Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

J. BIRNEY DIBBLE

Surgeon, U.S. Marine Corps, Korean War

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Dibble, J. Birney., (b.1925). Oral History Interview, 2009
Approximate length: 2 hours 38 minutes
Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:
J. (James) Birney Dibble was born in India in 1925 to missionaries, grew up in northern Illinois and served during the Korean War as a surgeon. He discusses joining Navy in 1943 as part of the V-12 Navy College Training Program and attending Duke University as a pre-med student before going to Camp Lejeune as a corpsman. Dibble describe working on an orthopedic ward at Camp Lejeune treating Marines injured in campaigns at Iwo Jima and Okinawa including the types of medicines they used at the time. He mentions attending medical school at the University of Illinois while on active reserve before receiving orders to report to Great Lakes from where he volunteered to go to the Fleet Marine Force. Dibble talks about combat training at Camp Pendleton, having his new wife – an orthopedic nurse - move to California with him and how they spent their weekends. He mentions the journey across to Korea, from San Diego, in 1951 and landing at Sokcho-ri above the thirty-eight parallel. Dibble describes his living conditions, day-to-day routine, receiving letters and parcels from home, and the rations they were provided. He talks about working closely with corpsmen, calling in helicopters to evacuate casualties and being moved around to different areas including in front of the Military Line of Resistance. Dibble discusses being made a commanding officer of a forward hospital, during which time his team triaged thousands of men injured at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1952. He tells a story about a Korean doctor he worked with – Dr. Lee – and returning to South Korea to visit him in the early 2000s. Dibble also talks about other colleagues and their performing artery surgery when the practice was still in its infancy. Briefly talks about the similarities and differences between his experiences and what is shown on the television show "MASH" and also discusses process of assessment for neuropsychiatric evacuation (now known as post-traumatic stress disorder). Dibble talks about being sent back to the United. After being discharged, Dibble became a general surgical resident at Cook County Hospital – he talks about some of his duties while there. He describes setting up a surgical practice in Eau Claire, Wisconsin with a friend from medical school. Dibble mentions working with his wife in different countries around the world including Niger, Cameroon and Ecuador. He talks about reunions with his unit, speaking with high school students about his experiences, and writing a novel based on events in Korea.

Biographical Sketch:
J. Birney Dibble (b.1925) enlisted in the V-12 Navy College Training Program during World War II. He served as a surgeon in the U.S. Marine Corps in the Korean War.

Interviewed by Ellen Healy.
Transcribed by Kylee Sekosky, 2014.
Reviewed by Helen Gibb, 2015.
Abstract written by Helen Gibb, 2016.

Interview Transcript:

[Tape 1, Side A]

Healey: This is an interview with Dr. J. Birney Dibble. B-I-R-N-E-Y, D-I-B-B-L-E. This is an interview with Dr. J. Birney Dibble who served in the United States Navy and in the United States Navy with 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division during World War Two and the Korean War. This interview is being conducted at Dr. Dibble's home [redacted] Eau Claire, Wisconsin on the following date, December 3, 2009. The interviewer is Ellen Bowers Healey. Dr. Dibble, tell me about your background, and your life circumstances before you joined the service. Let's start off with what year were you born?

Dibble: I was born in 1925.

Healey: And where were you born?

Dibble: In India. My parents were missionaries. My father was a pastor. My mother a nurse, but I just lived there for four years. We came back to the states in 1929 just weeks before Black Thursday when the banks closed, folded. So, the mission board did not have enough money to send my family back out to India. He'd had planned to be a lifelong career missionary. So, I grew up in northern Illinois a little town 'a Greenwood first and then Rochelle and Aurora. It was from Aurora that I left to join the Navy, 1943.

Healey: And how old were you in 1943?

Dibble: Seventeen.

Healey: And so you were a high school student at that time?

Dibble: I was. I graduated and left a few days later. My first duty station was with the Navy College V-12 Training Program, which was a very large group of young men. I forget the exact number, but there in the tens of thousands scattered all over the United States. My first duty station was Duke University.

Healey: How did you find out about the V-12 Program?

Dibble: Well they came to the high schools, Navy officers, informed us of the program and those of us that wanted to get into it took a written exam and if we passed that then we took a physical exam and if we past that then we were automatically enlisted in the V12 Program.

Healey: Before you enlisted did you know you were gonna go to the V12 or did you--

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: Enlist first?

Dibble: I did. No.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: That was in December of 1942 that the Navy officers came around and I left six months later.

Healey: And how old were you in December of 1942?

Dibble: Well, on December eighth, I became seventeen.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And you had to be seventeen with your parents' permission. If you're eighteen you could enlist without your parents' permission. And they readily assented to my going to college rather than goin' to combat.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: So I went to Duke and spent a year and a half there.

Healey: Let me back track a little bit, and just—you mentioned your parents were missionaries, what was the name of your father and mother?

Dibble: My father's name was Paul, and he was born in South Dakota and went to Dakota universities and to Garrett Biblical Institute, which is the seminary of Northwestern University in Evanston, specifically to become a missionary to India. My mother came over from Denmark to become a nurse to be—go to the foreign mission field. She thought probably India and then they met, and I'll say, well some marriages may not be made in heaven, but this one certainly was.

Healey: And did you have any other siblings?

Dibble: I have a sister. I had a sister. She died a few months ago.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: She was eighty-five.

Healey: Okay, now I interrupted you. You were sent to Duke University.

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: In the summer time, right after graduation?

Dibble: Yes. July first I reported for duty.

Healey: What were your duties at that time?

Dibble: It was sorta like a--almost a two year boot camp. Every morning up at six o'clock, fall in ranks, all—I think there were 2,500 of us at Duke, 2,000 were Navy, 500 were Marines. Calisthenics, inspection, and then march to chow, and then a regular school day.

Healey: During the summer of nineteen, what is it, ‘42 --

Dibble: ’43.

Healey: ’43. Did you start classes right away in the summertime?

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yes, and they asked me, "Do you want to specialize?" And I said, "Yes, I want to be a doctor. Can I take pre-med?" And they said, "Certainly." So I was in a pre-med program. The average number of semester hours that people took at that time was around fifteen or sixteen. I elected to take twenty-two, and the next semester I took twenty-four, and for the next two semesters I took twenty-eight semester hours, almost double what the average student does. So by the time I left there to go to Camp Lejeune in the spring of 1945 I had almost enough credits to get into medical school. I had a hundred and twelve, and they needed a hundred and twenty. They waved that so that when I got out of the Navy, I went directly into medical school as a nineteen year old freshman and graduated from medical school at the age of twenty-three.

Healey: Let's go back to Camp Lejeune. You indicated that you went there before you actually graduated?

Dibble: Yes, I went there for the summer of—I got the hundred and twelve credits, but I didn't actually graduate from Duke University. I never actually graduated from any university, [laughs] except University of Illinois medical school. And at Camp Lejeune, I acted as a corpsman at the Navy hospital, went on, what was that, New River, I think is the river that goes through there. And so I stayed there until October of ‘43, ’45 then went to Illinois, University of Illinois in Chicago.

Healey: Let me go back to Camp Lejeune again. You said you acted as a corpsman.

Dibble: Mm-hm.

Healey: What sort of patients were you seeing or treating?

Dibble: Oh, I was on an infected orthopedic ward. These were all young Marines from Iwo Jima and Okinawa Campaign. They had shrapnel wounds that became infected, and so they came in for surgery to clean out the infection. There was a regular, almost a parade of them coming in 'cause many of them didn't get infected until weeks or months after the--their wounds on the islands. So I was changing dressings, we were sprinkling sulfanilamide powder into the wounds, found out later that although it did control bacteria growth, it delayed healing. So that was given up. We were using penicillin every three hours by injection, usually 5000 units, now a million units is a small dose. That's because of development of resistance to the bacteria over a period of years and penicillin isn't used as much now as it was then because that was the only thing we really had, except omicin and all the other -micins that had not been discovered yet.

Healey: Did you have living quarters right at Camp Lejeune?

Dibble: We lived in a wooden barracks. They were built specifically for these huge contingents of D12 sailors coming down there. There were the original buildings that were brick I think, for their quarters, but they weren't near enough. We were able to use the recreational facilities and the little sail boats, the lightnings, the New River was sort of opened up into a baby fort, went into the Atlantic Ocean. So we had a good almost six months down there.

Healey: Did you interact with other B12 corpsman or did you interact with corpsman that were—

Dibble: Both—

Healey: —trained otherwise?

Dibble: Yeah. We did just about everything that the corpsmen train elsewhere, trained as pharmacist mates, as we called 'em then.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: I didn't know if you knew that or not.

Healey: No.

Dibble: With the Red Cross on the shoulder instead of the caduceus.

Healey: And those were uniformed—

Dibble: Yes—

Healey: —Corpsman?

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Uniformed pharmacists mates were able to give injections and uh, which we were not. We weren't trained for that, but we could do just about everything that they did. For one thing, we'd been trained for two years in the blue jackets manual, which gives all kinds of instruction on how to handle a wound and so forth.

Healey: Let me go back to your Duke pre-med training. You were obviously taking an accelerated course load. Did you have the opportunity also to work with patients?

Dibble: No.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: No, not at all. No.

Healey: So your first patient opportunity was—

Dibble: The first patient opportunity actually came at the end of my sophomore year in medical school. Freshman year was all anatomy and physiology. The second year was pathology and bacteriology and pharmacology and so forth, but we did begin to see patients in the latter part of the sophomore year, and then the junior year it was out of the wards and into the clinics around the university.

Healey: And again where did you go to medical school? What university?

Dibble: University of Illinois.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Pharmacy, dental, medicine and nursing schools of the University of Illinois are not in Champaign-Urbana. They're in Chicago, in the medical center right across the street from then famous "2,500 bed" Cook County Hospital.

Healey: And what was you military status at the time that you were going to medical school?

Dibble: I was on the active reserve.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Went on to Navy Pier once a week Tuesday night for about three hours, got to put on my uniform and go down there. Yeah, I think I paid fourteen dollars and seventy-five cents or something like that which added up to quite a bit, you know. At that time I paid for my fifty-five dollar a month room and board at the fraternity house.

Healey: And what did you do when you went down to Navy Pier for a couple of hours?

Dibble: I just helped the doctor, which—there was always a doctor on duty also that same night. And he would see reserves, because Navy Pier at that time had a huge contingent of Navy people aboard, and they would come in for sick call on Tuesday evening. Then when I came back from Korea and did my residency program, I also went down there, but then I was the doctor and did the same things, saw a few patients, mostly I read and studied.

Healey: What year did you graduate from medical school?

Dibble: ’49.

Healey: Okay. And describe what you did between 1949, your graduation, till you entered the Korea War.

Dibble: Five days after I graduated I married.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Edna Baird. I met her on an orthopedic ward, and we fell in love and nine months later got married. But it wasn't a shot gun wedding, it just was like the time between October and June, and then I went to Cook County Hospital for a two year rotating internship, male surgery, female surgery, male medicine, female medicine, obstetrics, the whole range of subjects. I spent two years rotating there. Meanwhile, the Korean War had broken out, so I knew I'd be going back in. The doctor draft had started and there was a ruling that affected a lot of doctors, that if they'd been in seventeen months or more in the Second World War as a doctor, they were ineligible for recall or drafting. And I knew one doctor who'd been in sixteen and a half months as a doctor, but didn't have that extra two weeks and they got him. I also knew a doctor who'd been enlisted during the Second World War, actually had been wounded in the European theater, and he was called up because he was now a doctor.

Healey: So, it was actually referred to as the "doctor draft?"

Dibble: Mm-hm.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: When did you get orders or word that you were—

Dibble: Actually, I got orders toward the end of my first year in internship to report to Great Lakes.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: But I had not yet had male surgery, I had not had obstetrics yet. There was some, and pediatrics, because they came in the second year of my internship. So, I wrote back directly to the Secretary of the Navy and asked for an extension of a year and to my surprise, they allowed it. But I think they could see what they would have done. I would've been an incompletely trained doctor, not having had these particular services. Just, so then I got orders toward the end of my second year and they said, "Do you want to go to--name the three places you'd like to go." Well I wanted to go to Iceland. I wanted to go to Guantanamo Bay, and I put Great Lakes third, because my parents lived just a couple hours away from there. Well, it was a mistake because they sent me to Great Lakes [laughs].

Healey: Oh, okay.

Dibble: And to train, to examine recruits and it was the most boring. All I could think of pre-med, four years of medical school, two years of internship, and all I'm doing is examining recruits. You know, looking in the ears and looking in the mouth and listening to one or two heart beats and one or two breaths and have a room full of naked men and examining them for hemorrhoids and oh, it was—so I volunteered to go to the FMF [Fleet Marine Force]. I went in—

Healey: Oh, how long did you spend at Great Lakes?

Dibble: Oh, I was—

Healey: Before you volunteered?

Dibble: —about, I was about a month before volunteered, but it was another month before I actually got orders.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: I went in to see Captain Eckland, who is my commanding officer, and asked him if there was a possibility I could go to the FMF. He said, "I think we can handle" – [laughs] "manage that" [continues laughing]. And so that started my career with the Marines again, I restarted.

Healey: Okay. Well from Great Lakes where did you go?

Dibble: To Camp Pendleton.

Healey: Directly to Camp Pendleton?

Dibble: Yeah, in October, October, November and the first two weeks of December, ten weeks of combat training. And as—

Healey: Describe that combat training. Where did you take the combat training, right at Camp Pendleton?

Dibble: At Pendleton, yeah.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah, we did the obstacle courses and the forest marches and calisthenics and the whole works.

Healey: Who were your instructors? What were their ranks and—

Dibble: Oh, they were mostly sergeants.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: From, let's see what are the three ranks, staff—what's the next rank up?

Healey: Gunnery sergeant.

Dibble: And then gunnery, and then master sergeant.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And I think we had all three. They weren't as tough on us as they were with the, you know, the boot camp. Course it wasn't a crucible for even the Marines then, but it was tough.

Healey: Did you take weapons training also?

Dibble: Oh we did, with the M1 Garand, the M2 Carbine, and the 45 Automatic. Yeah, we learned to field strip and we had to do it blindfolded, putting 'em back together blind folded, and we had almost daily, what'a ya call it, rifle target practice, target practice, with a Maggie's drawers and everything.

Healey: And you were all with a group of doctors?

Dibble: There were, I think there were eighteen doctors in the group, yes. But we had about fifty corpsmen, and the corpsmen and the doctors went through the same training, while the Marines were doing their combat training, most of them fresh outta boot camp, but not all of them.

Healey: Do you remember what part of Camp Pendleton your training was set up?

Dibble: It was in the Unit 3-5's home base is Camp Pendleton, and that's all I remember—

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: —is that we were in that area, wherever that is, or was.

Healey: Did you get any liberty while you were there?

Dibble: I had liberty every night.

Healey: Every night [laughs].

Dibble: I went out there, my wife and I decided that there would, I wouldn't be able to be a husband to her enough for her to come, but I'd been there about three days, and I realized that I wasn't going to be there for three months without her if possible. And she just happened to have an aunt and an uncle living in San Diego, and they said we could stay with them for that three months, and we did. So, I went home. We, about once a week, we'd have an overnight, either a march or overnight in tents, but the rest of the time I could go home. And then on Sundays, I don't remember if it was Saturday and Sunday, I think it was just Sundays, I was off every Sunday, which was really nice 'cause we got to see the west coast, to go up to L.A. and Knott's Berry Farm and do all those fun things, and Tijuana, of course to the Jai Alai Games [laughs].

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah, yeah, it was a good three months and then the final—the first week of December we went to Pickle Meadows. Have you ever heard of that?

Healey: I've heard of it, yes.

Dibble: Okay.

Healey: But describe where it is.

Dibble: It's up by— it's in the Lake Tahoe area in the mountains in December. They took us up in buses. There were 5,000 of us, so they took us up a 1,000 at a time, dumped us off, "We'll be back in a week fellas." [Laughs] It was the most boring week I've ever spent in my life. I, the doctors had nothing, we had sick call in the

morning, but two to three Marines would show up with a cold, and we had one guy fell of a--he was doing a traverse, upside down on a rope, and fell and broke his leg. Other than that, the snow was about two feet deep. We had our shelter hats with us. We had no books, we had no cards. We had nothing. We just stood around and talked, didn't even sit down 'cause the snow was so deep. Yeah, that was—

Healey: Was your wife still with you in San Diego or—

Dibble: She was still with me in San Diego and saw me off on the boat, December fifteenth, be coming up here in a couple weeks, of 1951. So it will be fifty-eight years ago in next week.

Healey: And where did your boat leave?

Dibble: From San Diego.

Healey: From San Diego.

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And we went across—

Healey: Do you remember the name of the boat?

Dibble: The Weigel, the William Weigel.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: The general class ship, yep, 5,000 Marines, about 4,500 of the 500 doctors and corpsmen. Yeah that was quite a trip, nineteen days. We hit a uh, typhoon in the north Atlantic about two days out of Japan and that was an awful experience, because they had to head into the wind, and the bow of the ship would go way up and tons of water off the sides and then it would go down on the other side of the wave, and the twin screws would come out of the water, and the whole ship would just shake, just--[makes noise] and all except 600 of the 5,000 Marines were incapacitated, didn't even show up for Christmas dinner. We hit the storm on December twenty-third, which was Christmas Eve because we crossed the date line the next day. So, the next day was the twenty-fifth, and I was one of the 600 that—they asked us, there were two doctors ship's crew, Navy doctors, who asked me if I would--would all of us, there were only two or three of us that weren't sick, go down in the hold, and into the enlisted men's quarters, because they were lying in their tiered bunks, four or five on either side, and then when they

vomited, they just vomited right on the floor and then there's scuppers on both sides, I don't know if you've ever been on any of those ships or not but—and so when the ship's prow would go up, the gutter would just run with vomit down the side. It makes me sick to think about it, and then when it tipped forward, it would go the other way. We just gave shots, don't remember what it was, but it was an anti-vomiting injection, and it did help the worst of the cases. And we stopped off in uh, Tokyo for two hours. The officers were allowed to go ashore, which we did and just walked around on our sea legs, and the enlisted were not allowed off.

Healey: What do you recall of Tokyo at the time? What did it look like?

Dibble: All I remember is that it all the signs were in Japanese and the shops were interesting. We'd walk into them and we were approached by girls of course, very frequently on the walk. They were all over the place. And then we went from there directly to, uh, a little town of—isn't that funny? I can't remember right now. Anyhow, we made a beach landing. It was unopposed. The big LST's came alongside and took a thousand men at a time, 500 on the upper deck and 500 on the lower deck, and took us in on the beach, and there we were loaded into trucks and carried up to the front lines.

Healey: How did the men do on the LSTs in terms of sickness?

Dibble: It was quiet. There wasn't any, and it was only about it— well we were on it for about an hour loading and moving into the beach and unloading.

Healey: And this was at, were you on the east side or the west side of Korea?

Dibble: We were on the east side.

Healey: Okay. Do you remember if it was the southern part of the peninsula or—

Dibble: It was in North Korea.

Healey: It was in North Korea?

Dibble: Yeah, it was above the thirty-eighth parallel.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: But our lines at that time, the Marine lines were well above the thirty-eighth parallel.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: It was only later that the thirty-eighth parallel was established by the Panmunjom people as the defining DMZ- demilitarized zone.

Healey: Before you landed, did you know on your ship or trip over, your nineteen days over, that you were going to go into North Korea or did you have any idea?

Dibble: We had no idea where we were going. Most of the ships did go around the peninsula and landed in Inchon.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Why we didn't, I don't know. Sokcho-ri.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Was the name of the little town.

Healey: Do you have any idea how to spell that?

Dibble: S— well not in Korean.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: But it's transliterated as S-O-K-C-H-O-R-I. Sok-cho-ri. With a dash, the "ri" just means village. So it's Sokcho, the village of Sokcho, Sok-cho-ri. Sometimes it's "ni" if it's a bigger town, like Nonsan-ni on the east coast, or near the west coast, or "ri," just a designation of a size of a town and that, I found out about eight years ago, is a huge resort area now because of the beach. It's a beautiful sand beach and the Koreans, who have the money, and a lot of them do now, go there for a week or two.

Healey: The South Koreans go there?

Dibble: Mm-hm. Yes, 'cause it's still in South Korea.

Healey: Oh, okay.

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: Alright.

Dibble: The thirty-eighth parallel, it's not a straight line across. It's a waving line. It corresponds roughly to where the trenches were at the end of the war, and on the east coast of those trenches were like twenty-five miles north of the thirty-eighth parallel.

Healey: So to clarify for me--

Dibble: Mm-hm.

Healey: --when you landed there, it was North Korea?

Dibble: It was in, uh, it was in, how should I put it? It was in South Korea, but it was north of the thirty-eighth parallel, which was considered North Korean territory.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And they tried to get it back, that's what most of the fighting was on the east coast and the latter part of the war.

Healey: [Both speak at the same time] to go off on a little bit different—well, go ahead.

Dibble: No, go ahead.

Healey: Um, I was, you landed there. Did you realize it was a nice looking beach or did, were you just too busy--

Dibble: No, didn't pay any attention.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: No, we had our, we were, it was January. It was cold, and we were heavily dressed, parkas and the bunny hats, and we were issued our rifles and ammunition. I think twenty rounds, and then loaded into trucks, open trucks.

Healey: Did you get your issue before you landed or once you landed?

Dibble: No, once we landed.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah, the Marines all had there Garand rifles with them. The corpsmen and doctors had no weapon when we landed, and we didn't need them. 'Cause as I said, it was unopposed, 'cause we were still, we were twenty-five miles south of the lines. We were issued the Garand rifles and then when we got to our battalions, we were issued 45s, because it was quite obvious that we couldn't carry a riffle in one hand and treat wounded men in another. And yet, we wanted to be armed and they wanted us to be armed. So, we were issued 45s and we strapped them on.

Healey: At the issue point, when you got your first weapons, what was the area like in terms of build-up? Was there—

Dibble: Nothing.

Healey: --a camp?

Dibble: Just a little tiny village that we could see down the road a piece, but there were no Koreans in it, they'd been evacuated. There were no Koreans anywhere south of the DMZ or the MLR [Main Line of Resistance].

Healey: Where were the weapons kept or stored? How did they get to you?

Dibble: They were in a, uh, what we called a cracker box ambulance. It's an oblong ambulance, two-wheel drive, and they were stacked up in there and handed to us, and the little case for the bullets, ammunition that we wore on our web belts, which we already had of course.

Healey: Where did you go from the--from after you got—the issue point—

Dibble: Then we went to the headquarters of the 1st Marine division.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And was assigned a tent. There were still the 18th; this was the sixteenth replacement draft. We landed on January the second of '52. And the *Consolation* was there, the hospital ship *Consolation*. I have good pictures of it.

[Break in Recording][End of Tape 1, Side A]

Healey: This is side B of tape one, continuing the interview with Dr. Dibble. Okay, continue on.

Dibble: What was I saying?

Healey: I'm going to have to think about it.

Dibble: Oh, yeah, we went up to the 1st Marine division headquarters, which were about, oh, ten miles back of the MLR, the Main Line of Resistance. Assigned a tent, there were no lights, we didn't have any lanterns. For the first night, we just sat there [laughs] in the dark. The next morning we reported to the uh, medical staff and all, there were sixteen of us, not eighteen, sixteen of us, in the sixteenth replacement draft, coincidentally. We went in one at a time, and a yeoman was handing out the assignments, 1st battalion, 3rd battalion, whatever.

Healey: When you say there were sixteen, sixteen doctors?

Dibble: Sixteen doctors.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: The corpsmen went to another place for assignment, and I just happened to run into a buddy from Cook County days, and so I stood outside the tent and talked to

him while everybody else went ahead. So, I was number sixteen on the list, which didn't mean anything to me at the time, but it did a year later when the first man on the list went home, the second man on the list went home [laughs], went home in the order that you signed in a year before, and so I was the last one to go, and I have the dubious honor of having served longer than any other doctor in Korea [laughs], or Navy doctor anyway. Yeah, that was a--that was a big mistake, but I didn't know it at the time. So I was assigned to the 3rd battalion of the 5th Marines and there was a Doctor Kimball, Robert Kimball, and I went up to 3/5 the next day. We were supposed to be in Korea for three days before deploying, as we now call it, but we didn't then. So, we went right to work. I had a tragic introduction to the front lines. We were just standing there talking to the two doctors that we were relieving--

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: --and they were getting ready to go back to, one to regimental and one to one of the medical companies. A Jeep ambulance came down off the front line hill, we could see it coming. We were about a quarter of a mile from the front lines in rear aid station, and it had a man in it who'd been accidently shot and killed. He had been relieving his buddy on the line, and he handed his rifle down into the fire--the, shooting hole that was big enough for them to stand up in and still concealed. He handed it down butt first, and his buddy reached up and grabbed ahold of the trigger housing and accidently pulled the trigger. It went right through his chest and out the back, and he was dead, literally, within minutes. So that was my first casualty, was one of our own Marines.

Healey: Okay. Now you said you were there longer than anyone else. You were there sixteen months?

Dibble: I was there almost sixteen months, came back in April, '53.

Healey: When you went up, you said you went up with Doctor Kimball to the 3-5 area? What were living conditions like there?

Dibble: We were in tents in rear aid. He and I roomed with two Naval aviators--Marine aviators—

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: —who were forward observers for the course hairs coming off the flat top out in the Inchon Harbor. And so, there were four of us. We had a tent, a squad tent, which is twelve by twenty four, you know. Maybe you didn't sleep in twelve by twenty four—anyway, we had a twelve by twenty-four squad tent for our sick

bay. Half of that was where we did minor surgery, and half of it was the sleeping quarters for us three or four corpsmen who were on duty in the sick bay all the time, day and night.

Healey: What was the—

Dibble: Port and starboard.

Healey: Was it heated?

Dibble: We had a potbellied stove that in January--I don't know exactly what it was because it didn't have a thermometer, but I would guess it heated up into the fifties. So, it was cool, but it was not subzero, and it did a pretty good job.

Healey: And was that both sick bay and where you slept?

Dibble: Where we slept? That was a pyramidal tent, sixteen by sixteen, no, twelve by twelve, sorry. And there the potbelly stove heated it up well into the sixties so that we could write letters and play cards with, you know, with hands that weren't so cold we couldn't--

Healey: What was the fueling source?

Dibble: It was an oil, fuel oil of some kind. The only problem was that when it got down like fifteen, twenty below zero, the lines would freeze and then in the coldest weather we didn't have any heat. When it would warm up a little bit, we would have heat, but you know, you acclimate whether it's a 120 in Iraq or twenty below in Korea, your thyroid takes care of it. It kicks in, the first three or four days, I couldn't get warm. We were living out of doors in these open trucks, but after four or five days I began to warm up, and then my feet were never warm until the second winter when we got the Mickey Mouse boots, the backend boots. They call 'em the Mickey Mouse cause they look black. I don't know if you've seen pictures or used them?

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: Yeah. So—

Healey: They're wonderful.

Dibble: Oh yeah. They were. My feet were never cold that second winter.

Healey: Okay. Let's talk—we talked about living conditions a little bit. Talk a little bit about your day to day routine, if there was a day to day routine?

Dibble: Okay. Yeah. We were, we as uh, the two doctors got up when we woke up, which was usually fairly early because we went to bed fairly early, six o'clock, six-thirty. And we would do our morning ablutions, shave, and other things. And then at, I think it was either nine-thirty or ten, we had breakfast, and that was hot. It was all out of cans, of course, the whole time that I was up there, number ten cans of great big monsters, and so the so-called "cooks," all they had to do was heat it, which they did in a squad tent. We had our little mess kits with the handle on it, and we would just pass down the line and they would put a—it was usually a powdered eggs, and powdered coffee, and sometimes canned meats of one kind or another, oatmeal of course, which they did have to cook, and very simple breakfast. And then we ate again in the afternoon at three, no lunch, and we ate at three 'cause it got dark around four and we couldn't work.

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: And I soon had a pipeline going from my home in Illinois, my wife's home actually in Springfield, and she started sending me popcorn and brownies and things like that, and most of that stuff actually came through.

Healey: How long did it take for mail to reach Korea?

Dibble: It was a month of— two weeks each way.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: You'd write the letter. It would go out- if we weren't in actual combat or on the move- it would go out the next day, go back to regiment, from there to 1st Marine division headquarters, from there on the east coast it would go to Homnomg [sp??] and then by boat home. There was almost no air mail at that time. It began while I was there. We got these little "V for victory" air mail things, then of course it was almost two weeks by boat and then to Springfield, so it was a good two weeks. The packages took longer. They took up to a month. Yeah, they were pretty popular, and you know, one thing that we didn't have? We didn't have enough of the little mantels for our kerosene lanterns. We would run out. So I wrote home and had my wife, Edna, send me a big box and when it came, I just distributed two or three to everybody in the battalion headquarters, and they were really appreciative because they, I mean, they break so easy you know, once there, if you've ever used one. It's a little bag to begin with, but when you touch a match to it, it flames up and it just becomes a--very, very fragile. So if you're on the move, every mantel on every trip that we took would break and you'd have to put a new one in it. Anyhow, just a little sideline as to what was important and what wasn't [laughs].

Healey: Mm-hm. In addition to the two meals you had a day, did you also have cold rations?

Dibble: We had C-rations and K-rations; we called them "Charlie rations." They called them “m--” what is it, "meals—"?

Healey: MRE's [Meal, Ready to Eat]?

Dibble: No, yeah.

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: We called them "Charlie rations," and I understand they're pretty much the same all the years, were somewhat better. Ours was little cans of--a little can of Sterno and then there’d be a little can of either pork and beans, or beans and pork. If it was beans and pork, it was mostly beans. If it was pork and beans, there was a lot more pork in it, and spaghetti and spam and usually a little packet of powdered sugar, powdered milk, and powdered coffee, which didn't really taste like coffee, but it was hot. And then when my pipeline started to work from home, we'd have popcorn and brownies and things like that that would transport over the period of a month and not get destroyed or wormy. We had--Kimball and I alternated. We had a front line right in the main trench line, a forward aid station that was in a big bunker, big compared to the others. I would guess it was probably, oh eight or ten feet deep and five or six feet wide. No, more than that, probably eight or ten feet wide too, and about four feet high, so you're always crawling around. We would go up there. We always had two corpsmen in that bunker and with a doctor there was plenty of room to sleep so that we would be there and that was in George Company. We had three companies in 3-5. We called 'em George, Howe, and Ivan. Those have changed, I understand, quite a bit. It was Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy, Fox, George, Howe, Ivan. Those were the battalions in the 5th Marines and in the 1st Marines and in the 7th Marines also. We had--in George Company, it was almost always in the center between Howe, and Ivan. So, where we could, we had our first aid station in the center in George Company.

Healey: Now did you go up there on a daily basis?

Dibble: No.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: I, uh--we went up and stayed for a week at a time.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: We alternated with rear and forward, rear and forward, rear and forward, and when Bob would come back, he'd come back--if we were close we'd walk. Usually it was far enough that John Gumpert, our ambulance driver, Jeep ambulance driver, would drive us up to the still in defilade, so, on the back side of the hills. It's all hills there, on the east coast, so you're always on one hill or another. We were on eight-twelve when I was there in January of fifty-two. And he would take me as far up as he could go with the Jeep ambulance, and then let me off and I would walk the rest of the way, which would be probably half way up the hill. So, it'd be three, four hundred meters, twelve hundred feet, about a thousand feet. And then I would, if there was incoming on the other side of the ridge, I would just wait, just hunker down until it eased up or stopped, and then I would just make a run for it and go up over the top. You know the old familiar statement, "Stay off the ridge line." That was hollered all--"Stay off the ridge line. Spread out men. One round'll get you all." That type uh—anyway, and I would just dive over and crawl down into the trench system and then find the forward aid bunker from there.

Healey: What was the bunker made out of?

Dibble: It was dug into the side of the hill and then they would cut down, there were, this was heavily forested, all over North Korea, or in the part of Korea we were in. They would cut down logs that would be about five, six inches in diameter and build them on the sides and then roof them over with the same and put a layer of logs and then a layer of mud or dirt, if you couldn't find any water, and then a layer of logs and a layer of dirt until you had a roof over head that would be a couple feet in thickness and that would withstand, I know [laughs] a personal fact, that would withstand the biggest mortars that the Chinese could throw. I remember one time, I just come up there and I was sitting in the bunker. The rounds started coming in, and I could hear the gunny sergeant. He was in the bunker next door in the command bunker. "One, two, three, four, stand, twelve, fourteen, sixteen." I mean—he was counting the rounds landing and a lot of 'em landed on the bunkers, but they all—I never saw a bunker that it was caved in by mortars. Artillery was different. None of the bunkers would--could withstand the Chinese artillery. If you got a direct hit on a bunker, the men were gone.

Healey: Now was there any heating in the bunkers?

Dibble: No.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: No. Uh, body heat.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Which did a good job in the two men, all the way along the line from the east coast to the west coast, from the Marines to the Korean Marines, to the Commonwealth division to the ROK [Republic of Korea] units, to another Korean Marine unit, they're all the way along the bunkers. There were two men to a bunker. Two Marines or two Army or two English or whatever, and they were small, just barely long enough for a man to throw down his parka to sleep on and a sleeping bag. We had the mummy sleeping bags, had a hood up over with the draw string so we could--that was one of the terrifying experiences that everybody had, rolling over inside the sleeping bag where there was no air and you'd wake up strangling, and you'd have to roll back over 'cause the face part of it, the open part, didn't roll with you.

Healey: Oh [laughs].

Dibble: It just stayed where it was and if you rolled on your stomach, you were facing in the back. It's one of those little—I hadn't thought about that for probably fifty-eight years. So then we would treat the men right in the bunker, most of them would be shrapnel wounds, and they would be just sent out at night or in a lull in any shelling that was going on and would walk back down to rear aid station. We'd treat them first, put bandages on them and if—and do whatever was necessary. We actually, as doctors, couldn't do much more than the corpsmen. The corpsmen were so well trained, starting I.V.'s and putting on bandages. There were two things that they couldn't do though. One was a tracheostomy. If there was an upper jaw wounds or lower facial wounds. I did two of those in the entire time I was on the front lines is all, and the corpsmen did most of the rest. I helped sometimes if they were having trouble stopping bleeding. They weren't as skilled as I was at that, but in just about everything else, with splints and stretchers and bandages, they were every bit as good as I was.

Healey: Where did the corpsmen in the Navy at that time get their training?

Dibble: In several places, many of them at Great Lakes, a lot of 'em at the hospital, I forget what it's called now, in uh, Los Angeles, San Diego, and one other place. I think it was in Colorado or Utah. Yeah. They were--some of them were exceptional, and I'd have to I think say that all of them were good.

Healey: How long was their tour of duty?

Dibble: They had a year.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: It was a pretty standard year for everybody, except [laughs] for poor old J. Birney Dibble, and there were a couple others that were there for fourteen months and thirteen.

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: Any rate, uh. So then—oh and a second thing that the corpsmen couldn't do was call a helicopter, and that was up to the doctor. And that's like why we like to have one of the doctors up on the lines, right there, bringing a gunshot wound in or a badly mangled foot from a shoe mine or anything that, abdominal or chest wounds, head injury. We would--I would stay in the bunker until the man was moved out, take him on a stretcher up over the hill and back down into defilade, so that the helicopter could come in and then as soon as I knew that they were on their way, I could call a helicopter and they would be there in like ten minutes, 'cause it's a very short distance, and they traveled even then with the old Bell helicopter and the Sikorsky. Those were the two we had. The Bells were uniformly used for front line cases. The Sikorskys were used to transport men from the medical company - that is a forward hospital - to the hospital ship or to able med.

Healey: Where did the helicopters come from? Were they from land or from ship?

Dibble: They were from land, yeah. They were based at uh--well there were several air force bases close by. There was K1, K2, K3 scattered all over Korea, and I don't remember which one they came from.

Healey: Were the helicopters flown by all members, all branches of service?

Dibble: They were all Marine.

Healey: They were all Marine?

Dibble: For us, yes. Yeah, and they made night evacuations. We had that all the time, it just amazed me then and it does now. They're [laughs]--without radar, they would maneuver their way through the ravines between the mountains and at night, we would hear them coming of course. As soon as we would hear them coming, the corpsmen would stand at the four corners of the pad, actually just cleared area in the forest, soon as they heard them comin', they stand with a flashlight at the four corners and point them up in the air, and then when the helicopter came down below the level where he could be--could not be shot at by the Chinese, then he would turn on his landing lights to see where he was coming in. The corpsmen would shut off their flashlights and when he'd land, they'd turn them back on again 'cause the light was on the bottom of the copter and didn't do much good,

and then load them into what we call "flying coffins," which we shouldn't have 'cause they were just the opposite, but they looked like little wooden boxes, and load the men in and send them off.

Healey: The helicopter actually landed or did they--

Dibble: Oh yes.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: They always landed, yeah. Because these pods were actually on the runners, and so in order to—

Healey: Oh, okay.

Dibble: Yeah, and then he would lift up off the ground, literally a few feet and then just spin in mid-air and take off back where he came from.

Healey: And so the person being extracted was actually on the runners--

Dibble: Yes--

Healey: —not inside the—

Dibble: No. Not in the Bell 'cause there was no room inside, just room for a pilot and another person and they never had co-pilots. They would occasionally use those Bells to bring an officer up to the front lines or inspectors of one sort or another. The big Sikorskys, they took the stretchers inside the body of the plane. They would take six stretcher cases. The worst accident I ever did see in Korea involved a Marine pilot, who I knew by face, you know, like I recognized him 'cause they were pretty much the same half dozen pilots that were on call to our battalion, and he was, he landed. It was day time, and he had just stepped out, he had one foot on the group when an artillery round came in. Landed right on him and the helicopter and just blew everything to smithereens. There wasn't even enough of the poor guy to pick up. He was just gone. A lot of people got wounded in that because we were standing around waiting with the two wounded men to put them on the copter. They missed me. But half a dozen of my corpsmen were hit.

Healey: Back to more of your, well, let me ask you this. You said you moved, how frequently did you move during the twelve, sixteen months that you were there?

Dibble: Uh, I can actually count them. One--we moved just a—three times from one position to another, from 8-12 to 7-62 and I forget the other, the third one. Then, there was a fourth move. The entire 1st Marine Division was moved from the

mountains of the east coast over into the relatively flat plains and small hills on the west coast. They were anticipating—this was in March or April of fifty-two, so just three or four months after I got there—the entire division. They were expecting a Chinese attack on Seoul again and they--Ridgeway wanted the strongest, or Sheldon it was by then, General Sheldon wanted the strongest possible force between the Chinese and the city of Seoul. So, he ordered the 1st Marine Division over there to take the place of the ROK and that 'course did come in August. By then I was back at Easy Medical Company. So that was a fourth move, and then we moved, went into reserve on the Kimpo peninsula, that was a fifth move, but the tents stayed the same and from then on, I don't think there was much of any movement, except of the H and S Company and the battalion, the rear aid. The front lines would move from one ridge to another, but the H and S Company, which included the rear aid station and the chaplain and all the accessory and the cooks and truckers and so forth. They stayed pretty much the same on the west coast.

We went onto the Kimpo peninsula for I think three weeks of reserve, and while I was there, I got orders back to Easy Medical Company. I don't know how it's set up now, but at that time, the 1st Marine Division had five medical companies: Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, and Easy. Able was about fifteen miles back of the line. It had the administrative offices of the entire medical battalion. It had interns and GPs [General Practitioner] and Pediatricians, who took care of the non-surgical or non-war injury type of cases, and there were some of those. Baker was on paper only. It didn't exist. Dog was back of the 7th Marines. Easy was back of the 5th Marines, and that changed of course as battalions rotated. We had the Marines, Korean Marines on our left flank. They were on Kimpo peninsula. We had the Commonwealth Division on our right flank. That was the Brits and the Aussies and the Canadians and New Zealanders, the Danish and Swedish troops - not very many - Indian ambulance teams, a Turkish brigade, I don't know how many they had, about two or three hundred, and then there was the ROK, the Republic of Korea, we called them the "ROKS" and two divisions on the other side of the Commonwealth Division.

Healey: How much contact did you have with those other country service members?

Dibble: Practically none. The one contact—one contact we did have periodically, the Turks were night fighters. They were used primarily, well they blocked one segment of line, but their primary purpose was to infiltrate at night the enemy lines and take prisoners for interrogation, and they would usually go out from their lines and come back through their lines, but every once in a while, they'd come back through our lines, and boy they were tough guys. They didn't carry any weapons, except a knife because they, if they had them, they might be tempted to

use them, and if their discipline wasn't one hundred percent—so their officers didn't allow them to carry any, they carried a knife, and they would just literally hold it against the prisoners. They would sneak up on peripheral guards and take them by the--from behind, and if they struggled too much, why they would just slit their throats. But if they went quietly, they'd bring them back. So, we would see every once in a while, like not all that often, every couple three weeks, a Turk coming back or two Turks often with a prisoner for interrogation.

[Gap in recording][End of Tape 1, Side B]

Healey: Side A, interview of Doctor Dibble, continued. We were just talking about the Turks, and how they got back into the lines.

Dibble: Mm-hm, yeah.

Healey: And I'm not sure how much the tape cut off there so, pick it up there if you would.

Dibble: Oh, I think I got all of it.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: They came back through our lines with prisoners and I mentioned that they didn't carry firearms, just a knife. It's sorta like the knives that we have, the K-bars, very similar, big knife.

Healey: And they were able to get back in because a password—

Dibble: Oh the password. Yes. That changed every, it was sometimes—we went out occasionally, Gumpert and a corpsman and I, when we had, when we were gonna go on an offensive our commanding officer, Colonel McLaughlin, would ask me to go out and find a place for a forward aid station in the new positions that we were hoping to take in the next day or two. So, we would go out at night and scout for a bunker big enough—there'd be abandoned bunkers—a bunker big enough to take the first--our forward aid station. And, one time, I remember, we either didn't have the password, or we couldn't remember it. And on the way back, we were challenged, and Gumpert just sang out whatever the previous day, and the guy said, "That was yesterday's," and Gumpert said he knows that was "blankety blank." "Well that was yesterday's," and "I'm John Gumpert, and I got the battalion surgeon with me." "Okay, come on ahead." [Both laugh]. But it was a little, you know—its dark and being told by a Marine that's standing there with an M1 Garand and his buddies on all sides of him. Oh yeah. Those weren't my happiest days, out in front of the MLR.

Healey: And you mentioned that you--different companies treated different types of a, medical situations. Were you always treating war wounds or did you treat some of the colds and—

Dibble: No. Well, yeah, they didn't get back to rear aid, but in the front lines, sure. We had a sick call every morning. Out in front, they'd just call down the trench line and come in the bunker, one at a time, and you know they had colds, and they had pink eye, you know, inflammation, conjunctivitis. Every once in a while, somebody would come in with symptoms of appendicitis, but they obviously didn't do that up there, but we'd evacuate them back to a medical company and just all kinds of things. They'd get something in their eye, or they'd get minor wounds that we could debride and just keep 'em in the forward aid bunker or send them back to their own bunker and tell their commanding officer that he's not to go out on patrol for X number of days. In rear aid, we saw about the same type of thing except that it would just be the H and S Company people, the truckers and the cooks and so forth. Now back at the medical company, that was ninety-nine percent war wounds, WIA's. I did take out a couple red hot appendix, appendices. Sewed up the bladder of our division surgeon once when he was thrown from a Jeep with full--from a Jeep with a full bladder and it burst. And there were a few other things like that but mostly it was WIAs.

Healey: Over the course of the time that you were there, how many WIAs would you estimate that you saw and treated?

Dibble: Thousands. The Battle of Bunker Hill started on August 24th, 1952. I was already back at Easy Med, as a matter of fact I was commanding officer by then as a lieutenant, senior grade. The billet raided a lieutenant commander, but they couldn't get'em, so they promoted me. I like to joke that I got a battlefield commission, [laughs] or battlefield promotion. I did actually get a promotion when I was on the battlefield, but not for what I'd done, but because they needed at least a senior grade lieutenant to be commanding officer of a forward hospital. After all there were two hundred men, a hundred and fifty corpsmen and technicians and so forth and fifty marines for cooks and truckers and a ring of security around our hospital all the time. After the Battle of Bunker Hill, which went from Friday night, all day Saturday, all day Sunday, Sunday night until Monday morning, all the 7th Marines, most of the 3rd Battalion. We triaged one thousand-four Marines, WIAs in that three day period. I know that because George Dupro, my senior warrant officer and I sat down and counted the EMTs, the emergency medical tags and there were one thousand-four. We didn't operate on all those, there's no way that we could have on that. So, we just had a steady progression of patients into the operating tent, into the minor operating tent, into ward four, where those that were hopelessly wounded and we couldn't take the

time or the personnel to, we just let them go, one of the toughest decisions, and the decision that I had to make as a commanding officer, whether to try to save life from that, I'll never forget some of them. And there was a steady progression, procession of Sikorskys helicopters who'd come in and take six off to the *Constellation*, six off to *Hope*, six to another medical company.

[01:07:09.00]

Healey: Go ahead and talk a little bit more about your triage system and categories that you had.

Dibble: The uh, yeah, the triage system, that's a French word just meaning “three divisions.” There were the men who needed surgery right away or they're going to die. They went right into the operating tent for Bill Ogle or Frank Spencer to operate on. There were those that had such minor wounds that they could wait almost indefinitely, hours if necessary, then there was the group that needed attention rather soon, but didn't have to be rushed right in to save their lives and there would always be two triage officers working on both sides of the triage tent. What we had was just two rails bolted to the wooden floor and we'd put the stretchers on the handles on either end of the stretcher on those rails, and the triage officer would just go from one to another and say, "Immediate surgery, next case on soon as they're done with whatever they're doing now," or "You can wait outside and just get out of the tent," or "Keep him in here, and we'll get to him as soon as we can." So that was the triage.

Healey: How did the people arrive on stretchers? Where they brought in by corpsman?

Dibble: Uh, no. They never came in with corpsmen. They came in either by—well there were several ways, a Jeep ambulance if the Jeep ambulance happened to pick them up on a hill. Usually they were brought back to rear aid from forward aid and put in what we called a cracker box. If they were walking wounded, you could get a dozen or fifteen men into the cracker box. If they were stretcher cases, you could only get in three. The Jeep ambulance took two on two levels, a lower bunk, you might say, and an upper bunk, actually, the place for the stretchers to ride. And at the medical company, they always came in either by cracker box or by Bell helicopters directly from the lines.

Healey: And you mentioned that the helicopters would be flying them out to the ships?

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: Was that for further treatment or for purposes—

Dibble: We would just, from the medical company, if it was a belly case, a gunshot wound or a shrapnel had penetrated the abdominal cavity or the chest or the head, we would just, if we had room in the operating room, we would take them directly to the room. If we didn't, we sent them out by helicopter 'cause they had an almost unlimited—you know they--the hospital ships, had half a dozen operating rooms with dozen surgeons, whereas, we had one operating room and two surgeons, two surgeons who were trained adequately to handle anything. The other eight or nine doctors were able to handle debridement of wounds that didn't penetrate the belly, chest, or head, and sometimes that would take an hour or an hour and a half, two hours if they had twenty, twenty-five, thirty shrapnel pieces in their body.

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: Sometimes it would just be half a dozen; sometimes it'd be just one or two.

Healey: During the operations, who would be assisting? Was it corpsmen?

Dibble: No.

Healey: Did you have nurses?

Dibble: There would be—no, no nurses.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: It would be one of the doctors who was trained in surgery but not able to do the case themself, which included me quite frequently. I rotated them. I would say, "Okay, uh, Joe or Doug or Lou or maybe it's my turn, or you know, and young Doc Lee, take over as assistant to Bill, I'll go next case." And then that man would come out and do the minor debridements. It was a—and we weren't busy all the time, you know. There were— it's like that air force guy said at the Second World War, "It was minutes, hours, maybe even days of pure boredom interspersed with a few seconds or minutes of sheer terror [laughs]." That's the way it was on the front lines. We didn't have sheer terror back at medical company. During the nine months that I was with them, we were never attacked even once. They didn't have planes by then, they were all shot down by our Air Force and Marines and Navy guys.

Healey: What did you do during those times that were not busy?

Dibble: The same thing we did on the line: read. Special services had paperback books by the hundreds and they would make routine--they would go from battalion to battalion to battalion coming from division. We wrote letters, played a lot of cards

and sometimes just good old fashioned bull session, you know. Just sit around, smoke a pipe, or a lot of the guys smoked cigarettes then too course. I didn't. That was another funny thing that happened. Edna sent me out a--I think as a joke, a little corn cob pipe.

Healey: Oh [laughs].

Dibble: And a little bag of tobacco, and I tried it, and I liked it [laughs]. And so, I started smoking the pipe and I smoked it up until just a few years ago, over a lifetime. But like Bill Clinton, I never inhaled [both laugh].

Healey: Oh I lost track of my next question, just give me a moment here or uh. Hm.

Dibble: I could tell you about Dr. Lee.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: We did have one doctor, Korean doctor. He'd been with the Army's Hourglass Division, right at the beginning of the war. So, he was trapped up in the Chosin Reservoir area. You've heard of that?

Healey: What's the Hourglass? You said that the Hourglass Division?

Dibble: Hourglass Division, I think it was the 7th Cavalry.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: I'm not sure about that. He called it the Hourglass all the time.

Healey: Alright.

Dibble: And uh, literally fought his way out with the Army that he was attached to, but it was the Marines at Hungnam-ni that rescued him, and he decided to stay with the Marines, and so he stayed with that Marine group till they were evacuated, and then they recognized that he had some surgical talent and sent him up to Easy Med before I met him. Lee Young Cok [sp??]. His father had been killed by North Koreans on the steps of the Presbyterian Church. They were Christians in Seoul, and I visited him and his mother and his wife a couple times while I was at Easy. Being the commanding officer, I could take off for a little while once in a while.

Healey: Was his father killed in the 1950s?

Dibble: In the fifties, when the North Koreans—first time they came through Seoul and drove the entire Army down to the Pusan perimeter. Yeah, and he was good at what he did, and we became very close friends, spent more time probably with

him than with any of the others. You know how you do that sometimes with other people. It just seemed to click.

Healey: English speaking?

Dibble: Oh yeah. He spoke English almost perfectly, except for when he was telling me about the time the father was killed, then he broke down. We were in Seoul and just visited the Presbyterian Church. Big imposing church, on that tape you may remember seeing it. And we kept in contact, and I'd been home in my surgical residency at Cook County Hospital when he wrote and said that he would like to have a surgical residency somewhere in the states, could I help him? Well, I did have some contacts and one of them was at Colorado, University of Colorado, and so he came over here and got a full four years of surgery training, residency. He went back to Korea, got on the staff of one of the major hospitals, and the last—in nineteen-eighty or eighty-one, when I visited him there, he was chief of surgery at this hospital with about seventy or eighty surgeons.

Healey: And where's that hospital located?

Dibble: In Seoul.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And I was on Guam, living there, and I got a letter from him. We corresponded periodically. Said, "Did you know that there's a Korea re-visit program? Whereas if you get to Korea, the government will put you up in a hotel and furnish transportation for you to go back to the places where you were when you were in combat here." So we went, and spent a week with him and his wife. It was Edna then. I lost her a few years ago after fifty-two years of marriage. Any rate, he showed us around and by then he had been doing transplant surgery. He was the first surgeon in Korea to do a kidney transplant and then he started doing other transplants. And I went back again eight years ago and just visited him for one day. He was in rather failing health, but that's the contact I had with him over the years.

Healey: Tell me a little bit about your re-visit, when you went there. Were you able to see, where were you able to go?

Dibble: Well, we--they took us to, over to the Cheorwon area, the Iron Triangle area, up to Hill 8-12, and we could see Hill 10-52, Luke the Gook's Castle. They took us to a Marine, a Korean Marine base right on the DMZ, and we--there was a big building with a plate glass window, bullet-proof window. They told us [laughs]. Glad nobody tested it, 'cause we could look out over the DMZ and the Korean or

the Chinese lines, no not Chinese anymore, Korean by then. And they took us to the several underground tunnels--a tunnel I guess by definition is underground—where the Chinese had been planning to send troops, even had a little railroad down there, one car railroad, the electric thing. We were able to ride right up to the stone wall where the Chinese had filled in the back end at our command, and we went to Monsan-ni and--when I was there in fifty-two and three, Monsan had two houses standing. It was a fairly large city, I understood, a couple thousand people before the war. Everything was destroyed, burned down, 'cause they all had thatched roofs, and the walls were crumbled, they were made out of mud, except for two buildings. I used one of 'em for my command post, administrative offices, and one I lived in. It was really nice to get out of that squad tent with a dozen other men, had my own privacy, and I could always go up. I spent most of the time up in the squad tent, but I slept down below by the helicopter pad, and it was right next to the hospital, so I could get over there in a hurry. I got side tracked a little bit there.

Healey: I don't know if there's anything else you remember from your—since we're talking about the re-visit.

Dibble: Oh, yeah.

Healey: Could you tell you were in some of the same places?

Dibble: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah that's right, I was going to say--and Monsan-ni had been a built back up to a couple thousand, and the two houses that I used were gone, or at least, I couldn't find them.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah, that was really interesting.

Healey: And what year did you go back to—

Dibble: Nineteen eighty-one. Yeah. Then I went back again, my son had been after me for some years to take him over there. Well when Edna died in March, March sixth, of '01, he said, "Dad, we're going back to Korea. You just find the--you know—set it up," and we did. We went in October, and it just so happened that one of the other men on it was Don Barker, who was one of my corpsmen, in both 3-5 and at Easy Med. So, we had a lot to talk about, and then at that time, we were able to find all these same places, and I was able to show Eric just literally - except for in Monsan - show Eric literally where our camp was, where the trench line was, and the hills, and he had pictures that I had taken and he would hold the picture, and say "Oh that's there and that's there," the contours of the land and everything.

Healey: Are the trenches still there?

Dibble: Yeah, they're still there, yeah. They're crumbling and filling in 'cause they're in the dirt obviously, and every time it rained, I'm sure that it collapsed just a little bit more. I couldn't find any part of the lines that look familiar. I mean the, you know the trench system itself and the bunkers, but I could find the areas and the hills 'cause they obviously look the same ‘cept there's a lot more trees on 'em now. I don't know how many billions of trees that got bombed, shelled, just lost, but they grow up again.

Healey: I'm going to go back to your service in Korea and we talked a little bit about your medical experience there, but you were attached to 3/5.

Dibble: Mm-hm.

Healey: How, did you see or meet the commanding officer of 3/5?

Dibble: Oh, yeah. I saw him every day.

Healey: Every day?

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah, Colonel McLaughlin. Lieutenant Colonel McLaughlin. We had regular staff meetings of the S1,2,3,4,5, and 6.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Every day, and I was not only invited, I was ordered to attend. Sometimes I couldn't, I'd be busy, but whenever I wasn't actually working on a wounded man or in some other way, I went.

Healey: And where were those staff meetings held?

Dibble: They were in a separate tent, and the Colonel had a little table, and he had his maps spread out there, and Colonel Paul or Major Paul Bratton was his S5, and the Chaplin that was there, the two Navy, two Marine pilots that were FOs and that's I think about it. So there'd be the six, it's just about ten of us, and I don't know why he wanted me there all the time. There were times when we'd be planning some kind of an offensive when, I mentioned that before, we needed to identify a place forward of the line and he would show me on the contour map. I was amazed. Those contour maps were kept up to date within months of the way they actually were. You know, the maps would be dated, say its March of

nineteen fifty-two, the maps would be dated, like November, December of fifty-one. They were that recently done. I got most of them still in my closet.

Healey: Oh, okay.

Dibble: Yeah, not most of 'em, but some of 'em.

Healey: How frequently might you see some of you medical supervisors?

Dibble: Up on the lines, never. When I was back in a medical company, Colonel, Commander Bill Ayers, A-Y-E-R-S, would come up about once a week. He would-- there were just three companies. He was at Able, so stationed there about ten miles back, then there was Charlie, Dog, and Easy. So there were four others, only three functioning and he would make the rounds. Every other day, he'd go to one of the companies, so he was on the scene a lot. And we--twice we had surgeons, Navy surgeons, commander and captain - one was a commander, one was a captain - who came out and spent a couple weeks with us. Primarily, I think to uh, see what kind of work the so-called trained surgeons were doing, and he was always very satisfied, 'cause these two were exceptional, the two that were there when I was there, Bill Ogle from Memphis and Frank Spencer from Columbia in New York. Frank was the first one to do an artery transplant in the field hospital in combat conditions, the very first. We were operating one night and he was helping me do an amputation. I'd done some before, but I didn't feel real comfortable. So he was helping me, and he said, "You know, Birney, if I had an artery transplant, I could save this leg," and I said, "Do you know how to do them?" "Yes, that's part of my training. I've been doing them now for a couple years." We're talking about 1951. Artery surgery in general was really in its infancy. They were doing the roto-rooter thing, you know, excavating the plaque, and they were starting to do transplants. He said, "If I get this solution, I can make the solution, if you can get the permission."

And so, within a month, he had the solution concocted - put it in a big glass jar, just like you'd can things in and when we'd get a KIA or somebody died during or after surgery, one of us would go in and take the aorta, the femoral arteries, and the brachial arteries, that's the arm arteries, and put them in this jar of solution. And the helicopter would come up and pick it up and take it back to Able Med, where they had a storage space and refrigeration, keep it there, and then when we get a patient in with an injured artery or aorta, anywhere in the body, we would call Frank Spencer down to take a look at it. "Can you or can you not do an artery transplant on this patient?" If he said yes, I would get on my double E-8 phone, I don't know if you still have the sound powered phone, it's a crank. Call a helicopter and within ten minutes you'd have that bottle with the arteries in it, and Frank would do the transplant and save a leg. In some cases there'd be so much flesh gone with the artery that there'd be nothing to cover it with. Then he couldn't do anything, 'cause sometimes it'd just be a section of artery gone, but enough that he could cover it with muscle and fat and skin and in that way save a leg or arm that would normally just be amputated. He got a Legion of Merit for that, as a

lieutenant, senior grade, the lowest rank Navy officer ever to get a Legion of Merit.

Healey: How long would the arteries—that you extracted—would they be good for transport?

Dibble: I don't remember exactly, but it would be around two to three months.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And so, we--unfortunately, fortunately, we got the arteries but unfortunately, we had enough KIAs that we had a steady supply of arteries.

Healey: Did you have to do a blood match?

Dibble: No.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: No. Apparently, the artery is so inert that is doesn't cause problems like you get with heart transplants or lung or pancreas or even kidney. And of course they gave that up probably ten years later when the artificial arteries came into--somebody invented. They were totally inert and were much easier, you could just keep them in a box on the self.

Healey: Did you ever have occasion to get any feedback as to how well those transplants—

Dibble: I met, uh, one Marine at our annual reunion of 3/5, which we've had for twenty years now, twenty-one years. He saw that video and I always show the video at that reunion, and most of the guys have bought it, and I sold it for what I paid for it. Any rate, this guy said, "You know, I often wondered who did that surgery. I've got an arm here that's absolutely, perfectly normal and I had it done at Easy Med by a surgeon there." And I said—he said, "You might even have helped with it."

[End of Tape 2, Side A] [01:33:28.05]

Healey: This is Tape 2, Side B, an interview on December third, 2009 with Dr. Dibble. We were talking about artery transplants and reunions at 3-5. You mentioned you came across a Marine who said he had an operation done on his arm and a transplant.

Dibble: Yeah, Dr. Spencer just told him he didn't know his name, the patient didn't know the doctor's name, that he thought he could fix it, and he did. And he had a perfectly normal right arm. Yeah, that's a miracle.

Healey: What were your supplies like? Did you—in terms of medical supplies?

Dibble: We never had any problem at all up on the lines or in the medical company.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Never any problem at all. It was just a steady supply. One thing we ran out of in the Battle of Bunker Hill, that three days and four nights, were caps ‘cause you're supposed to change caps after every operation. They finally gave out so, we had plenty of masks. So we just tied a mask on the top of our head to keep the hair from falling out into the wound and another mask over our mouths, but other than that and we did get—I called back to Commander Heirs and he sent a great big box, just a few hours that we were, but I do remember that, that was kinda funny.

Healey: Now you mentioned the Battle of Bunker Hill. What days did that occur?

Dibble: It was in August of ’52.

Healey: Okay. And what was happening there? Why were there so many casualties?

Dibble: The Chinese that had the, that our commanders had been worried about enough that they transferred the 1st Marine Division from the east coast to the west coast, actually occurred. They wanted back Bunker Hill, Reno, Nevada, let's see, what others, Tedokson [sp??], which didn't have any designation, but these were all outposts, and there were half a dozen. Reno? Did I mention that?

Healey: Yes.

Dibble: And they wanted them back. They wanted that territory 'cause it was the high ground in the area.

Healey: So Bunker Hill's on the west side of uh—

Dibble: It is, yeah.

Healey: —Korea.

Dibble: Yes, it's almost straight north of Munsan-ni, which is just straight north of Seoul. You can go up to the front lines in the neutral quarter and go up in the bunkers in the front line, and with binoculars you can see off to the northwest Panmunjom. Straight ahead is Tedoksan [??], which is two hundred and thirty-five meters or something like that, and Bunker Hill is right there. You can see all three of those

from the front lines and Reno and all the others. You can see in a line out in front of our lines, what our lines were then. In the 5th Marines, when we were on the west coast, there were two battalions on the east side of the neutral quarter and one battalion on the west side. The neutral quarter went from Munsan-ni up through 1st Marine Division lines up to Panmunjom. The peace negotiators and the reporters and other people dealing with the three year talks lived in box cars on the railroad in Munsan-ni, and they would go in a procession of about a dozen Jeeps almost every morning right through our line, and when I was with the 3rd Battalion, I would see them down in sort of a little valley. When I was at Munsan-ni at Easy Med, they just went right by our front gates. So I never got to meet any of them. I did see a head of a couple come in with medical problems that I turned over to somebody else, but we had little or no contact with them, as short a distance away that it was.

Healey: That brings up a point. Who did you treat? Were you treating Marines and Navy people or—

Dibble: At Easy Med, yeah, they were all Marines.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And an occasional corpsman. Yeah.

Healey: And was that—

Dibble: No civilians.

Healey: No civilians.

Dibble: No, no. We weren't a MASH unit.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: [Laughs] and no nurses.

Healey: Why no nurses?

Dibble: They just, the Marine Corps doesn't allow them in the front line.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Actually the MASHs weren't front line. They were always ten, fifteen, twenty miles back of the line.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And my warrant officer, George Dupro, was married, and his wife was at a MASH about two hours away from us, and as my predecessor, Roy Ledbetter had done, I let him go once a month to spend the weekend with his wife. And once he said, "Why don't you come over too? Maybe we can find one of those nurses." I said, “No, George. First of all I don't want a nurse. I'm happily married, and that's not part of my character." He said, "Well come along anyway," and I did. Went over there, and--I was going to say "slept with," but that's a bad term. I bunked with the commanding officer of the hospital. I can't remember his name right now, but I was glad we didn't have nurses there. There would be about a dozen nurses for two hundred men, and it would be an intolerable situation. I talked that over with the commanding officer. He said, "Yeah, it's awful." Everybody's trying to get into bed with every nurse, and the nurses are selective, and some of 'em want it all and there's the constant tension, these female bodies around these men. Some of them married, most of them not. It was just, it would be an almost impossible temptation for anybody who wanted to go to bed with these girls, and so I was really—we didn't have that problem, I should say.

Healey: Did you also get the opportunity to look at the MASH set up?

Dibble: Oh yeah, it was so similar to ours.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah very, they were in Quonset huts, which we weren't. Although we did get a Quonset hut for our operating room late in 1952, but they were--that was part of the, what would you say, the reality of *MASH*, 'cause they showed most of the people living in Quonset huts and the operating room was in a Quonset hut, familiar with a Quonset hut? You know what I'm talking about?

Healey: Yes.

Dibble: Yeah, okay. I was--just sort of as an aside, people would ask me, "Do you watch *MASH*? Do you like it?" And for a year or so, I just couldn't watch it. It was so unrealistic. I could appreciate the humor, Alan Alda and the, what's his name, the cross dresser, and the Colonel, but it was so unrealistic that I'd have to keep saying to Edna, "That's not the way it was. They couldn't possibly do that. No." And she said one day, "Maybe you just shouldn't watch." Well, I went to a meeting, Massachusetts General. I was talking to a guy and found out that he'd been in Korea, and that I had been. He said, "Oh, I bet you enjoy watching *MASH*." I said, "I just can't watch it," then went through the same stuff, and he stopped me, said, "Do you watch *Hogan's Heroes*?" And I said, "Oh yeah, I love it. That is really funny." He said, "Do you suppose that’s the way it really was in a German prisoner of war camp?" "Okay, I get your point." And from then on I

could watch it, realizing that it was satire, it wasn't supposed to be realistic, and they did have a few programs once in a while that'd be very poignant and would remind me of the way things really were, but distilling you know martinis with that-- oh it was—and course, Alda, Alan Alda is funny.

Healey: Now you mentioned a couple of times you got to the hospital ships.

Dibble: Both times with wounded men.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: I would usually, if a man had a chest tube in with a chest injury and an underwater sealed bottle, he had to have somebody with him to make sure that bottle didn't get tipped over, or the tube didn't get pulled out, or anything untoward. So, I'd send a corpsman most of the time. A couple times things were real quiet and anticipated that they were going to be quiet, I would say, "Okay, I guess I'll take a little ride." [Laughs] And, one time, I landed on the repose, and guess who greeted me? Captain Eckland, who had been my commanding officer at Great Lakes, who I'd asked to be transferred to the MFF. He was the captain, not of the ship but of the medical personnel aboard. The first thing he said to me, "Oh, Dr. Dibble." He recognized me a year and a half later. "I suppose the first thing you wanna do is take a shower." [Laughs] I thought I was pretty clean, I'd washed [laughs] and then we're standing there, and all of a sudden we hear over the PA system, "Fire on the after deck. Fire on the after deck. This ain't no drill. Fire on the after deck." [Laughs] Oh he got beet red, and he asked once the fire was out, he asked for that man to report to the captain as soon as feasible. I don't know what he did, but he just thought that was not becoming of the Navy, and all I could think of was I'd survived six months on the front lines and six months back at Easy Med, which wasn't a problem 'cause, as I said, we were never hit, but I'm gonna burn up on the hospital ship. I didn't really say that, but—

Healey: I didn't even ask you about shower facilities. Were there any opportunities to take showers?

Dibble: That was one of the major problems on the line, especially when we were on the move. We went--I remember going three weeks once without any kind of personal hygiene, nothing at all, and I would have to hold my nose when I got into my sleeping bag. Most of the time, we were able to get water, and we would just dump it into our helmet liner, and there wasn't any way to heat it a 'course, but we could wash, and we did whenever it got so bad that we couldn't stand it any longer. No showers of any kind, except the two times we went into reserve. They had a big squad tent, twelve by twenty-four, with five shower heads hooked up to a heater and one of the big water tankers, you know, that they pull around, and we

were actually able to take hot showers, and what we did is they had a great big barrel of some kind, we took off our outer clothes and put them on the ground, took off our under clothes and dumped them in there and we took a shower, went out the other end and there were clean under clothes waiting for us.

Healey: Oh!

Dibble: [Laughs] They knew that there was no way that after three weeks we could wash out those skivvies.

Healey: Um.

Dibble: We had white skivvy shirts by the way, and the Marines had the olive green. So, you could tell a man whether he was a Navy or Army, or Navy or Marine by the t-shirt he wore [laughs]. You could also tell from the insignia. The corpsmen had the caduceus on the left sleeve and the marines a ‘course had the chevrons on both sleeves.

Healey: Now having mentioned that, did you button up so that the white skivvy shirt wasn't showing?

Dibble: No.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: We did--I insisted and so did—I got this from Colonel McLaughlin—insisted that the pants be inside the boots, so one hundred percent of the time, which is pretty much true in all the services now, but it wasn't then.

Healey: Oh, okay.

Dibble: Some of the, yeah, Marine outfits allowed them to wear their pants on the outside of the combat boots, which really looked sloppy.

Healey: Something that you hit on probably about an hour ago, but you mentioned that when you went to chow, you took your own utensils with you.

Dibble: Mm-hm.

Healey: Well, when you were finished with chow, what did you do with the utensils?

Dibble: There were three barrels with the hot water and you rinsed them up and down, and the first when I got most of it off, rinsed it up and down in the second one usually got all of it, but you did it in the third one and you could use your finger if you wanted in the first one, and so you cleaned 'em off and cleaned 'em that way. Yeah.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Little things like that, you see, you know, forgotten about until you ask the question.

Healey: What did you do for sterilization in terms of medical?

Dibble: Up on the lines, soap and water. We had no other way. Back in the medical company, we had an autoclave - that's a great big thing that you put whole surgical packs in to sterilize all of maybe a hundred instruments at a time. These were dry heat sterilization, and like in our hospitals still do here and did then, a little button like thing in a little container, sorta like fixing a turkey, when it turns color it's been there long enough. And so you could tell if you pulled it out, if the button hadn't changed color, then back in it went for another fifteen minutes, or twenty minutes. Yeah, so in the medical company, and there were corpsmen assigned just specifically to that, and you know, there were very, very few infections unless the shrapnel went in the bone, then sometimes it was--we couldn't dig them out there at that time. It would take too much time. Left a lot of shrapnel in, left it open, filled it with Vaseline gauze and then put a bandage over the top of that and shipped 'em back to Able Med. Sometimes they would keep going and go to the hospital ship, or some of 'em actually to Japan, but then the shrapnel would be dug out in some other place where they had time and instruments and so forth. Yeah, I left in a lot of shrapnel. The orders were, "Don't play around with it forever. If you can't get it out on the first try or two, leave it in and somebody else will get it out later."

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: We never sewed up any wounds at all, except to the face and the head. Those were sewed up, but all other wounds were left open and closed in what we'd call a secondary closure a week or ten days later.

Healey: If there were injuries to the jaw, to the dental portion, what did you do with those types of injuries?

Dibble: We would do a tracheostomy and then, just to make sure that they were getting air.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: If tracheostomy, meaning putting a hole in, tracheotomy would mean cutting the trachea with a little medical information [laughs] and shipped them by helicopter directly to the maxillofacial surgeon on the hospital ship, because none of us, even Bill Ogle and Frank Spencer, were trained in maxillofacial. Maxillofacial

surgery, so we just shipped 'em out and we did see some pretty horrible mutilations. You wonder what happened to them. I know what happened to one of 'em, 'cause he was in 3/5—a 3/5 reunion and he said he remembered me, and he still had an open hole here on the side of his face, never was able to close it, great guy.

Healey: Something you wrote a little bit about was those, and you mentioned them under different titles or name during each war or conflict but the shell shock--

Dibble: Yeah, it was called shell shock in the First World War. We called it combat fatigue in the Second World War, and we called it a neuropsychiatric evacuation in the Korean War, just a change of terms for the same situation where a man has just reached his tolerance under fire.

Healey: How were those people assessed?

Dibble: Frank Roach, Dr. Roach, was our division psychiatrist, and he was back in division and saw cases back there until I came back to Easy. He's a good friend of mine from Cook County, and so he asked Commander Heir's permission if he could just go to Easy. So he came up and was with us, and I have pictures of him.

Healey: Oh, he was assigned full time?

Dibble: Yes. Oh yeah, and that's all he did. He took his job seriously. The evacuation rate, if you take a hundred casualties evacuated, two of them would be neuropsychiatric in the Marine Division. The other ninety-eight would be war wounds. 'Course this was a wound too I guess you might say, and he would be asked to evaluate the patient, you might call, the Marine, the evacuee, and determine, "Did this man know right from wrong?" And if he did, was he able to adhere to the right or was he unable to adhere to the right? He's ordered into combat, make a patrol, he cowers in the back of his bunker and won't move. Is he a neuropsychiatric, or should he be discharged, or should he be treated, or should he be treated at home in the states, or treated in battalion, or back at the medical company? He had all these decisions to make. "Perhaps, we can get him to the point where he can actually go back into combat," and so he--yeah, he got drunk one night, Frank did. He ordered this man out to be in a dishonorable discharge. They used to hang 'em a 'course back in the Civil War days. They called 'em deserters, and he came, "Look at the blood dripping from my hands, Birney, look at that blood dripping," and he could actually see blood dripping. He was hallucinating. He took it that seriously.

Healey: The doctor?

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: Oh.

Dibble: Yeah. He got over it. He apologized the next day, and I said, "Frank, all you're doing is making your best decision, what you think is right. 'Should he go back to the front? Should he be treated here? Should he be treated back at Able Med? Should he go to the hospital ship? Should he go home, as a deserter?' And you're not the final, you're the first, and your opinion will count, but you're not the final decider. You don't make the final decision about what happens," except for the ones that go back to the lines. Sometimes the guys would just say, "Look doctor," or Lieutenant, or captain, or whoever he's talking to, "I was just scared, but I'm over that and I won't do this again," and then he'd go back. I rarely saw these, they were almost always evacuated at night, went right to Frank's tent. I could hear them over there. His tent was right next to my command post. Sometimes they'd be shouting, sometimes they'd be crying, sometimes you'd hear Frank shouting, or always kind of a murmur, and I knew that somebody was being evaluated for--

Healey: Did you keep in touch with Frank after the war?

Dibble: I did, and I've been in touch. He died here about two years ago, and I'm in touch with his sons now. As a matter of fact, I got an email from 'em just a couple days ago, wishing me a "Merry Christmas." I kept in touch with a lot 'em, Don Flowe, the best corpsmen that I ever had, and Don Barker, I mentioned him on that return trip, and Tom Suttles, our x-ray tech [laughs].

Healey: What did some of the corpsmen do after they got out of the service? Did they—

Dibble: Went into all different kinds of things. Don Barker became a podiatrist, foot doctor.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Tom Suttles became an insurance man. Don Flowe went into medicine, became a physician. John Gumper, my ambulance driver, went, got out of the Marines, went to flight school and became a licensed pilot, and he spent thirty years or something flying the head of a great big lumber company out on the west coast. I can't remember the name of it, but he was his--the CEO's, private pilot for thirty years. He said he had about ten CEOs, well he stayed on and so on. It was like that. Tex Downs just became a realtor, and last time I visited with him a couple years ago, he owned two hundred houses in Austin, Texas. Andy Gumpert stayed in the—Andy Comer stayed in the Marines for twenty-five years, and one guy became a fireman in Seattle, Bob Herman, and—who are some of the others? We

keep in touch through these reunions. Now all of the men there weren't in Korea when I was, or I didn't know them, but when you start comparing notes, "Oh yes, I was there, and I was there, and I was there." And Don Shaller, who did that picture of the little beaver there with pen and ink, was an FO for the 11th Marines in the 1st Marine Division, that's the artillery. I don't know what it is now. And I had gone to see a--it was within the first month that I was there, and I'd seen mortar men working at Pendleton, but never up close, didn't really know what the set up was, and what they did in combat, and so forth. Well, a good friend of mine, turned out that he was a mortar man, hundred and twenty millimeter mortars, and invited me over. They were gonna take some shots at a--in defilade. Well, we may not have been visible to the Chinese, but they knew we were there, because the incoming started falling. We scattered, and one of the mortar men had a really bad wound of his leg. So we pulled him into, there's kind of a little ravine, and then I was working on him, and I sent one runner back to get the Jeep ambulance 'cause I walked over.

It was only a half a mile or so, and all of a sudden we heard penny whistles and gun shots and behind us, back in H and S Company, where we just come from, there'd been a break through, and so we just all lay down and the Marines spread out in a line. They all had their M1s with them too, of course. There were about fifteen of 'em, and I was behind them. They said, "You stay back there, Doctor. We need you," and all of a sudden, we heard another rattle of gunfire, and we saw about fifteen or twenty Chinese running in the next door over, a hundred yards away, maybe seventy-five? Quite a ways. They just kept going, didn't pay any attention to us at all.

Well, I wrote this book, *The Taking of Hill 1052*, and in that, I put this occurrence in, and Don Shallard, a good friend of mine, was up here visiting. He said he wanted a book, so I gave him one. He called back about a week later, and said, "When did that incident take place with the mortar men?" I said, "Oh, I guess that was like February of fifty-two." You know who it was that saw that and sent in, he said, "I saw the break through. I was the FO up in the main line of resistance. I saw the break through, and I got on my double E8 and called back to battalion, and he took the company that was in reserve, and they crossed over into your territory and routed those Chinamen." And I said, "Thanks, Don." Who knows? They might never have found us, but I, the way it was going, we were in a precarious position to say the least, and so I have a good school buddy to thank for maybe saving my life, at least keeping me from getting captured, one of those coincidences of life.

Healey: You mentioned the radios and the dialogue, but wind up or?

Dibble: It was a, yeah, it was a sound powered phone, and you wound it up with a little crank on the side.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And then you shouted at the top of your voice and the sound of your voice somehow stimulated the electrical cells, I think it's about this size in a canvas bag of course, and we used those for, uh--and the commo wires were stretched between—

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: So, com wires all over I take it?

Dibble: Yeah, all over the place, that was one of the big head aches too 'cause they kept cutting 'em, saboteurs. We called 'em guerillas, what was the term they used in Vietnam? They had a special term for those, anyhow.

Healey: So when you were up on the front lines, generally, how was the communication?

Dibble: It was quite good, because they were constantly sending out patrols back of the lines into all the little villages, making sure that they were unoccupied, and if finding anybody, escorting them out to where they could be picked up by a truck and taken to the closest Korean town or refugee. Most the time, it wasn't necessary for me, 'cause I would use a radio to call a helicopter because we didn't have lines stretching all the way back to Able Med or K1 or wherever the doctors were located, but to go between Bob Kimball and I, we used that all the time. He would say, you know, "I'm coming down this afternoon at two o'clock." So I would be ready to go back up with Gumpert when he got there. We thought it was better to have the exchange take place in the rear aid station rather than the forward aid. So, the one on the front would come back and when he got there, then the guy in the back would go up front.

Healey: Well, you talked about being the last person to get orders out of there—

[break in recording][End of Tape 2, Side B]

Healey: This is tape three, being recorded on December 3rd, 2009. Dr. Dibble, and we were just talking about getting orders out of Korea and being sent to Inchon.

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: Go ahead and pick up there.

Dibble: And we just stayed overnight there and got on the ship the next day and went home. It was almost all Army. One of the Army guys was, I'd been in internship with at Cook County. We had a reunion--

Healey: --and when was this? What month and what—

Dibble: That would've been in late March or early April of '53.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: April, May, June, July, just four months before the war ended. Trying to think of the name of that ship, and I can't. It was one of the general class ships. So there'd been about five thousand. The main thing I remember about that is going into the bathroom, and sitting down on that nice warm seat [laughs] and flushing the toilet. For a year and a half, I'd gone into the woods with my little entrenching tool and dug a hole [laughs]. Oh, I remember more than that, but I remember the hot food and vegetables, fruit and vegetables. For a year and a half in Korea, I never had any kind of fresh fruit or vegetables at all. Everything was canned or in boxes like the C-rations or K-rations. Yeah. We had a bridge tournament aboard. I teamed up with an Army guy, whose name I can't remember now either, and we won, and I won a meerschaum pipe, was the only one, first meerschaum pipe I'd ever had.

Healey: What's a meerschaum pipe?

Dibble: Oh it's a white, like clay, except it's hard, and it's dug in France and in a couple places in Germany, and it's one of the premier liners for a briar pipe, or an actual entire pipe bowl is made out of the meerschaum. Yeah. The years I lived in East Africa, they had a small meerschaum pipe business there too, and I could by a meerschaum pipe for—it's two, four, or six dollars, depending on how much meerschaum was in it. Meerschaum pipes on the market are twenty, thirty, fifty, seventy dollars, very expensive. Little bit off the subject [laughs].

Healey: Your ship and your transport back, about two weeks? Or how long did it take?

Dibble: It was eighteen days.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: We didn't stop in Japan. We just went straight through, and this time we landed in San Francisco.

Healey: Did you know you were going to go to San Francisco?

Dibble: No.

Healey: No.

Dibble: Not until we were almost there—Yes, I did. Of course I did. I did.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yes, and the reason I know that I did is because my wife was waiting for me there.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: She actually—now wait a minute, how did that occur? I thought I'd be going to San Diego in like November, December, 'cause I would have been there a year. So she drove out with my mother to San Diego and roomed with a fraternity brother internship, a partner of mine from Cook County, by the name of Fulk. Lonnie Fulk, and she waited there until— just expecting me, you know, daily, and I kept writing her and telling her when I was gonna be, "next month, next month, gonna be next month," and eventually I did get orders to this ship, and they were gonna land in San Francisco. Meanwhile, my mother had gone home, which I thought was--I didn't think anything of it at the time, well yes that's proper, but I thought since, that must have been a difficult thing for her to do, rather than to wait for me. Knowing that I would be with my wife--would want to be with my wife for the first few days and weeks at least. Wally Indeck, I haven't thought of his name for years, was the Army officer I played bridge with. He--his wife was waiting for him too, and I can remember standing on the ship and looking down and they actually had a band down there, an Army band walking as they played the whole time we were off loading, and Wally and I decided that we would go to the Top of the Mark. Did you ever hear of that?

Healey: No.

Dibble: It's a real expensive restaurant at the top of the biggest hotel in San Francisco, and it was up on a hill. We had a big dinner and were walking down to where we parked our--Edna had driven our car out. Wally's wife had a car too, but we were in our car that night. Any rate, I remember going by a soda fountain, we called it then, and there was a great big banana split in the window [laughs]. I said, "I gotta have one of those."

Healey: You hadn't seen one of those for—[laughs]

Dibble: --hadn't seen one of those for, well a year and a half, well more actually, 'cause almost two years by then. So, we went in, and I got a banana split. Funny how you remember a thing, and Wally laughed about that so hard.

Healey: So how long did you stay in San Francisco?

Dibble: Just three days.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah, I had to report to the Navy, forget what it was now, some Navy office of some kind, that's completely slipped my mind. Just to report that I was back and get—

Healey: Where?

Dibble: In San Francisco.

Healey: Oh, in San Francisco.

Dibble: And they wanted my address, so that they could send me orders, 'cause they didn't know then where I was going to go.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: We drove to Springfield, that's my wife's—

Healey: Let me ask, at that time when you got back to San Francisco, what was the feeling about the end of the Korean War? Did you know it was coming?

Dibble: No.

Healey: No idea.

Dibble: We knew that it probably wasn't going to go on much longer 'cause the lines were stable. The last six or nine months of the war the lines didn't move at all, but except very briefly from one ridgeline to another, but they didn't move in those big long sweeping skirmish lines that they had earlier in the war. So, yeah that was—

Healey: So you went back to Springfield?

Dibble: Went back to Springfield.

Healey: Okay. Were you discharged or what was your military status?

Dibble: No. I went to Great Lakes.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah, I was not due out. I had a two year hitch, so I was out on June 30—Well when I was in Korea, I think early on, did I tell about why I decided to go into surgery?

Healey: No, I don't think you did.

Dibble: These visiting surgeons would work with us, and on two occasions at Easy Med, each one of them said as we were finishing up a case, "Dr. Dibble, have you ever considered going into surgery?" And both times I said, "No, I'm going into general practice," and both times they said, "I think you should." I took that as a compliment that they thought that I had some, if not natural ability, at least trainable ability, and so I decided right then that, "Okay, I don't know what to do. I'll leave it up to the Lord. I'll write to Carl Meyer," who was the head of surgery at Cook County Hospital, "and if he accepts me, I'll go into surgery. If he turns me down, I'll go into general practice," and the answer came back a month or six weeks later that I was to report for duty, general surgery residency, Cook County Hospital, Ward 23 on June 30th at 6 p.m. So, I did. I arranged it that I was discharged that morning at Great Lakes and drove directly to Cook County and—

Healey: And after that did you have any more ties to the military?

Dibble: No.

Healey: No.

Dibble: No, that was it. Well, I should say I was in the active reserve for the next four years. I went back down to Navy Pier once a week, again on Tuesday night, and we had of course been married for two years. Edna got a job as an orthopedic nurse, for two hundred dollars a month. I was making a grand total of fifteen dollars a month at Cook County. That's what--I take that back, I got fifteen a month as an intern. I was now making twenty-five a month as a resident my first three years, and I got a rise as the British would say, a raise in salary to fifty dollars a month as of my fourth year at Cook County [laughs].

Healey: So I take it you took a bit of a pay cut compared to your Navy service?

Dibble: Yeah, I was getting, oh I was rich in the Navy. I got five thousand dollars a year, which back in the fiftys that was a lot of money. It really was. My dad wasn't making half of that as a minister. Any rate, we found a place to live and stayed there four years and had both children there.

Healey: Were you compensated for your Tuesday night at Navy Pier?

Dibble: Yeah, about the same. I think I must have been a standard.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: So, was sixty dollars a month, plus twenty-five, plus Edna's two hundred a month, we were able to live in the medical center. They had completely taken the medical center about a square mile around Cook County Hospital, Illinois University, Illinois Research Hospital, the Presbyterian Hospital, and the School of Pharmacy, Dentistry, Nursing, and which was all in an Italian neighborhood, and they evacuated the entire square mile, and the medical center commission moved all those people out, most of them Italians and Sicilians. It was a hotbed for the Sicilian mafia. I can tell stories about that forever, but that is getting off the subject. Any rate, and then they remodeled the outside, replaced steps that were bad, windows that were broken. In general, made them livable again, and then rented them out for fifteen to twenty-five dollars a month. Our first one was eighteen and a half dollars a month. It was not much, but it was a place to live, and we had a better place later on for twenty-two dollars a month and it was like that for the whole four years. Our gas bills were literally forty, fifty, sixty cents a month.

Healey: Hm.

Dibble: No water bills at all. Electricity, yeah that's a dollar or two, a dollar and a half, two and a half, depending. Yeah, everything was really cheap. So there ends my—

Healey: And how did you get to Eau Claire, Wisconsin?

Dibble: I had met a young man, Ralph Hudson, from Mt. Morris, Illinois on a train going to my first duty station way back in 1943. He was at one end of the car and I was at another, and we kept looking at each other. I thought I recognized him. Well, we got together at Lynchburg, Virginia and found out that he was, lived in Mt. Morris and I lived in Rochelle, and we played each other for several years on the basketball forward in the same conference. So naturally we looked familiar but didn't really know each other. Oh he and I stayed friends, medical school, internship, residency, and decided to go into practice together, and we wanted to go into Minnesota or Wisconsin, and so we literally just sat down with an atlas or a map and picked out ten places in northern Wisconsin, ten places in northern Minnesota and investigated all of them using Chamber of Commerce, and we knew an amazing number of doctors practicing in these towns, and we get information about the town, the living, and just--and then we narrowed the field down to about five in each one, and then we just took two weeks off with our wives and drove up here, and we went to--we eliminated Milwaukee, Madison, Duluth, Superior, Minneapolis as being too big. So, we went to Rhinelander, we

went to Eau Claire, we went to Stevens Point and Ely, St. Cloud and some southern Minnesota, well near it, eventually just narrowed it down to St. Cloud and Eau Claire and then decided that Eau Claire had two surgeons who were board surgeons, American Board of Surgery. St. Cloud had seven, so we figured we're gonna get a better start 'cause we're just gonna hang up our shingle, you know? "Ralph Hudson and Birney Dibble, world's great surgeons" and wait for the people to come in, and they did, slowly.

Healey: Now I know from your writings, periodically you have taken off and gone abroad. How were you able to maintain your practice here in Eau Claire?

Dibble: The first time we went for three years in the sixties. Ralph Hudson's practice and mine were small enough that he could handle both, and he enjoyed it. He is, was, and always will be a workaholic and—which is better than being an alcoholic or a chocoholic, but anyway, that's another story. He was able to handle it. The second time I left, that was just for three months. We had taken on a partner, Bill Walter, and the two of them were able to handle my practice with the exception of the chest surgery, which neither one of them did, but by then, we had a chest surgeon in town at the Luther--at the Middleford Clinic, Jim Merrick, and so that's the way it worked, and then in 1980, I decided just to leave my practice. I was working sixty, seventy, eighty hours a week, night call. I was tired all the time, not exhausted, but I just, any given night, I just never got enough sleep. Night calls and up late or up early in the morning at four, five. Any rate and I was making a hundred thousand or so a year and I didn't need that much money for my lifestyle. So, I decided that I was just gonna drop it and find someplace else. The doctors up in Rice Lake wanted me to come up there. They didn't have a surgeon there yet. There was a group of doctors, I forget the clinic now in Madison, but they asked me to come down there, and we went there and spent a couple days in both places and then I saw in a magazine an ad. They needed a doctor, a surgeon, on Guam.

Well I knew of Guam from the Second World War. I'd never been there, and so I investigated it. They flew me out there, and I— so we went to Guam for two years then. There I met a doctor who'd been in Saudi Arabia and said to Edna, "You know, we want to do missionary work. We don't have enough money right now, and the house isn't paid for, and your car isn't paid for, why don't we go to Saudi Arabia where I'll make a"—I made a hundred and twenty thousand a year there without any taxes at all, and we could put that in the, and pay off our debts, put that in the bank and then we could go on a mission trip, which we did. That's when in 1985, we then went seven times to Africa, twice to Niger, twice to Liberia, once to Nigeria, and uh, where was the other one, in uh, Cameroon. And that would be for varying periods of time. We just went where we were needed for as long as we were needed, and then eventually, we stopped going to Africa

and went to Belize, Central America, and Honduras and for again varying periods of time, twice to both of those and then four time to Ecuador and by the time 1999 rolled around, actually we can home on January 1st, 2000, and I was then seventy-five, and I think that's enough.

Healey: Okay. You've done some writing obviously about your experiences in Korea. When did you start doing the writing?

Dibble: Oh, I wrote *The Taking of Hill 1052* about ten, I can look and see. I wanna give you a book anyway. I think it was, it was about ten or twelve years ago. Yeah. What I did, I had, oh, did you wanna--

[break in recording][02:24:05.10]

Healey: Okay I was asking you about, um, what uh, what got you to start writing? I guess I asked, "When did you start writing about your military experiences?" but what caused you to start writing about your military experiences and have them published?

Dibble: Yeah. [Phone rings] Can you pause it?

[break in recording]

Healey: Okay the question that I asked was "What caused you to start writing about your military experiences and have them published?"—

Dibble: Okay. I'll have to back up a little bit. They were planning in our battalion on the east coast, shortly after I got there, an assault on Hill 1052, which is by far the highest mountain in the area. And for several weeks, every evening in the S1 tent, the 6 tent I should say, 5-6 tent, they were discussing the possibility of how to attack it, and one of the fly boys suggested doing it by helicopter. Now they'd been moving wounded, they'd been moving troops by helicopter for up to--like from April of the previous year, but they'd never actually made an assault by helicopter. So, they were planning, and then they actually did begin the training of the Sikorskys, and the men, and how they were gonna go, and all this, and I was in on it, because I had to be there to again go forward of the line at night and find a bunker big enough to house my forward aid station. I kept notes on all of this, all these plans that they were making. Why? I don't know. Okay, fast forward to about ten years ago. I ran across those notes. I thought, "Boy that would make a great novel. The taking of Hill 1052 by helicopter," and then I had all my letters that I'd sent home to Edna, and I had all my memories. And so I just decided that to make a novel out of it, rather than to write it as a personal experience, 'cause

there's several things that, you know, I wanted to get into it that I had not myself had happen to me.

Healey: And what's the name of that novel?

Dibble: It's called *The Taking of Hill 1052*.

Healey: Okay, but it's in novel form.

Dibble: Yes. You know—

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: I got one over here. [Steps away from recorder] 1995, so it's almost fifteen years.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And these are the books I've written back here. And I don't know if you saw that or not. What I would be able to wear if I were in uniform. You probably don't recognize most of 'em.

Healey: Well it's a shadow box is what—

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: What we're referring to now, its shadow boxes.

Dibble: Oh yeah.

Healey: Yeah. Let's uh, very nice—no, I don't necessarily recognize— it is.

Dibble: So, I just sat down and wrote it and got it published.

Healey: Okay. You also mentioned the 3/5 reunions that you've been doing for about twenty years or so.

Dibble: Mm-hm. Yes.

Healey: Do you meet all over, or where do you meet?

Dibble: We do, we go from the west coast to the central plains to the east coast and then back to the west coast. So the--some people can come. They can't fly all the way, they can come to the one that's closest to them. Yeah. This last one was in Branson [Missouri].

Healey: Oh, okay.

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: And is it 3/5 from just Korea or is it from different periods?

Dibble: Just from Korea.

Healey: Just from Korea?

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah. We started out twenty, twenty-two years ago. I didn't get to the first one, was like seventy-five, eighty Marines.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: And their spouses, or significant others, and we had our last one this last September in Branson, and there were twenty-five, and talk about not having any more. There were guys there with walkers, and one guy in a wheelchair, and although I'm the oldest, except for one other guy, I'm in the better physical shape than most of 'em.

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: So yeah, it's good to keep in touch.

[break in recording]

Healey: Okay, go ahead.

Dibble: Yeah, for some years now, I've been going to the American History classes at the local high school, which has about—well there are five classes with about twenty in each.

Healey: And that you said is Memorial High School?

Dibble: Yes.

Healey: Here in Eau Claire?

Dibble: Eau Claire. They, the teachers, there're two of them - one has three classes, one has two - that show my video, now it's in DVD of course, to the class the day before I come. So the entire fifty minutes is questions, and they, soon as I come in and I'm introduced, the hands just start going up, and they go up for an hour, almost an hour, and they're still some hands in the air when the bell rings. They're just so exciting for me. It's tiring too, to stand on my feet from 8:30 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon with a half an hour break, forty minute break

for, but the enthusiasm of these kids about the Korean War is really astounding to me 'cause they're getting a background in the Korean War that ninety percent or ninety percent of the American public have no idea about. It's called the Forgotten War, but I disagree. It's not forgotten. It was never known, and you can't forget somethin' that you never knew. I came back to Cook County and nobody, almost nobody, knew about the war, only those that, particularly the patients. I asked twenty-five young girls on the OB ward once if they had heard of Korea, this was almost three years after it started, one of them had heard of Korea and that was 'cause her brother had been there.

Healey: That's amazing.

Dibble: It is.

Healey: I, I didn't realize that, that it had so little visibility in the fifties.

Dibble: And yet we had a dedication, I think that was that same year, maybe that also stimulated my writing, of the Korean War Veteran Monument in Washington, D.C. Have you been there?

Healey: I have.

Dibble: That's striking for me.

Healey: Yes.

Dibble: And Bill Clinton gave the address, and he very rightly said that the Korean War was the very beginning of our war against communism. Although it wasn't part of the Cold War obviously, because it was a shooting war, but it was the beginning of our fight against communism and a long, long stretch of affairs that followed it.

Healey: Where you there for the commemoration?

Dibble: Yes, I was.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: Have you been back since?

Dibble: I have, one time, yeah. I had a niece who's since moved to Chicago, but she was working for one of the senators as a--I don't know, one of the higher paying parts of the—and she invited us to come out and so Margaret and I were able to go, that's my present wife. We married six years ago. So, I'm a newlywed [laughs].

Healey: And I should say congratulations.

Dibble: Oh, it's been great.

Healey: Good! What questions do you, what are some of the questions that stick out in your mind that young high school students ask you?

Dibble: Oh, they ask me a really wide variety from what we ate, where did the food come from, about--pretty much the same questions you're asking.

Healey: Okay.

Dibble: Where did the supplies come from? How did you sterilize your instruments? What was the worst thing you saw? What was the most terrifying experience you had? Along that line, just about uh, how did we get the men out, what was the uh--and then I illustrate the answer to the question with my anecdotes, my story telling like I've done here today. They ask about a most terrifying experience, I tell 'em. I don't know if I told you or not?

Healey: I don't think I asked that question.

Dibble: No.

Healey: No.

Dibble: It was in the winter, we were still on the east coast, only been there a few months, and we were ordered to move forward with the lines. So we weren't in a bunker. We were working on wounded men on the side hill in the snow, in the darkness. We were able to put IVs in and put on bandages and evacuate them under cover of darkness, but we did have a patient, and JJ Hendrickson was working with me on the other side of the stretcher, and I said, "JJ, I think I gotta turn on a light. I just can't get this blood vessel stopped." So I did. I had a little pen light, if you've ever seen that, I turned it on briefly and just as I did that, without knowing it, a Chinaman had come through. We had a circle of Marines around the, what we--this outside aid station, but this Chinaman had apparently snuck through. Came up behind and just as JJ was saying, "I think he's gone doctor," and so I started to stand up, and just as I stood up, the Chinaman took his burp gun, "brbrbrbrbrbrbr" across the back of JJ, across his back.

Healey: Mm.

Dibble: And he fell forward and I don't know what, and just then a Marine from security patrol was very close by. I don't know how he missed hearing him, but they wore tennis shoes, you know, even in the winter, and this was kind of a slushy snow. It didn't crunch, and we hadn't heard it. Any rate, he shot the guy, killed him right

there in front of me. So, I had the dead Marine on the stretcher, JJ, one of my best corpsmen, and a Chinaman all in a mass there. If I hadn't stood up just then, I probably woulda gotten it too. You know what a burp gun is? Why they call it a burp gun?

Healey: Go ahead and explain.

Dibble: Just that it, when they pull the trigger, it's a submachine gun, thirty—

[break in recording] [02:36:11.03]

Dibble: —named it when they first came into the war.

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: The Chinese with their submachine guns.

Healey: Now when you, you said tennis shoes, who's wearing the tennis shoes?

Dibble: The Chinese.

Healey: The Chinese, okay.

Dibble: Even in the winter. They weren't tennis shoes like we think of 'em. They're little rubber shoes. The kids wore them too. We saw them in the streets when we were going through Korean towns in the winter, bare feet except for the rubber, almost like a rubber sandal. I guess maybe their feet adjust, I guess they obviously do. We had an order coming out in fall of 1952 from the commanding general, "There will be no frostbite in Korea this winter." [Laughs] This was after the Mickey Mouse boots had been—the problem was that these boots, although when they were intact, they were perfect. If they got the tiniest little hole, it broke the vacuum, and it was the vacuum - they call 'em vacuum boots - it was the vacuum that uh, kept your feet warm. It would just like an old fashioned pair of rubber galoshes.

Healey: Mm-hm.

Dibble: Other than that—and so these Marines would get a piece of shrapnel or just catch it on a broken branch or uh, ice, anything that just--they weren't all that strong, and they would get frostbite [laughs]. So, we'd sign them out as uh, vascular problems or uh, some other euphemism in order that the man didn't get court martialed. One of the more stupid things that the commanding general did [laughs].

Healey: That's interesting. I had not heard of that.

Dibble: Yeah.

Healey: Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to—

Dibble: I guess that's it.

Healey: Well, I thank you very much.

Dibble: Well, you're welcome.

Healey: I appreciate it.

Dibble: I look forward to reading my, I'll make a book in itself [laughs].

[End of Interview]