stewart: Thirty below zero.

Mik: Tell me about the cold.

Stewart: Thirty below zero. You're laying out in that stuff twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. You can't even dig a hole in the ground. We were burning everything in sight--that was wood--that would burn. You couldn't blast a hole in the ground. That's how cold it was. And the GIs, you got wound--like I say, that's the bad part. Up on those mountains, you'd freeze in a heartbeat. See, most of our carrying parties, we had carrying parties. Everything we used in Korea had to be carried up these mountains. And they were all carried up mainly by some South Koreans. What we called carrying parties. And they'd also bring the wounded back. A lot of times we got in firefights, they wouldn't even come up there. In the morning when you jump off on the assault, the attack, you'd leave your bedroll and everything there. Carrying party is supposed to bring that up to your next position at night. Many, many times they never got up there with that. You're laying out there with what you got on.

Mik: How do you get through the night like that?

Stewart: Well, I think a lot of it's fear. I think fear does a lot for a person. I think fear keeps people on their toes. I also think fear keeps people alive. But like I say, you become so hardened to it because after you see what they did to your people. You're bound and determined that you're gonna stay awake so they don't do the same to you. Cause they have no qualms about--more than one of our people were bayoneted right in their sleeping bags. They had these quilted sleeping bags, more than one was bayoneted in their bags. I'll tell ya one thing, I saw people take their boots off and

crawl into their sleeping bags. I never took my boots off over there. Never. I went right into that bag mud, snow, whatever. Boots and all. And everything I had on went into that bag with me.

Mik: Is that so you were ready to come out?

Stewart: Absolutely. After you see a few of these, like I say, people that were caught in their bags. See, the hardest thing is, when you're on outpost, you're the eyes and ears of that whole platoon, or that whole squad, or that whole company. And their lives depend on you. And if you fall asleep, and these people get killed, course you're gonna get killed right along with 'em, but that's on you, see what I mean. So that's why I say fear comes into play. You don't want to let your buddy down because he's your right hand man. He's your left hand man. He's there with you all the time. He depends on you, you depend on him. That's what makes a team. That's how you live. You keep each other alive. Normally, at night you went on a, what we call, fifty percent watch. But then when the gooks would start to attack, I call 'em gooks, they're North Korean, I call 'em gooks, they would come in full alert. But I think one of the eeriest things is the way they would attack. Blowing bugles, drums and cymbals would drive you batty. But that was a psychological thing I'm sure. Then they had their psychological units over there too, you know, dropping us leaflets, surrender leaflets. Come over to us and we got good looking women for you and all this stuff. Junk. You don't believe none of this stuff. We used to listen to it and Seoul City Sue, we used to listen to her once in a while. She was like Tokyo Rose. Sometimes we'd get better information from her than we would from our own people. Cause there's a lot of chaos over there. Lot of times the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing. Course you have that in any war.

Mik: Did you run low on ammunition?

Stewart: Oh, more than once, yeah. More than once. That's when you use bayonet or club, rifle for a club. Rocks or whatever. Whatever you get your hands on. You had to. It's just fit for survival. You or him again, gets right down to that, you or him. Either you beat him up or kill him or he's gonna do the same to you. He's gonna try and do the same to you. But like I say, it goes right back to Korea, fighting in mountains because of that fact. Everything we had had to be carried up. And ammunition is very heavy. If we had a choice, we'd take our ammunition before the rations. You go a lot of times, without meals, that was knowledge. If they got you food, that's fine, if they didn't you learn to get away with that, get around it. We used to find other things to eat. In Naktong we used to raid watermelon patches and green corn. Eat anything and everything you can eat. Eat their rations. Take their rice away from 'em and eat that. Shoot at the cow, shoot at deer. Anything you could find.

Mik: I'm trying to picture thirty below, not really properly dressed--

Stewart: Oh no, we didn't have any clothes.

Mik: Not even on outpost.

Stewart: To me, this is strictly my outlook on the war, the war actually, the offensive war only lasted, I think, about nine months. Because after that, we went into bunkers, started going into bunkers, defensive positions--in '51. Because we never got any further, maybe a few hundred yards one way or the other, but I mean we didn't get up north or anything again. So I think the first people there, really fought the first nine months, I think, we were the first offensive war. Cause we went all the way up to the Yalu River. Chosin Reservoir and Ham Nung and all the way back.

Mik: I was gonna ask you, after the Chinese came in and you were overrun, was it again just fighting your way back down?

Stewart: Yeah, same thing we did the first time. Except there was more of us but there was more of them. Where they had--we first went over--I think we went into battle we were fighting three North Korean divisions. Course their divisions were smaller than ours. I think their divisions ran about ten--twelve thousand men. Ours ran about eighteen to twenty. Now when we went over, ours didn't have that many because we were short one battalion each--in each regiment. Cause you're looking at probably 3,000 men to a regiment, you're probably looking twelve--fourteen thousand, our division we went over. Theirs ran about ten--twelve thousand.

Mik: And they had three of 'em?

Stewart: When we were fighting em, well, they had more, but we were fighting three of 'em. So you can see why they would be--and at that period in time, you have to realize that we had that many men, maybe ten--twelve--but they were in Japan. We only had fifteen--sixteen hundred of us there--see? Course, they didn't need three divisions but they had--at that time they had two on line. Now, they just walk around us. There was nothing to that. We knew that. We weren't there to stop 'em, or win the war, we were there to delay it. We knew we couldn't--

Mik: And then up north you had more people 'cause the Chinese were in it.

Stewart: We had more--well, I can remember that had--they told--they said they was taking one unit back, I think he said, the 1st Cav for a victory parade in Tokyo. Well, for all intents and purposes, the war was over. We'd beat the North Koreans. The war was won. Cause we were sitting on the Yalu. But they--this unit was getting--in fact they were loading what armor we had, our tank battalions, up on flatcars to take 'em back south. Then the Chinese crossed with their million men. I think nine field armies they crossed with. So we, our division--see there again, you get into division, most of the time, a division doesn't have all three regiments on line. If they got three full--normally not on line. You normally have one in reserve, so consequently, you're looking at two regiments on line, see. And until you get hit, or they need 'em for a blocking position, or something like that. So then they--the Chinese, when they crossed with their million men they just--just Chinese, Chinese, Chinese.

Mik: Tell me about that fight back down.

Stewart: Well it's the same way, you just fightin' Chinese, they get around you, you fight 'em again, they get around you, and you just keep falling back. Then they'd set up an ambush. They ambushed the 2nd Division up there at Chippanee. Just slaughtered those people. They got 'em in a valley and got around 'em. That's how many there were of 'em. They just--mass. We lost a lot of men there, coming back from the Chinese. And it being so cold and that--the snow hampers your movements also, see. Your units are disorganized, you don't know where company is, you don't know where your platoon is, your squad is, you don't even know if you have one. You end up joining the first unit that you encounter, friendly unit. Til you get back and get some stabilization of the line. Cause the line sure isn't stable, it's flexible. It's moving. Doing the same thing, you're fighting a retrograde movement. You're fighting, you're falling back, you're fighting, you're falling back until you find a defensive position, a line that you can possibly hold, which at that time was on the other side of the Han River. That's where we went into a defensive position. That's where we finally stopped 'em, the Chinese. Then we went back--April we went into the attack again, that's when they took Seoul again.

Mik: Was it warm by April?

Stewart: I haven't got warm since I got outta there. It's probably me, but I just--that cold is so imbedded in my mind that that's all I see, snow and cold. Bleak, snow and cold. There's not a tree around. If there was a house around, we'd probably already burn it for wood. We would stop on the side of the road and pour gasoline in a steel helmet and light a fire to it--keep warm. But then they started getting warmer clothes over there too. Parkas and stuff like that. But initially we didn't have that, we had a summer-type sleeping bag. And they'd get cold just that fast.

Mik: Those sleeping bags, they--

Stewart: The summer type was a blanket with a zipper around it, that's all the summer type was. Then they come out with the down filled, that was a good--they kept warm.

Mik: How about your machine gun, did the cold affect it?

Stewart: Yes. I could tell you a story about the machine gun. Cause I was running a 17A-1 water cooled job. The water'd freeze. So what you have to do is try to hold your urine until the gooks started hitting ya. Then you would pee into the water jacket or the water can. The steam would rise and it would stink, but it would fire. Or they'd freeze right up. That's the way it was. Like I say, survival. You know what I mean?

Mik: What do you do when you ran out of machine gun ammunition?

Stewart: Pick it up and throw it at 'em. Thirty-two pounds. Thirty-two for the gun and thirty-two for the tripod. Destroy it. Because there's no way of getting it--

Mik: Did ya have a rifle nearby?

Stewart: Oh yeah. Rifle. BAR. My favorite weapon. Best weapon ever made as far as I'm concerned. Browning Automatic Rifle.

Mik: [unintelligible]

Stewart: Well, people make choices. And I like to have something--well I had a K-38 Combat Masterpiece also, a pistol I carried. Cause I couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with a .45. .45 was my issue weapon, sidearm. You couldn't hit nothing, I couldn't hit nothing with it. But you have a shelf underneath the traverse and search mechanism in the machine gun. And that's where you' lay your grenades and then most guys laid their .45 there cause when they come down in your hole then you could blast 'em, you know. But, you know, the Chinese we ran into a lot of 'em were--seemed to be under the influence of drugs. And you could cut these people half in two and they'd still keep coming. So you know they were under drugs. In fact, the people that hit us were Mongolians. Big six--seven foot Mongolians. They were all drugged up. They just--you cut 'em half in two with machine gun and they'd still keep moving. Makes you stop and think, what's at stake to stop these people, you know. You look back now--it wasn't funny then, but you know, you look back now and it's--I think a lot about it. In fact, I think about it all the time. What happened? How come I made it through, where a lot of the other guys didn't. Just one of these things that I guess, the Good Lord, when he wants you he's gonna take you. But I don't think I ever really feared death. I think doctors say that after a while you envied the person that was dead because he had eternal rest and what do you got? Plotting along in the mud and the crap and the cold. You know eventually the odds are gonna catch up with you, you're gonna get it. It's a matter of when, where. Is it gonna maim you for life, or gonna kill you, or whatever.

Mik: What is it they say; you become a good soldier when you realize you're already dead.

Stewart: Conditioned. What they call conditioning. Yeah, you're conditioned. I think it goes with anything. You're conditioned to actually anything after a while. That's one of the things they use in brainwashing technique, they condition you to--when we first went over, we weren't conditioned for any of that. We weren't properly trained, we didn't have the proper equipment. We were glory boys in Japan having a good time. Got on pass.

Mik: I don't think I've run into anyone else who was in the early part of the war and then back on the DMZ after the war.

Stewart: Yeah.



- Mik: What a unique perspective you must have had.
- Stewart: Well, you could see the difference in the Koreas. When I--I saw Taejon and these places that were mud huts, mud roads, cow trails through 'em, with superhighways when I was over on the DMZ. Superhighways for crying out loud. I was amazed--metropolis. Their cities--the only city they had of any consequence when I was there in '50 was Seoul. And it was totally devastated. Taejon was nothing but a bunch of mud huts and dirt roads, and things like this. They had maybe one paved road through it, that I saw. The rest of it was all rice paddies. Now it's a metropolis. You know, it's amazing how far these people came.
- Mik: Didn't you say you were also there in '54? You were back on the line? Or did I misunderstand you?
- Stewart: '64, in '64. No, the war was over in '54, war was over '53.
- Mik: When did you leave?
- Stewart: I left there in '51 and then I left there in '60--no I was there in '63, I left there in '64 then. Second time.
- Mik: In '51 when you left, where did you go?
- Stewart: I went to--I left and I came back to the States, was sent to Fort Belvoir, they shipped me to Germany. I came back from Germany, got out of the Army, went into the Marine Corps.
- Mik: What prompted that?
- Stewart: Well, we fought with the Marines on the Naktong. And I liked their style of fighting. I spent six years in the Corps. Then they had some schools I wanted to go to, and the Marine Corps didn't offer it, so I got out of the Marine Corps and back into the Army.
- Mik: I didn't know they allowed that.
- Stewart: Oh yeah, you could spend five years in the Air Force, five in the Army, five in the Marines, five in the Coast Guard. It's all federal service. Oh yeah, individuals switch all the time. They're in one branch and they wanna try another branch, they go into another one. Like when we were in Korea, we had an outfit--see, we went to Korea, we had only one World War II veteran, platoon sergeant we had was a World War II vet. Army. But we had two Navy veterans in the Army. People always switching services.
- Mik: When you went to Korea in '50? So they didn't know much about infantry, did they?

- Stewart: Well, you all get the basic, six to eight weeks infantry training. But it isn't that intense. You go to the firing range, you fire the rifle. Then they send you over to-- now it's all changed, of course, then they send you over to your organization, the unit you're gonna be assigned to, then you're supposed to get your squad training, your platoon training, the company training. On your BAR, and your crew serve weapons, which is your mortars, and your 75s, and 57s, what have you.
- Mik: What do you think when you look at your photos?
- Stewart: What do I think?
- Mik: Yeah, when you see you're twenty--nineteen years old.
- Stewart: How did you live that long. Everybody says that. How do you live that long? Because you must have did something right that you're still here. Because I only know of two other men in my company that's still alive. In fact, the individual that I remember that got hit the same time I did, in our company, I thought was dead. Forty-five years. He found me after forty-five years. Cause the last time I saw him goin' out, he was goin' out on a litter. And he said, "The last time I saw you, you were goin' out on a litter." And he said, "I thought you were dead," and I thought all this time he was dead. But after forty-five years we found out that--and he's one of these, went in at sixteen like me. Still around, his health is not as good as mine. He doesn't get around too well. He's doin' alright so far. I just talked him into quitin' smokin'--after seventy-three years. He'd been smoking since before Korea.
- Mik: Do you think it would help to be a teenager instead of Twenty-five or--
- Stewart: You know, people say that but you know, experience comes with age. There's a question today too, I see it every once in awhile, they say, "Well some of the teenagers, they shouldn't be there." Well, maybe they want to be there. I don't think there's any more group that's more patriotic than teenagers. Because they're at that state, or that age, where they're just making decisions. Because you reach in your twenties, you already have some idea to go anywhere, achieve in life. That this stage as a teenager, you begin to learn what life is all about, and the price has been paid for your life by other individuals. Just like you. The average age of a pilot flying B-17s over Germany was nineteen. And teenagers can't fight a war? If you look back through history, I'd say that a good portion, not half of your people fighting in your wars are teenagers. Very few of 'em are in their twenties.
- Mik: Right. Twenty-four-year-olds: the old man.
- Stewart: Twenty-four-year-old-- our company commander was only twenty-one. The oldest man in the company was twenty-four. You're susceptible to anything and everything at that age too. I think you're more easily taught things and I think you comprehend things better at that age. At that age I don't think you really question things. Whereas

in your twenties, I think you begin to question; is this right or is there another way to do this, or is this wrong.

Mik: I think your reflexes are pretty good too. I suppose in combat--

Stewart: Why you have to. It's all about that. You help each other, like I say, you're there for each other, it's just the camaraderie even to this day, you never find a camaraderie like that. Like I told a gentleman before, the people that I went to war with are more like my brothers than my brothers. They were more of a brother to me for what they'd been through than my brothers would. And I had a twin brother in the Army, I had another brother in the Army and I had a brother in the Navy. But none of 'em saw what I saw. They weren't in Korea. They were peacetime. But I loved the guys I was with more than I do my own brothers. That's hard to say but--I'm saying it may be callous but that's the way it is, you know--because you lived and died by these people. And this guy that I was talking about--just quit smoking. I call him every Wednesday and he calls me every Saturday. That's how much I think of him. I love this guy. And his family's just like my family. It's hard to take but that's the way it is. Some people see it differently, I suppose. But some people--a lot of your people that went in--see, have different views of the war. A lot of 'em, they went in when we were in a defensive positions and bunkers and that. That's an entirely different war than what we fought. They didn't walk 700 miles up to the Yalu and hike 700 miles back. You know what I mean? So, their concept of what happened, or how the war went is a little different than ours. But there's not enough of us left to define this option we had. So there's where it is. You got a bunker around you, defensive position. The only thing you got is a fatigue jacket. And it don't stop very much. Cause you're out in all kinds of weather and you name it. We didn't have flak jackets. That T-shirt, that T-shirt didn't stop bullets. Seemed to go right through. Where they went in the bunkers in defensive positions they had flak jackets, lot of 'em. Never fighting out of bunkers. Course it was rough, I'm not saying it's not rough, because it was. But it was a different kind of war. It was a different war than we fought.

Mik: Well, your war was very much like World War II.

Stewart: Oh, absolutely.

Mik: Their war was very much like Vietnam.

Stewart: Yeah. We fought masses, see, in Korea. We would have twenty-eight, thirty men on a hill. The gooks would throw four or five thousand men at you, trying to knock you off of that hill. Course whoever dominates the high ground will lose the roost, so to speak. So that's why every piece of ground, every piece of real estate, with any height, is very valuable. You wouldn't believe how many lives have been paid for this real estate, over and over and over again. We went north, we fought over some of the same ground, we fought over coming back. Same hill, some of the same hills.

You say to yourself, "There's been a heck of a price paid for this already." So, what do you do? You live with it. That's part of life, you know.

Mik: Thank you.

Stewart: Quite welcome.

Mik: Sharing your stories and thank you for your service.

**[End of Interview]**