

Wisconsin Public Television
Korean War Stories Project

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
FRANK J. STUIBER
Rifleman and Communications Chief, Army, Korean War
2005

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Madison, Wisconsin

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Stuiber, Frank J., (1931-). Oral History Interview, 2005.

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

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Frank J. Stuiber, a Milwaukee, Wisconsin veteran, discusses his experience as a rifleman and communications chief in the Army during the Korean War. Stuiber touches on basic training at Fort Riley (Kansas), debarking to Japan, marching to Panmunjom from Inchon (Korea), and assignment to a rifle company in the 3rd Infantry Division, 7th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Easy Company. He talks about patrolling the Main Line of Resistance, including night patrols and ambushes. Stuiber addresses the cold climate in the mountains and getting frostbite on his feet, and he states the troops were not trained properly on how to take care of themselves in cold weather. He explains he is currently undergoing operations to fix hammer toes as a result of his frostbite. He describes his base camp, daily routine, unit rotation, and Army food. Stuiber discusses transfer to communications and tells of running wire to the Outpost Listening Post (OPLP). He tells of getting shot at by a sniper while swimming. He explains he was stationed at the OPLP twice, but nothing happened while he was there. While a guest at the 8th Army Artillery Outpost, he talks about spotting approaching tanks, and he describes the racket attacking troops would make with bugles and drums. Stuiber speaks of promotion to communications chief, transfer to the 24th Division, 34th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Easy Company, and ending up near Taegu. He details the duties of the communication section. Stuiber describes making a drawing of the valley's wire circuitry, wanting to make some corrections to it a few days later, and being told he couldn't see the drawing because it was restricted information. He talks about the Republic of Korea soldiers stationed with American squads and recalls paying them to sew patches onto his uniform. He describes playing practical jokes on men in his unit and talks about keeping in contact with veteran friends. After his return, Stuiber discusses having difficulty sleeping, not being able to talk about his experiences except to other Korean War veterans, and feeling appreciated during a reunion in Korea. He characterizes other United Nations troops he came in contact with: Belgians, Turks, Greeks, Brits, and South Koreans. He talks about taking photographs during his service, lists the weapons he used, and describes travelling by foot or tank to support other units. Stuiber reports being ambushed on the road and being relieved to find it was by a South Korean Army unit. He reports the Chinese would sometimes calibrate in on the American radio net and fill it with empty transmissions, and the Americans would do the same thing back. He reveals he would sometimes talk to and cuss at Chinese and North Korean soldiers over the radio. Stuiber analyzes inaccuracies of the television show, *M*A*S*H*, and recalls seeing a combat soldier have a mental breakdown.

Biographical Sketch:

Stuiber (b.1931) served in the Army from 1952-1954. While in Korea he served in the 3rd Infantry Division, 7th Regiment and the 24th Infantry Division, 34th Regiment. After his honorable discharge he married in 1958, attended community college in Cudahy (Wisconsin), and worked at the lithography department of the Continental Can Company for forty years. Stuiber resides in Cudahy (Wisconsin).

Citation Note:

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Context Note:

Raw footage interview filmed by Wisconsin Public Television for its documentary series, "Wisconsin Korean War Stories." Original WPT videocassette numbers were WCKOR109 and WCKOR110.

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.

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

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010.

Transcribed Interview:

Mik: So, let's see where you were, and who you were, and how old you were, what led to a military career.

Frank: You want me to start right from the beginning, or right from basic training?

Mik: Before basic training.

Frank: Before Basic training. There wasn't too much before basic training. My induction center was Fort Sheridan, Illinois, we went down there, and then they assigned us to various basic training camps. I was assigned to Fort Riley, Kansas, in the summer of May 1953.

Mik: Can I have you just lean back just a little bit, there we go. Thank you.

Frank: Very hot, very hot, ninety, one hundred degrees there. I asked one of my fellow trainees if we were fighting any wars in the Sahara Desert. Says "No," says, "Good chance that we're gonna to go to Korea." And that's what happened we were assigned to Korea--FECOM--Far East Command.

Mik: What year was that?

Frank: That was nineteen-later part of '52.

Mik: Is that why you went into the military?

Frank: Yes.

Mik: Because of Korea?

Frank: Right. The volunteer draft. After basic training we shipped down to San Francisco, that was the Port of debarkation. We got on the troop ship, *General Walker*, very large troop ship. 4,500 troops. We shipped out of there and then we went up the coast, along the coast of Alaska, the Aleutian Islands, Adak, Kiska, heading for the Island of Honshu, the main island. We landed in Yokohama and we spent one night there. Take on some more troops, from there we went on to the southern island of Kyushu, at the city of Sasebo--there we got off, we spent three days there and we got our field equipment. Got our rifles, went out on the range took our three shots at the target, got back on the troop ship, we hit Inchon. Had to get us in there, and out fast because they had one of the highest tides in the world there, thirty feet. Ya got in and out fast. We got up there, then we marched in as far as we could. We got on some trucks, went up a little further, we went up around Panmunjom on the Injin River. There's where we first contacted Chinese forces up there. This was in October, starting to get cold. The terrain in Korea is a little funny. You take the real southern part around Pusan, it's almost tropic, but as you go north on the peninsula

you are going higher and higher in elevation, you are getting up in the mountainous area and it gets colder and colder. They say it gets to twenty-five to thirty-five below zero up in some of the mountain ranges up there, in the winter. We were assigned to Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division. I was assigned as a rifleman. I would run on missions, patrolling up and down the MLR, that's the Main Line of Resistance, run into little skirmishes every now and then, nothing serious. Then I was assigned to the communications section of Easy Company as a wireman.

Mik: Those missions you were talking about, were those night patrols? Or--

Frank: A lot of them were night patrols, right.

Mik: What are those like? Don't lean forward.

Frank: There was different kinds of patrols. There's contact patrols. Just to go out to search out the enemy, you know, like that. At that time it was very, very cold, bitter cold. It was not too much longer after that we were out on patrol, and we were too far from our base camp and we had to spend the night in the field, a couple, two or three nights in the field, that's when I had both of my feet frostbitten up there. They said it was about twenty-five--thirty below zero. I had taken my cartridge belt off to lay down in the trench, spend a night. I got up the next morning and the water in my canteen was froze solid. So it was pretty cold. A lot of guys did stuff for frost bite and later on they lost toes and feet. On account of the bitter cold, bitter, bitter cold. That was one thing they never prepared us for, was the weather. We were prepared to have contact with the enemy, how to fire with machine guns, this and that, but not the cold, how to take of yourself in the cold weather. And a lot of guys suffered from that.

Mik: Did you learn how to take of yourself?

Frank: I sure did, I sure did. One of the tricks that we learned, we always carried an extra pair of wool socks, open up my fatigues and put a pair of socks next to my body to keep 'em warm and in any chance that we had, we got by a river or stream, we'd stop, I'd take my boots off, take my socks off and wash 'em, dry them out as best as I could, take the clean dry socks from next to my body, put them on, take the socks that I just washed, put them next to my body underneath my fatigues and continue on. Try to do that every day, every day, but that one night, was so tired from marching all day that I didn't have time to change my socks. Plus with those Mickey Mouse boots that we had, rubber boots, I got my feet frost bitten. Consequently I had--suffering from hammer toes right now, I have had four operations on all my feet, there's a fifth one coming up.

Mik: What's that mean, hammer toes?

- Frank: Hammer toes, one toe cross over the other one like that. So I got four hammer toes straightened out, they lengthened some of the tendons on my feet. Everything is going along pretty good, no problem.
- Mik: So when you frostbit your feet you woke up in the trench, and were your feet just numb?
- Frank: They were numb. It was a really, very eerie feeling. I reached down, I take my shoes off, my boots off, I touch my feet, I couldn't feel my feet. So when we got back to base camp our senior aid man took me back to the battalion aid station and they treated me for frostbite there through application of warm water and massage. He gave me another pair of wool socks, sent me back to the company for further duty, like that. We learned a lot over there, how to take care of yourself.
- Mik: Going back to base camp, was that that photo we saw?
- Frank: Yeah, right, yeah, that was one of them. We had several base camps.
- Mik: Describe those camps for me.
- Frank: This one, the Boomerang, that was very tactical, that was right up on the MLR. We had trenches, we had bunkers and then we had trenches going from bunker to bunker, and then we had bug out trenches in case the Chinese come over, try to overrun us we could get out of there you know, through the bug out trenches, like that. Those bunkers, they weren't that bad. We had them set up really nice, commo wire bunks, you know. Had all our equipment hanging on the walls. And believe it or not, we used to get beer rations up there. About once a month, a couple of cans each, three point two. And the food wasn't that all bad. Basically it was C-rations, very old C-rations. Some of those C-ration cans they were dated 1943, '44, from stock piles that they had in the Philippines, you know, they'd ship it over to Korea and we'd eat on that. The military found it easy to--on Christmas and New Year's, or whenever, Thanksgiving, get hot food up to us in these big thermal cans. Excellent turkey, everything. Fed really well. I never complained about Army food, never. They always fed us very well, even though it was C-rations. I found C-rations not too bad, as opposed to nothing.
- Mik: Yeah, hunger is a pretty good condiment, isn't it?
- Frank: That is, that's right.
- Mik: What was life like in that base camp, what was the daily routine?
- Frank: The daily routine, get up on the morning, you always slept at least fifty percent alert. That means it was just your shoes off--you'd be lay in your bunk, your home-made bunk, your rifle on your side, or whatever weapon you're assigned to. I had the M-2 carbine, the full automatic carbine and you're ready to go. You had a bandoleer of

ammo either around your neck, or next to your rifle, next to your weapon. You get up in the morning or whenever, and you'd have head count, they'd start counting personnel. And there is always activity going on. Guard duty, posting guards, changing guards at the OPLP that's Out Post Listening Post. Way out in front of us. And later on, I was with the communication section and we used to have to run wires out to the Outpost LP. And that was a little scary situation.

Mik: Did you come under fire doing that?

Frank: Oh, yeah. I remember this one time, little funny, I was out by myself picking up wire, come by this little reservoir, by a big rock, water was there, nobody around, "I think I'll take a little dip." Took off my clothes, was in the water, I was completely nude, and some sniper way up in the mountains, undoubtedly it was a .51 caliber single shot, fifty-four inch barrel rifle, you could tell that, you know. And he took a couple of shots at me. I got dressed mighty fast and I got out of there--on the run.

Mik: What'd you hear a snap? Did it snap going over your head or was it splashing?

Frank: They got their situation that you learn in training when you get over there, it's called a crack and thump method. That bullet's going over your head, it's a crack, CRRAACK, then the thump, that's the explosion of the shell in the weapon so you use a crack and thump method you can just about tell where that shot was fired from. So this guy who was shooting at me, he was maybe three, four hundred yards away from me up in the mountains. Very poor shot. I got back to base camp and I was telling my buddies about that and they all laughed. Yeah, we got sniped at pretty often over there.

Mik: How often did you have to run that wire out, would it get cut?

Frank: It used to get cut over a road, maybe a tank would go over it. We didn't have to string a wire out there that often, it got cut a couple of times and we'd go out there. What we did, we'd run alternate wires out, run an alternate wire out to the listening post and come back a different way, lay another wire back so somebody out there would cut that wire and lay around waiting for the wire team to come out you know, take that splice. We'd use the other alternate.

Mik: Was that common practice?

Frank: That's common practice, yes.

Mik: But I mean for them to cut a wire and wait for you to come out?

Frank: They've done that many times, yeah, yeah, oh yeah. Then you had to watch yourself out there for mines, AP mines, that's anti-personnel mines, trip wires, yeah they were great at that. Wooden-box mines, where they could not be detected with the mine detector. Very interesting experience.

Mik: Where you ever stationed out in the OPLP?

Frank: Twice.

Mik: Tell me what that's like.

Frank: You know you are way out there by yourself. You know that the enemy out in front of you, they want to get at you, they want to get you. What we are basically doing out there on that LP--OPLP is just get information, listen to what is going on out there, you can hear people walking around, equipment rattling together, mess kits, vehicles, tanks. You got your glasses there, you got your radio, and you got your sound power set to the OP. Not much ever happened out there.

Mik: To you or to anybody?

Frank: What?

Mik: Not much ever happened out there when you were there or?

Frank: Not much ever happened when I was out there. But there was some guys that never come back, you know. Right out in front of us Army intelligence said there was at least ten infantry divisions, Chinese and North Korean divisions, out in front of us. They could have overwhelmed us any time they wanted. I don't know why they never did.

Mik: But was it a strategic location?

Frank: Yeah, it was. It was one of the largest valleys and approaches to North Korea, while we were in North Korea. It's a very strategic location up there a lot of high ground a lot of roads.

Mik: So they never get attacked?

Frank: Oh yeah.

Mik: Are they just little skirmishes?

Frank: Little skirmishes, company size, infantry, platoon size. I remember this one time we were up there visiting 8th Army Artillery Outpost, it was right connected with the Boomerang, they were right up there with us. And we were in a bunker, in their bunker and they had a big pair of field glasses, these other guys, I don't know what they were doing but I was looking through the field glasses, looking at this valley in to North Korea and I seen twenty-two T-34 tanks coming at us. They were across the valley and I told a 8th Army guy, "Hey, we got some tanks coming towards us." He says, "Oh, let me take a look," radioed back to intelligence, back to his

headquarters, fortunately the column of T-34 tanks, they had a column right and they went off right into the Horizon, nothing ever happened. But they were quite concerned about that. Right in back of tanks comes infantry. The tanks never could of got us, we were up in the mountains, you know.

Mik: When they would attack would it be at night? Or would it be--

Frank: Most of the time at night, yeah. You'd be up there on the MLR and you could hear the enemy troops out there, blowing their bugles, signaling back and forth, I assume it was signaling or maybe psychological warfare, I don't know. You could hear them signaling back and forth, with the bugles, the drums, nerve-racking.

Mik: How did it happen that you got transferred into the Commo--

Frank: Because prior--part of being a volunteer draft I was with the reserve outfit in Wisconsin, and I was in communications, and the company commander looked at my records and he said, "Oh you had some commo time." I said, "Yeah, wireman, radio, switchboard BD-72." "Yeah we could use you. There is a man rotating back to the States. You could take his place as a wireman." There I was, I was going to become a commo section.

Mik: How'd you feel about that?

Frank: Great, I thought it was great. Further on down the line of maybe--about a year later, maybe not quite a year later, I wound up as Commo Chief, communications chief, I was promoted to sergeant, communications chief, like that. Good job, Then prior--after that they needed a Commo chief in the 24th Division, 34th Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Easy Company and this one colonel requested that I be transferred over to the 24th Division, so I went over there, and then we were transferred back down to Japan, Kyushu, Japan for training, infantry training. That was at that Japanese submarine base. Then we went back to Korea, went to the 24th, we were up around Taegu, South Korea, yeah.

Mik: What's a Commo Chief do?

Frank: Commo Chief? Well he is just in charge of the radio section, wire section, you know.

Mik: I mean what are the duties? Tell me what the commo section does?

Frank: I'd get up in the morning and I'd assign the guys who were going to maintain the switchboard, operate the switchboard. Every patrol that went out they had to have a radio man with them. I'd say, "Okay Joe, you go with the patrol tonight, Sam, you go with the patrol in the morning," you know. "Al, you are going to be on the switchboard tonight, Felix you are going to run the alternate wire to the outpost listening post." It was pretty good.

Mik: Did the commo teams take a lot of casualties?

Frank: A few, not many, not many. No, no. Come close a couple of times particularly when we were stringing wire up on telephone poles we used to make our own telephone poles, cut down trees, stick them in the ground, string a wire on them, maybe like going across the road, like that, and somebody would snipe at you. It only happened to me like maybe two or three times. One or two shots, and that was it, they're gone you know.

Mik: And did that, I mean do you have to tie everything together, all the different outposts and the different units and everybody to a headquarters?

Frank: You're talking about the communications section? Right, in our company we had attached to our switchboard, a wire going to every platoon, headquarters platoon, motor pool, ah like that and then we had truck lines that went to regimental headquarters, battalion headquarters, from there we could we could tie into any outfit in Korea.

Mik: So the whole MLR was wired?

Frank: It sure was, oh yeah, yeah. Had a very good communications system set up there. I remember this one colonel asked me to give him a drawing of the metallic circuitry in this one valley. I said, "I've never done anything like that before." He says, "You're a sergeant now, you want to be Corporal?" I says, "No sir." He says, "I want that day after tomorrow in my bunker." "Yes sir."

Mik: Wait, wait I think you pulled your microphone. You are a wireman, you should know.

Frank: I should, yeah [laugh]. The wrong wire. I am used to working with a W-110. [Laugh] Okay? So I went out, I went to the motor pool I got a jeep, I went around the whole valley checking out the commo situations. Switchboard, trunk lines from switchboard to switchboard and their particular set up in the different companies, I had that all down on a huge sheet of paper. Finally got it done, within the time that colonel gave me, I went back and gave it to the colonel he looked, "Yeah, this is pretty good." Okay, that was it. A couple of days later I says, "I think I want to make a couple of corrections on there, I think." Went back up to the colonel I says, "I'd like to see that drawing I gave you." He says, "You can't see that." I says, "Why?" He says, "That's restricted information." Army acts in strange ways. I couldn't get a hold of it so I had to go make another one for myself. [Laugh] Figure that one out.

Mik: So, when you were still in the infantry, and you're on the--

Frank: I was in communications infantry.

- Mik: You still were, right, but when you were on the MLR, what was that rotation like? Were you up there all the time?
- Frank: Uh, no. Had two up, and one back. Two companies up, one back. Two platoons up, two back. Like that, they rotate. We're back in the blocking area. They'd have one of two platoons in the back, down, from the hill a little bit then they have the trenches and the bunkers up on top in case the Chinese would make a big attack, an offensive they'd come up over that hill, and our troops would have to move off, go down the hill, the troops down below in blocking would come up, and meet them. Meet the enemy, like that.
- Mik: And what was that rotation like, how many days?
- Frank: Ah, maybe week, two weeks?
- Mik: That feel good, to come down off?
- Frank: Sure was. It was like a vacation.
- Mik: Was it like a vacation in that you could let your guard down?
- Frank: Instead of sleeping one hundred percent, you slept seventy-five percent, or fifty percent alert. You know, like that. We'd go back, you'd go back to the blocking position, they' have shower trucks set up, shower points and we go back there, maybe once in a while, maybe about once a week, every two or three weeks, go back in there, take a shower, you go in one door, you take all your clothes off you know. Keep your personal stuff in a little bag. You want to take a shower you go up the other door and you get new uniforms, new fatigues, new socks. Fresh, nice and clean, most of the time.
- Mik: So then you were on the line you didn't have patches or anything?
- Frank: Yes, we did.
- Mik: You did?
- Frank: Yeah, we did.
- Mik: So every time you got a new uniform you had to put the patch back on?
- Frank: Right, oh yeah. In every squad we had a member of the ROK army, ROK, that's Republic of Korea, the South Korean soldiers and they were pretty handy, they use to sometimes do our washing for us, sew patches back on. I remember this one time we went up to relieve the 40th Division up on the MLR, that was the California National Guard, and we had to take our patches off and our ranks off, you know, in

case we were captured they wouldn't know what division we belonged to, you know. When we got up there we had to sew our patches back on so the ROK soldiers, we'd give them a buck. They'd sew our patches back on for us. We didn't have our patches with us. When our gear would come up from the rear we'd get our patches out of--from wherever we left them and the ROK soldiers would sew them back on for us. That was Okay. These guys were good fighters, ROK soldiers. We were in for maybe three years, in the service, these guys were in for the duration, sent in eight, nine years, pressed into service. **[End of Tape WCKOR109]** Very good guys, well trained. Some of the guys I am still in contact with now. My old foxhole buddy, Kenny Pyette, he was a, my first commo sergeant up there. Come through with hardly a scratch on him. Now he has been diagnosed with beginning stages of Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease. Went through the whole Korean War and not scratch and he comes down with this. Rest of the guys, all very good. They all had a job to do and they did it and they did it very well.

Mik: You look like you got along pretty well. Sitting there with grenades.

Frank: Yeah, we had our moments up there. Yeah. A lot of playing around, you know. Yeah. I remember this one time I found a piece of rubber hose, forget where I got it, "Man this thing is too good to throw away," And this one guy Jim Wheeler, he come off a patrol and I'd taken that rubber hose and I put it in his sleeping bag, down in the bottom, the foot of his sleeping bag and he come in--he was beat you know, threw his pack down in the bunker. I say, "Hey Jim, you better keep you eyes peeled I just seen a great big black snake crawl here before." "Yeah, okay Frank, I'll watch out for him." Then he took his shoes off climbed down into that sleeping bag and his feet hit that rubber hose, thought it was the snake. He fired out of there like a mortar shell. Oh man, he didn't talk to me for a couple of days, but we were always pulling things like that on one another. You get a few guys sleeping with his hand out like that you get some of that aerosol shaving cream, fill his hand full of shaving cream, then you take a piece of grass and drag it across his face, thought it's a fly, slap it. "Hey!" Shaving cream all over his face. That happened to me, they pulled that on me several times. Nobody ever got mad, you know. Okay, you got me today, I'll get you tomorrow. Right in the middle of war, stuff likes that going on. So you picture the mental attitude of some of these guys up there. It's Okay. Guys were Okay up there. We do get together occasionally, go down to Tampa, Florida, that's where my old sergeant is right now, there's about six of us, we get together we go down there occasionally, we have a good time. Bring our scrapbooks down there. Sit around, book combatties, tell lies, like that.

Mik: What do you think about, how do you feel when you look at those photos? Are you back there?

Frank: Yeah, I am, I'm right back there. Like this one here. I can't imagine myself being back there, but I was there. It was really something. There were a lot of situations that we experienced, that we could not photograph because of the intensity of the situation. You don't want to carry a camera around with you all the time. You come

back you can't tell people about some of the situations that you ran into. First off, they wouldn't believe you, and you really can't relate that to somebody who has never been there. Just like the people in Iraq right now, or Vietnam, guys in Vietnam can't really talk about Vietnam, some of the bad situations they were in--same thing with the Iraq Desert Storm, Second World War.

Mik: And it's such a totally different world that what is correct and proper in that world when you try to tell people about it, you just feel like--it sounds like something else.

Frank: Right.

Mik: To them because they're not--

Frank: They have never experienced anything like that. I never experienced anything like that. You never talked to anybody about it. Never.

Mik: Is that why it's good to get back with the guys?

Frank: Yeah. Yeah. It's the only people that I can talk to about Korea, was the guys that had been there and experienced it with me. That's why have Veterans Associations, like the American Legion, created War Veterans Association. We all get together and you start talking about some of the experiences, good and bad. It's an emotional release. I fell more relaxed and relieved when I talk to somebody who has been there with me, that knows what went on.

Mik: And is it because there's no judgment? That judgment based on just not even knowing what that world looked like.

Frank: Yeah, yeah, right.

Mik: Did those things ever bother you after the war?

Frank: Yeah, they did, yeah. I used to have trouble sleeping. I'd still be sleeping fifty percent alert, like I am sleeping with my eyes open. [Pause] Loud noises would get me. I'd get up in the middle of the night and walk around, one--two o'clock in the morning. Like that. Anybody who has been over there experiences the same thing, you know, I would imagine.

Mik: Yeah, it's a tough thing to put people through. And when you are talking about the guys you were on the line with, you know, your soldiers and your kids.

Frank: Yeah, I was like nineteen. Yeah. I was talking to some people in Chicago from the Korean community, and I told them, "Yeah, I was nineteen years old when I was over there." They says, "Yeah you were just a little boy." I says, "Yeah, I was a little boy but I was big enough to pick up a rifle and fight for your country."

Mik: Are they pretty appreciative?

Frank: Oh yeah, oh brother, very much so. When we went back the second time, or the first time we had a reunion in Korea. We stayed in a real nice hotel, they had everything all arranged for us. We'd go out on the street, people would shake our hands and thank us, we were--semi-uniforms on, you know and give us hugs and "Thank you, thank you, thank you." I know that they really appreciated it very well. We were always treated with great respect.

Mik: Did you ever have any contact with the other UN troops?

Frank: Uh, yes we did, yeah. We had some friends in the Belgium Battalion, they were just down the line from us, Belgians and Australian, and the Greeks. The Greeks were pretty close to us. The Greeks were very good fighters, vicious fighters. So were the Turks, the Turkish were over there--Turkish Expeditionary Forces. The Turks, they were really vicious fighters. Ah they had a, I don't know what they would call that, they'd shoot a North Korean or Chinese man, they'd take their knife out and they clobbered their ear off and put in on like a key chain, key ring and they'd take it back to their base camp and they'd get money for that.

Mik: What a nineteen year old, you're getting exposed to other Cultures--

Frank: Yeah, other cult--oh yeah--other foods. Yeah we ate with the Belgians quite often and the British. British soldiers when we'd be hiking down the road someplace where there was a road, there was truck traffic, the British were the only truck drivers that would pick us up. Our trucks would pass us up, you know. Who else did we serve with? Australians, they were pretty good. Naturally the ROK soldiers, Republic of Korea, we ate with them quite often. By that time we were very well used to Korean food, Kim Chi. Bulgogi, Chop che. They used to serve dog over there quite often, we never had any of that though. I would pass on that.

Mik: Did they pick up English, the ROK soldiers?

Frank: Yeah, yeah, fairly well--yeah. As opposed--I never picked up any Korean, hardly any Korean, very difficult language to pick up as opposed to Japanese. I found the Japanese language very easy to pick up.

Mik: Were you aware when you were up, maybe not when you're on the MLR but when you would come back down, of the Peace Talks, of what was going on with that?

Frank: Very little, you know. We know it was a big farce, you know. We had hoped that something was going to be settled soon, but the way they were going about it, you know. That was at Panmunjom. When we went back the second time, in the year 2000, we were in that Peace Hut. They had the line right down the middle of the table, you go beyond on that line you're in North Korea. There were no North Korean troops around at that time. Around that Peace Hut. I walked all the way, the

full length of that Peace Hut, and I went out the back door--I'm standing in North Korea, and I looked up this little path, went up to this big building, maybe eighty, ninety feet from the Peace Hut and there was a North Korean guard walking back and forth and the Colonel says, "Hey Frank, you gotta get back in here, or you're going to start the whole thing all over again." I got some nice tapes, some nice pictures up there.

Mik: Tell me about it, you were taking lot of photos.

Frank: Oh yeah.

Mik: Over there. Were there a lot of cameras over there?

Frank: Talking about the second time I went over?

Mik: No.

Frank: The first time. There weren't too many cameras, no, no not too may.

Mik: Was that just an interest of yours?

Frank: It was an interest of mine, yeah. The first camera I had over there was a Brownie box camera, a 127 I believe it was. I took some fairly good shots with that. The next one was the Japanese Nobia. 35mm, that's where I got a lot of these pictures from.

Mik: That was a good camera. I mean--on that, and the resolution was--

Frank: Not too bad, yeah.

Mik: Did you, and as I said, I am not going to push you anywhere you don't want to go. But did you ever have times when you thought you weren't going to make it?

Frank: [Pause]. Yeah. Yeah, oh yeah. A couple of times, I thought, "That was it," you know. My buddy, my sergeant buddy, he was right next to me, I even told him, I said, "Hey, Kenny," I says, "This is it." [Pause].

Mik: [Unintelligible] You talk about your foxhole buddy, you get pretty close to somebody in a foxhole?

Frank: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah--closer to him, than my own brother. Yeah, getting along while we're laying next to each other, I told him, I says, "Yeah, we're not going to get out of this one." He says, "Yeah, we're going to make it." And we did. Here I am, you know.

Mik: What, you just thought they were coming?

Frank: Yeah, they were coming. Big time. [Pause].

Mik: What, what, was that your weapon?

Frank: Uhh, that was a M-3.

Mik: I think you better turn around.

Frank: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mik: He'll yell out, [Laugh]. He won't yell at you, he'll yell at me.

Frank: I can look at the monitor over there. That was not my basic weapon. My basic weapon was the M-2 carbine, full automatic. This was an M-3 submachine gun. I carried that for awhile, .45 caliber. I picked up a Russian burp gun, I carried that with me for awhile. Everything you own, you got to carry on your back, you know. I got rid of it, I traded it off for a, I don't know something or other, got rid of it.

Mik: Not only do you have to carry it on your back, you have to carry it uphill.

Frank: That's right, there's nothing over there that's downhill, everything is uphill, you know, seems like that. This one outfit that was bugging out, they were going to burn everything. I picked up an Underwood typewriter, portable typewriter, it was too good to leave here. Carrying that along, carrying it, and carrying it, marching down the road. "Man I can't carry this thing anymore." Went over a bridge, over the side it went, give it the deep six.

Mik: So being stationed in the same base camp, but did you do a lot of walking?

Frank: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah we did. Yeah, a lot of walking. To back up other units, you know. You may walk ten miles, you know, full field pack. Yeah we were tough, we were lean and mean, we could do it. I couldn't do it now. This one particular time we had to be some place, the generals had decided that we were supposed to be at another place up on the line. And they transported us in the back-up tanks, a tank company. I don't know what kind of tanks they were. But we got on the backs of these tanks and we rode about forty miles on the back of tanks. That was really quite an experience. The tank that my buddy was on, my foxhole buddy, Kenny Pyette, the gunner, the tank commander hit the fire button and that cannon went off. It was 155 or whatever it was, and hurt his ear drums. I seen that tank when that cannon went off, it was just a big concussion ring went up around the tank, the dust lift off the ground. And he got off and he's holding his ear, and he couldn't hear for awhile after that. But we finally got to our place where we were supposed to be, we deployed, dug in and waited for something to happen, which it never did, it never happened, you know.

Mik: Never happens when you're expecting it.

- Frank: When you are asleep or eating, writing a letter or something.
- Mik: Tell me what it's like, it's hard, and again for somebody who hasn't experienced it, but everyone has been out in the dark, we know what the dark is like. Tell me about night patrol.
- Frank: Oh. We were in contact with this one LP, listening post, outpost listening post, and this guy with the sound power said, whistle into it, and the guy back in base camp you know, said, "Okay." This guy was really shaking you know, he was afraid of the dark, he was out there and he was whimpering, "Hey, they're all around me, I don't know what to do. Come and get me." Found out that he was always afraid of the dark, something had happened in his childhood I guess and we had to replace him. But night patrols--first patrol that I ever went on, was a night patrol. You get rid of all your equipment, your dog tags, you tape them together so they don't all rattle. I couldn't see anything, you couldn't see the hand in front of your face, I was just following the guy in front of me. And I come back and you go through a debriefing, "Well, what did you see out there, what did you hear?" I said, "I didn't see or hear a thing, you know." So my presence on that patrol was useless. But a little later on you'll learn to listen to certain things out there. You could hear people walking around, maybe somebody coughing. A twig snap. Your ears get trained for certain things out in the field. A twig snapping sounds like a cannon going off for the trained mind. And if you do run up against any dead enemy soldiers you look at the condition of their uniforms, see if they're fresh uniforms, take their patches off, their rank, take 'em back, go through their pockets, look for onion skins, overlays.
- Mik: I'll bet a twig really sounds like a cannon when you're the one that stepped on it.
- Frank: Yeah, oh yeah. You got to watch your step when you get out their, trip wires, can't see them at night, you know.
- Mik: And when you're there, did you set up ambushes?
- Frank: Oh yeah, yeah, certainly.
- Mik: Did those ever work?
- Frank: Yeah, a couple of times, but not often.
- Mik: Usually you just sit out there and get cold.
- Frank: This one, we were coming--a buddy and I, Kenny Pyette, we were coming back from a little session with the Belgian Battalion up the road, maybe about three miles up the road we're coming down the road at night, and all of a sudden lights, little hills on either side of the road are like a cut, flashlights are shining down on us. In Korean they say "Hey, stop, put your weapons down. Hands up!" These guys,

armed, come down off the side of the hills coming at us walking you know with their weapons, they're all in camouflage, netting with twigs and everything in there. And that really rattled my cage. I can just visualize myself spending the rest of my life in the chopstick factory up in Manchuria, but it was South Koreans, it was a ROK army. What a relief. You know, went through our pockets and everything made sure that we were who we said we were. There were Russian infiltrators up there too, believe it or not.

Mik: I understood that was a little problem when uniforms would go missing.

Frank: Yeah, yeah.

Mik: You didn't know if they were trying to infiltrate.

Frank: That's right, that's right. There was a lot of that going on. A lot of infiltrators. Some of these infiltrators could speak perfect English. We found that out when we established our radio net with our BC-10 radios, that was the company, the basic company radio, and we have a radio set up that would be talking to our patrols out, then the Chinese or the North Koreans, mostly the Chinese, they'd be sweeping the frequency and they would get us on their radio and they would calibrate in on our radio net and they would push the transmission button and our whole net, radio network would go dead. And we'd be talking--we could talk to these--I talked to Chinese, North Korean soldiers over the radio many times. Sounds funny, but we did.

Mik: What'd you say?

Frank: Uh, cuss at them a little bit "Get off the net!" You know. So we finally wised up and got an alternate, just like the wire, the wire we were running, run an alternate net, go on net two. We pulled the same thing on them too. Get one radio and sweep their frequency band and calibrate in on their net. Push the transmission button, start whistling and singing, you know, raising a little hell with them.

Mik: I was thinking when you talked about getting up, and having a head count, up in camp, was everybody always there?

Frank: Not always. I remember this one time, it only happened once. I forget exactly where it was, but [pause]. We were on guard duty that night, fortunately I was in a different section, guard duty in a different section, but some infiltrators snuck into camp and got into one of the lieutenant's trenches or foxholes or whatever it was and he was garroted. Put a wire around his neck and pfft. They found him dead the next morning. Had a big stink about that. "Where were you on guard duty?" I say, "I was over here." "Okay, where were you?" Nobody got chewed out for that, but there was one dead soldier out there, because of an infiltrator. So from that point on, we kept extra alert.

- Mik: As if you weren't alert enough already.
- Frank: Yeah. We were sleeping 100 percent alert, they wanted us to sleep 110 percent.
- Mik: You started to tell me, before we started the interview, about laying in the snow.
- Frank: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, laying up there, Northwest of Chorwon Valley and it was cold, very cold. The snow must have been maybe a foot and a half--two-foot deep, and we would be moving from spot to spot. Trying to get cover and concealment. We were laying in the snow up there, we were going to cross this little valley, and we knew the Chinese were over there; we were waiting for them to do something. Fortunately nothing ever happened, but it was bitter, bitter, bitter cold--very cold. They said it got thirty--thirty-five below zero. We used to get winds right out of Siberia, Manchuria, Siberia, so you know it does get cold up there.
- Mik: And except for your feet, you never got wounded?
- Frank: Got a couple little knicks on my finger one time, that was about it, nothing.
- Mik: That's kind of amazing isn't it, that you can go through that.
- Frank: Thank god. A lot of the other guys weren't so fortunate. One of the things the general public don't hear about, a lot of GIs froze to death, up there in North Korea. I see this TV show a while back, M*A*S*H. Unbelievable, they don't tell the whole story, of course, they take the Korean War and they have to romanticize it. They don't say all the atrocities that were committed by the North Koreans and the Chinese. If I pulled half of the stuff that somebody pulled on M*A*S*H, you know, and that movie, I'd still be over there on KP.
- Mik: Yeah I don't suppose you ever get used to the things you saw. You just have to go on.
- Frank: Yeah, that's it. Oh yeah, like when you see your first body. Up to that point it was just like a John Wayne movie, you get nicked in the shoulder or nicked in the leg. You put a patch on, and continue on, but not when you see a guy with his arm blown off, half his face gone.
- Mik: I bet that has a lot to do with sitting around with you buddies with grenades in your arms.
- Frank: Yeah, sure. Laugh. You talking about that picture there? Yeah. We did goof a lot up there too. It wasn't all serious, it wasn't all combat either. You could not take a year and a half of solid combat, you would wind up in the psycho ward, no doubt about that. We had our little moments for playing around.
- Mik: Were there guys that did get to the point where they couldn't take it anymore?

Frank: Oh yeah, right, a couple of them went psycho. One of 'em Section Eight. Sure.

Mik: What would happen with that, what would he do, start shaking?

Frank: Start shaking, you know, he'd just start shaking, talking incoherently, you know. Running around. So we called the medic, the senior aid man, "This guy's had it." They'd get him in a jeep and they'd take him back. Take him back to regiment and then they ship them back to Japan, the psycho ward. You're over there long enough you get used to that, used to seeing things like that.

[End of Interview]