

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Korean War

Personal Experience

O.H 1220

ROBERT FORCE

Interviewed

by

Don F Baker

on

July 7, 1989

## ROBERT FORCE

Robert Lincoln Force was born on February 12, 1929, in Milton Township, Ohio, son of Earland Strock and Minnie Spell Force. He graduated from Newton Falls High School and earned a B S Ed in 1951 and a M Ed in 1960 from Ohio University. Mr Force married Betty Bethel on June 6, 1959, and they have two children Dwight Robert Force, 26 and Diahn Danielle Force, 23

Mr Force was in the U.S Army from July 10, 1951 to March 26, 1953. During this time, he served as a combat soldier in the Korean War. He was awarded a Bronze Star and the Combat Infantry Badge for his service in Korea.

Mr. Force was employed by the Newton Falls Board of Education from September 1954 to May 1989, when he retired. He was a teacher, coach, and principal in the Newton Falls School System. A member of the First Christian Church in Newton Falls, he has always had an interest in sports.

B This is an interview with Robert L. Force for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Korean War, by Don F. Baker, at the Newton Falls Jr High School, Newton Falls, Ohio, on July 7, 1989, at 10:00 am

Bob, do you remember how you first found out about Korea and what you knew about it at that time?

F Well, I did not know too much about Korea at that time. I was a senior in college. And, I got the notification that I was going to be called down to Columbus for a physical. And that is when I got interested in Korea. I found out that I had to take a physical, and I was going to be drafted. That was in 1950.

B: 1950

F 1950

B What were your thoughts about the possibility of you going into Korea?

F Well, I was not too excited about it, but I did not think too much about it. I felt that everyone was going. No one was complaining. I felt that I should go, too. So, that is the only thought I had about it.

B. Would you mind explaining what your basic training was like? Things like, what you did, and housing, food -- those kinds of things.

F Okay. I will start out when I went into the service. I took a second physical in June of 1951. I was deferred for one semester to finish last semester, my senior year in college. So, I took my physical in 1951 in Canton. And I thought I was coming back for a 30-day leave, like most people did at that time. But the next morning, I was at Fort Meade, Maryland. I was inducted at that time. I stayed at Fort Meade for about two weeks. I had the opportunity of handing clothing out to other young men coming into the service at that time. When I first went down there, I thought those guys were there permanently, and they stayed there. And the next thing I knew, I had this job of handing clothes out to guys passing through the line. So, I was there for about two weeks at Fort Meade.

Then I got my orders. We went by train from Fort Meade to Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. I got there sometime -- I would say -- in the middle of July. We were set up in a basic training outfit. I was very lucky to the extent that I did not have basic training like the other fellows did, because I played baseball. I went out for the baseball team. I made the baseball team. I would go out in the field with the guys for basic training. But when we had a game that day, they would send a jeep out to pick me up and bring me back. We would play ball. We had our own mess hall where we ate that night. We always had steak after every baseball game that we had.

I was in basic training for approximately three weeks. The last baseball

game, I was standing there in the baseball diamond. I looked across and I could see somebody looked like there were trying out for football. So it dawned on me I am going over there and try out for that football team. That is when my basic training ended. I had three or four weeks of it. I was removed on temporary duty from basic training, went to the football team, and that is all I did from August until January of 1952. I was out with the football squad.

Now, in basic training, I did get some of general basic training, but not too much. We would go out to the field and learn to march and I think I got as far as maybe the rifles, using rifles and things such as that. The food part, I never complained about the food. Two of the key foods that I liked was -- I cannot use the word that they had -- but it was toast and dried beef and gravy. I just loved that. And stew, beef stew. Boy, when we had that, I ate well. The rest of the guys, for some reason, they did not like that beef stew. I did not mind the food. I did not mind the food but a lot of the guys did complain about it. But as I said, I got a lot of breaks to what the guys did in basic training because I was playing baseball and then I went off with the football team. I got on the football team. After we would practice, we practiced two times a day. And then, after a period of time, we would out to basic training.

I remember we went out to the machine gun range and we fired machine gun. We went by bus. We fired the machine guns. We got into the bus and came back. The poor guys that were out there that had to walk out, they had to clean those machine guns that night. Probably they never got to bed until after 12 00 or 1 00, something like that, cleaning those. So, my basic training part was not that tough. But then after I got out of basic training or after I got off the football team, I could not play basketball. Anyway, after the football season was over, I had the opportunity of going to Leadership School, which is the first eight weeks of OCS (Officer Candidate School). If you passed Leadership School, then you could go to OCS. I spent eight weeks in Leadership School. That is where I got most of my basic training, in those eight weeks there. It was a little more advanced than what you would have in a regular basic training. We had to go to classes, and things such as that. There were 18 of us from the football team that qualified to go to Leadership School.

One thing about Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, it was a direct line to Korea. There was not any way that you could get out of it unless you played football or a sport and you got a hold of the right guys in Japan. But some of our guys that were on the football team, they stayed in Japan. But anyway, when Leadership School was over, there was a period of time before we left for Korea. I had a choice of being a cook or a fireman. So I said I wanted to be a cook. So I cooked at Indiantown Gap for about three weeks before we left for Korea. But I did not learn that much about cooking. So then we left at that time. So you want to stop right here, or do you want me to continue on?

- B. No. What was a typical day like at the Leadership School?
- F. Typical day?

B· What time did you get up? That kind of thing

F We would get up at 6:00 and have an inspection. We would have to fall out in the parade ground, have an inspection. Then we would go to class. And after class was over, that would be just about lunch time. And then, we would have lunch and then we would have classes in the afternoon until dinner. When dinner was over, we had a study period. Some days, though, we were not always in the classroom. We would go out in the field and we would have experiments. I guess you would call them field problems, such as, we would have to use the compass. They would take us to some place, and we would have to use a compass to find our way back. Another time, we would be walking along and they would fire off these false explosions from the ground as if we were getting shelled. We would have to decide what to do in that situation. Or, we would come to a stream. And, the only thing with that stream, it was too wide for us to walk across, and we would go and swim with all of our pack and everything. So they would tell us, "Now you have to find a method of getting across here." So they would have boards and things there. We would take our belts off and tighten them up and get those boards to the right length. And then we could get across the stream that way. And we would get graded on those things.

A typical day in Leadership School, though, was quite exciting, I thought. We had different problems. One day would be different from what the next day would be. It just was not like the regular basic training. I learned quite a bit. In fact, it is a good thing I did go to Leadership School, because I went right into combat the minute I got to Korea. If I had not had that Leadership School, I would not have known what to do. I received good enough grades, but then you had to re-up for, I think, three more years if you went to OCS. And I did not want anything with that. I just wanted to get my time in and get out.

B· So after your leadership, then you went to Japan. How did they get you there?

F Okay. Well, I had a situation there. We had to catch a train from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to Seattle, Washington. They gave us a ten day leave. During that ten day leave, I bought airplane tickets and I flew from Akron, Ohio to Seattle, Washington. That way I got to stay home, I think, for four or five days more. And so, we flew out. I flew out with my buddy from Ravenna to Seattle. We were at -- I cannot think of the Army Base -- Fort Lewis. We spent probably three weeks there. They prepared us for Korea. They gave us information. They gave us a little booklet on Korean language and the culture of Korea. That is where I found out more about Korea than any other time. I mean, they tried to cram that all down your throat in that three weeks that we were at Fort Lewis. And they went through everything -- the culture, what we should eat, not to eat any of their food there, because the human waste was put onto the fields. Then they showed us films of guys that had eaten food or vegetables from Korea and they had large worms coming out. I do not know whether it was fake, but they did have these worms coming out of their mouths and things such as that. It sort of made you

sick. Right then, I did not want anything to do with Korean food. I mean, I think they try to scare you, or prepare you not to eat anything that is produced in Korea. And they gave us some of our uniforms and things that we would need. Not the whole outfit, we did not get the whole combat outfit at Fort Lewis. But, it was a learning experience about Korea there. Very nice, I loved it down in Seattle, yes

B Really?

F Yes. I do not know whether you want to put this in here or not -- but anyway, you would look out. Here is the ocean there. It was just nice and green. You would look off to the other direction and you could see the mountain ranges and snow half way down them. This was in March when I was out there, and the weather was just as nice. It rained a little bit. Seattle is a beautiful town. I enjoyed living there.

B How did they get you from Seattle to Japan?

F Okay, we went by boat from Seattle to Yokohama, Japan. It took us 18 days. I probably got onto the ship, and I weighed 190 pounds. I was sick for all 18 days. We had this, in the Army it is called the Mess Hall. I do not know what we call it in the Navy, wherever you ate. But, when we would go down to eat, I went down there once and I will have to put this in here. But anyway, we had to stand to eat. It was hot in the Mess Hall there. And it was a steel table, long steel tables, just looked like they ran for miles. I know they were not that long. The people were standing to eat. And of course, the ship would rock back and forth. Well, if you did not hold onto your tray, it would slide down and go down on that steel table quite a ways. Well, the first day I went down to eat, they said, "If you ate, you would feel better." Well, I tried to force the food into myself, but the ship went one direction my tray went away from it. And then somebody down a little distance from me, he vomited in my tray. And it came back to me.

B Oh, geez!

F And that was the last time I could get to the Mess Hall. And, by the time we got to Yokohama, I had lost probably 30 pounds. The only thing that I could eat, I had some buddies, a couple of my buddies got pulled for KP. They would go down and bake. They had baked goods. They would bring me up a loaf of bread. I could buy this taffy, it was a chocolate drink. That was what I lived on for 18 days from Seattle to Yokohama. I just could not believe we have a body of water that big, until you get out on one of those ships that we were on. There were 5,400 of us on that ship, troop ship. And, it was not really that big. It was just like a bobber out in the middle of Lake Milton. Boy, you just go up and down, in all directions.

And sometimes, when we hit a storm, the propeller would come up out of the water, and the whole ship would just vibrate. And, we did hit a -- I do not

know whether it was a typhoon, or just a heavy storm -- it was a heavy storm. We were locked in for two days. We could not get out of the compartments. They kept them locked up. One thing that I disliked about it, we were sleeping eight high. The man that slept above me, he weighed about 260 pounds. The bunks were made out of canvas, and they sagged. Once I got into my bunk, he was right on my stomach. He was right there. He was a big man. You could not move. And, another thing I disliked about it, you had to get up real early in the morning. They only had so much fresh water on the ship. And, you could get a fresh water shower. After that water was used up, then you had to go to salt water. I tried to take a shower every day, but down there in that salt, you just could not get any soap suds or anything on you. It just seemed like you were sticky. But, it was sort of refreshing. It was cool anyway.

I spent most of my time sitting up on deck. One of the worst feelings, and I guess maybe I made myself more sick sitting up on that deck, I would get up against that wall here and look out. For a while, I would be looking at the water, and then all at once, the ship would tilt. Then you would go up to the sky. Next thing, you would be looking straight out. And, then you would be looking at the water again in that motion. It just got the best of me and I was too sick. I was dumb, I guess. I just did not want to go down to the sick bay -- they called it the sick bay. I guess I could have picked up some pills down there, maybe could have corrected that.

B Really.

F Not like they have today, but I guess they had some pills that could have corrected that. But, it was amazing. It was quite a trip going over. I would not want to do it again. In fact, the trip over and the trip back was the worst part, I thought, of the whole thing. So then we arrived in Yokohama. Do you want me to tell you about Yokohama?

B Sure.

F Okay. Yokohama, of course, is one of the larger towns in Japan. And, you must remember, this was in 1952. It was not too long after the World War II in 1945.

B Right.

F And the towns, when we went into the harbor, they still had mines and things. You could see them floating out in the harbor. The mines were still floating. They had big mines sticking out. And the towns, you could see they were still damaged. They had not been completely rebuilt. The thing that amazed me, when we went to the camp that we went to -- and I cannot remember the name of it -- were the number of Japanese walking and running along the streets. Now, they had a few cars. And, there were taxis. They had those rickshaws. You could ride in those, where a guy pulled them. Two or three people could sit in

them. But, they had those taxis. The thing that amazed me, it just seemed like it was an anthill to see all these little Japanese people running around. They had those black rubber boots on. The streets were just full of them. And, these guys would come down in that taxicab, put his hand on that. And boy, if those people did not move, I believe he would have run them over. They just scattered all over the place.

And I think we were in Yokohama for about six days, something like that. That was where we picked up all of our equipment for Korea, all of our combat equipment and stuff such as that. No live ammunition. We did not get that until we got to Korea. But our packs and tent, and our little pup tent, or whatever you call it, and things like that. We received it there. I did not get to see too much of Yokohama, except from the dock where we went by bus to the camp, and then back. They did not leave us off the post, because we were going on to Korea. That was another three days. That was not too bad. Apparently, we went up along the coast, you know. And the water was not as rough as it was out in the middle. And I was not too sick at that time. Well, the big thing when we got to Incheon, we unloaded by compartments. I was way down in the middle of the ship. Now, we had to put on our full field pack, and everything, because you had to strap it onto our backs. I think we had our M-1's at that time. They issued our M-1's at that time, too.

B. Excuse me, the M-1 is the rifle right?

F. The rifle, yes the M-1 rifle. The closer we got to the top of the ship there, we could hear airplanes. And we could hear them shooting at things. We could hear artillery. Of course, the word came back down that we were getting shelled. But, when I got to the top of the deck there, we were not getting shelled. What they were doing, they were pulling target planes across the sky and they were shooting at them with artillery and things such as that. But anyway, they loaded us into these LST's, those little landing crafts. You know, where the front end opens up. They were LST's, something like that. But anyway, a storm was coming up. And we were in Incheon Harbor. You could not get into Incheon Harbor because it was just a mess. Just before, that is where they split Korea in half. That is where they really started the fighting at that time.

B. Right

F. And we went in there. And there was a storm coming up. We spent about two hours circling in that harbor in that LST with those full field packs on. We had to stick our M-1's underneath the pack of the guy in front of you to hold him up, because they were heavy. Finally, we landed. That was where I got my big surprise. Incheon was just as flat as this desk top.

B. Oh really?



F I mean, there was not a building standing There was not a building standing They had a train waiting for us there They loaded us on that train, and they gave us C-rations We ate those C-rations

B What is in a C-ration?

F Well, that is the food that you could get in cans They come in cans You would get a can of spaghetti, a can of beans, maybe it would be beans and franks, beans and ham, lima beans, beans and tomato sauce, hash -- those are just a few of the things Then you got a dry pack, which you got two hard tack cookies in it That was your bread. Maybe you got a piece of candy in there, like a gum drop, except it was round and flat Then, you got a sterno to heat it You just light those But, we got those C-rations and this is where I got my biggest surprise, besides seeing Inchon being so flat We did not see any people when we came in. There was no one there We got on that train The train sat there and we ate And they had cans set up for us, garbage cans We threw our C-ration cans in there There had to be thousands of little kids [that] came out there [They] Went through those C-rations out of the garbage to get food That just broke my heart I mean, they were living down underneath, where the roofs were down and things such as that I just could not believe it They just came out in dirty and ragged clothes. It was just awful But Inchon, there was not a thing left in that town From there, do you want me to continue?

B Sure, just keep going

F From there we went on to a replacement center I was put in the Third Division, Infantry Division

B What army was there?

F I believe it was the Eighth Army It was the Third Infantry Division that I was put in We got things there handed out to us. We were probably there two or three days Then, at night time, they picked us up in the jeep and took us up on line, right in combat They did it all at night time My first night up there, at 2:30 in the morning, I was pulling guard duty I did not have the slightest idea what the terrain was like I did not know what was out in front of me I did not know anything such as that Sergeant took me up He says, "Down there, can you see the stars reflecting?" Well, it took me a little while There was a big stream I cannot remember where the river went right now But anyway, he says, "There is a stream down there, and they will cross that stream Now, you watch in that area "

Okay, I watched in that area All night long, I could hear these airplanes going over, from 2 00 a m until about 5 00 a.m. And then the Sergeant came up -- or somebody -- with me on the line, because at 5 00 a m it started to get light, and that was when the North Koreans would make their attack. So he came up

And I said, "Where were all those airplanes going last night?" He said, "What airplanes are you talking about?" Just as I had finished, one of them went over. I said, "Well, right there goes one." He said, "That is not an airplane. That is artillery rounds." They were shooting back and forth. I did not know. I never heard an artillery round before in my life. Anyway, I got a rude awakening in that short period of time.

B Yeah

F After it got daylight, we ate. Then they said that you could go in sleep. Well, in the day they had guys pulling guard duty, but usually in the daytime nothing happened, they said. So, we all went to sleep. And I had been asleep for about a half hour, and all at once I heard this rumble and this roar. I could not imagine what it was. Here, a tank had come up and he was firing out ahead. And every time he would fire, the recoil would back the tank up. One of those tracks would run up on our bunker, then roll back off. Boy, I was sure surprised when I looked out there and could see what that was. But that is what they did with everyone. They just got checking the line at dark. After I was there for a period of time and I became a platoon sergeant. We had guys come up. It was my job to put them on guard duty, two three, four, five. I felt sorry for the poor guy, but that was the only way that you could do it. Everything was done at night.

After that period of time, I was in combat then for approximately ten months before I finally got an R & R back to Japan for five days. That is rest and recuperation. Many little things happened while I was up on line. One of the nicest things, they took us off the line. They had a prison camp back at Pusan. Right now I saw some pictures of it, and I just cannot believe that it looks like New York City. When I was there it was just a mess. They had trouble at Kogi Do island in a prison camp. Back then, the MP's [Military Police] could not handle these prisoners, so they wanted a combat officer off the line. My company was chosen. We went back to thirty days to guard prisoners. It was a learning experience.

B Yes

F This compound was all women. They had another compound there where they were all men. They had another compound where guys had been really wounded. Say, for example, they had this jelly napalm, it is a sticky material that explodes. It just burns the flesh right off. You could see guys in there, their nose would be burned off. Their upper lips would be gone. And they did not want our medics to take care of them. We would bring our medical supplies in. Our food was brought in by trucks, brought to the gate. The gate was open, and it was dumped right there for them. They would sort it out, whatever they needed. They would not allow any more medical personnel or anything such as that into those compounds.

B: What was that? Do you know?

F I do not know I think I do know -- after a period of time I will tell you why I think I knew why they would not let us in there, after I tell you this other part

B Okay

F I happened to be there on May 1, which is Communist Day I was pulling guard duty between two machine guns. They had these big towers up, and they had machine guns on this one, and machine guns on this one. And usually two or three guys walk between them. Just a short distance, too I mean, we just surrounded the whole place. We had tanks there and everything else There was two little towns where this prison camp was located. The civilians would walk between these two little towns. These Communists, North Koreans, were up on top of their buildings putting up posters "Communist Day " I believe there was a big picture of Stalin up there There had to be fifteen of them up on that roof

I am walking back and forth and, all at once, somebody in back of me opened up with what had to be an automatic weapon of some type He was shooting over my head I was down on the ground when he started to shoot because I did not know what they were shooting at It was the South Koreans shooting at these North Koreans on the road Man, he cleaned that roof off in about 30 seconds There was not a guy around I do not know how many got hurt, or anything, but he cleaned that thing off. No one knew who did it. I was not looking back and I was not going to turn around to look back, because I was down flat But I will never forget that day They just had everything I do not know where they got the materials to make those posters, and to do what they did They made flags, and what have you

Maybe I better go back to where these women lived in their compound They bury their dead above ground. You could see where they were buried In those compounds, some of the women had babies. You could see the little mounds where they had buried their babies. Those women were worse than the men They were awful

B Really?

F Oh, man [They] Scream and holler You knew it was filthy stuff that they were hollering at you, but you did not know what it was It was Korean. But they could come out with our foul language, in American language, too They could say that. It was a learning experience to see those women and those men They were separated The longer we stayed there, the worse it was getting. They wanted to clean that compound out, and move them out to Koji Do Island, which was off the coast there at Pusan It was a better prison camp, I guess. So, to try to control them, we shut the water off I should not say "we", but I guess I am with them It was we We shut the water off

And one night I had to pull guard duty, another guy and I, at the main water

tank They could reach through the fence and turn that water tap on if they wanted to It was our job to see that they did not They came out there throwing stones at us, you know Boy, they were throwing everything in sight I had a pretty good arm. This other guy did, too We were not supposed to throw stones back at them and we were not supposed to shoot at them, either, as long as they were inside. Anyway, I decided, I am going to throw stones back at you guys. You are throwing them at me I had a little better arm than they did, so they backed off Another thing, they hate a bayonet

B Oh, really?

F We would always put our bayonet on and just jack it up to the fence. That would back them away from the fence. They did not want anything to do with the bayonet. So, we finally shut the water off They stored water, so they had things in there They had made things to store that water over a period of time So one day they decided, "Well, we are going to clean this compound out " They moved tanks in, personnel carriers, machine guns -- we had everything And we went through the fences. Now, this is why, I think, they did not want us in there They had weapons in there made out of the litters They would take those They were aluminum side doors on them They had those made into spears They would take barbed wire, four or five pieces of barbed wire, about four feet long, had it wrapped with tape here [They] Took the barbs off Boy, they would swing those things at you.

When we went in there, we had concussion grenades and things like that. We cleaned it out. Then we had to take them up to a place where there were interpreters A funny thing -- I have to put this in here -- I had a real good friend when I was in high school David French was his name I never had seen him after we graduated from school. I found out, when we took them to this place where the interpreters were to question them and them ready for Koji Do Island, he was an interpreter in there.

B Really?

F. I never did get to see him, though I never got to see him there, but I found this out after I came back We cleaned that place out Tanks, they moved everything in It was completely cleaned out So I had thirty days guarding prisoners And then I was sent back up on line with the whole combat outfit, back up on the line The thing that was amazing about it, when we moved from the line -- up around the 38th parallel -- back to Pusan, which is the southern most part of Korea, we had to go by train They had those narrow-gage trains It took us three days, that distance -- forward, back, forward, and back [There were] No sleeping quarters We had to sleep on the floor. [There were] No bathroom facilities, nothing like that Everything was wooden inside those little trains [It was] Very uncomfortable, very uncomfortable I cannot remember how we came back up there I do not remember whether we went by truck, or whether we went by train

back then. I remember the trip down. But then, I went back on line again. I can tell you about one day of combat.

B Yes, that would be good

F Well, it was a funny situation. The thing that really upset me, I was a Douglas MacArthur backer, and he said, "Once we had them on the run, keep them running." But, of course, they said, "No." We had to stop. So it got to the point where, one day we would go out and look this hill over, and maybe get one guy killed, or two or three wounded, and they would come back. That night we would ambush them and kill a couple of them. They knew exactly where we were because we had to walk on these rice patty dikes. You could not get off because it was all swamps on both sides and, I do not know, I imagine they were two, three feet wide, something like that. So one day somebody got the bright idea that we should take this ridge with all these fingers that ran down from them -- they call them fingers. We had to take the furthest one over, the outfit that it was in -- my platoon. I was the platoon sergeant at that time. No, I was not the platoon sergeant at that time. I was a BAR man.

B That is Browning Automatic Rifle.

F Browning Automatic Rifle. They weighed 23 pounds, they were heavy.

B Really?

F They are heavy. You have to wear a full jacket with twenty magazines in it, full of ammunition. Plus, you have an assistant that carries a full jacket with him, too. Your assistant carried the rifle and you carried the tripod, if you needed it. But when you were in a skirmish line, which I am coming to, I would carry that, and he would carry an automatic rifle with him. But anyway, it was raining. It was during the monsoon season. And when you have the monsoon season there, these rains that we had here, no comparison. You could not even see that wall when it started to rain. In fact, it was raining so hard that day that our artillery rounds were being detonated by the moisture.

B Really?

F Coming over our heads, that is how heavy the moisture was that day.

B Oh, my goodness.

F We were getting explosions over our heads. It was from our own artillery, we found out later on. We got out there, and every time those artillery rounds came in, we had to dig in, you know, because we did not know what was happening. Well, when you have a Browning Automatic and you get water on them, and you

get mud in them, they just do not fire. There is no way you can fire those things. We got out there to take that ridge, and we got into a skirmish line. Everyone was in a straight line. Well, I was right in the middle of my BAR, and the platoon sergeant was right next to me, Sergeant Sailor from Oklahoma. I can remember that name just as plain. The reason I can remember it, we were going up that hill, and I said, "Sergeant, my BAR will not fire. It is wet." You have to hold on to it with this hand here.

B. With the right hand.

F. Yes, and the bolt is over on this side.

B. On the right side.

F. On the wrong side. So I had to hold this with the handle. There is a handle on because that barrel can get so hot. I have seen guys grab that hot barrel, and you had to pry their hands off.

B. Oh, really?

F. It just burned the flesh right off. But anyway, I put my handle there, and I pulled one round at a time. I would fire it and pull another, and fire it. It finally got jammed. I said, "Sergeant, this is jammed. I need some help." So he comes over and he is working on it. I pulled it and I pulled the trigger at the same time. Man, it went off. I had to point it right straight down. And it went right past his foot. It just made a hole in the ground about that big [indicating size]. He looked down at his foot. He looked up at me. And he swore. He said, "You missed my foot. I would have my way home if you would have hit my foot." [Laughter] That was his first day. If I would have hit his foot, it would have taken his foot right off, probably.

B. Yeah.

F. But anyway, we went up. We continued on up through that heavy rain. We took the hill, although we did not have any resistance at the time. We got up on the hill and, all at once, we were getting machine gunned. You could see the mud flying up, and we could see the bunker way out in front of it. We did not have anything to fire out at that bunker. We held it, and then we got to watching back. It started to clear up just a little bit. We could watch over one another. And this one guy -- I will not forget that guy -- I do not know whether he was brave or he did not know any different. The Koreans, when they threw their grenades, they had the "potato mashers," they were called. They had bamboo sticks on them and they had rings on the end of them. They could run with strings and they would run those strings up there. They could stick three or four of them through their fingers like that, and throw them.

B Throw them, yeah

F And the rings would fire them when the string pulled the pins out.

B Pull the safety pins out.

F And this bunker was holding this one platoon down They could not take their ridge. And this guy would run up there with a grenade, and throw that Man, you would see those grenades. He would go out, circle, and run back down the hill They never did get that hill taken Finally, we got knocked off the hill, too We had to retreat out of there No one said whether we should hold the hill or not, but I guess you could call that a strategic withdrawal

B: Yes

F So we had to get out of there. We went back into the valley We regrouped there and Casmire Deluski was my buddy from Steubenville He was in "B" squad and I was in "A" squad, and something such as that He hollered over at me He says, "Hey, Bob I got a big box of candy from my mother yesterday. I got a pocket full of it. Do you want any?" I said, "No Not right now I am in this shell hole and this is where I am staying." You could hear rounds going over I do not know why those guys all grouped together. They all grouped together when an artillery round came in. Out of that platoon, we lost over half of them just on that artillery round We had to have a role call that night to find out, because the round hit on some of them, and it just blew them apart We had our barber, a guy that cut our hair He had a pair of scissors with him a comb all the time He would cut our hair He was not really a barber, but he did a good job Very religious young man He never swore He was from Birdsboro, Pennsylvania. I remember that, but I cannot remember his name Anyway, he had his insurance made out He had half of it made out to his girlfriend, half of it made out to his mother. Boy, he was hit You could not even identify him Anyway, I was in that shell hole. There was not that much water in the hole with me

B About six inches

F Yes. When that round went off, they all decided they were going to get in the shell hole with me. I was caught in the bottom, I could have drowned I had my face down in that thing All I could smell was that gas from that round going off. So, finally, we got straightened out If somebody was wounded, you could pick up a litter and take them back to Battalion Aid So Deluski and I picked up this one guy, got him on a litter, and we would run with him -- I would say -- two or three miles. We got him back to the battalion When we got back to Battalion Aid, Deluski told me, he said, "Boy, my backside, it just burns something awful " He said, "I cannot stand it " Well, I could not see anything, so I said, "Take your trousers down " He did, and his shorts looked like a sieve

B Oh, no

F He had 18 pieces of shrapnel and did not know it until he started running.  
Perspiration started to burn

B. Wow.

F They sent him back See, in Korea, if you were badly wounded, you would not stay there They sent you back to Japan because of the bacteria from the human waste that is on the field. The bacteria was so high, you could get an infection So, they sent him back to Japan He thought he was going to go home I did, too They straightened him up. They sent him back, and he became a company clerk He had to sit on a cushion He had to make up his duty See, you got so many points a month there, in combat. If you did not get the points and you were capable of coming back, they sent you back So, he had to come back I did not get to see him, though. I had left before he had come back That was a typical day in combat It was very foolish The part that was foolish was the fact that you were not allowed to go any place, only so far ahead. Then you had to come back They knew exactly where you were going to be, because they had to follow the same rice patty out there every day

Another thing that I would like to tell you about is that, when we would come back from a patrol at night time We would go out on combat patrol We would carry approximately seven or eight bandoliers of ammunition That was a lot of ammunition We would probably have five grenades on us. Every time we would go out, we opened brand new boxes of grenades and brand new boxes of M-1 ammunition, because if they had dirt on them or if it was dirty just lying around, it would not fire through those automatic weapons So everything was brand new that we got When we would come back, we would make sure that we never brought it back We would just take those bandoliers off and throw them in the rice patties, and throw those grenades over in the rice patties

B Oh, really?

F And I have often wondered about when they started to farm that after we left, those water buffaloes

B [They] Hit that stuff

F [They] Hit that stuff, and would just blow those water buffaloes and those humans up.

B Do you know where that was, geographically?

F. That was around the thirty-eighth parallel in Korea



B Okay

F A little bit about the point system that they had in Korea?

B Alright

F You could rotate home if you received 36 points. You got four points a month for being in combat. If you were back in blocking position, which was just in back of the line in case there was a breakthrough, you got three points. If you went back in the reserve, now, that was further back where you rested up -- you did not have to do too much, you just rested up to get ready to go back up on line -- you got two points. Now, if you were not in Korea, I think you got a point a month, something such as that. I am not sure. That is how the points were developed there. I picked up my forty points in just a little over eleven months, so I spent most of my time in combat or in blocking position. So I got my forty points.

Let me tell you about a situation after that time when we tried to take the hill. Of course, we did not have enough men for a platoon, so they had to find replacements in a hurry. So they sent us up whatever they had: cooks, mailmen, anything. And this mailman came up. He was ready to rotate home. He had 42 points but he had not rotated yet. They sent him up. They put him in a bunker there with a Korean. At that time, they were slowly moving the Koreans, South Koreans, into our outfits. Eventually, the Koreans were going to take over, you know, after they became combat prepared, or whatever you want to call it. He was in this bunker with him. Now, on the front of the bunker, when you are looking out towards the line, the opening is called the aperture. Well, during the daytime, you always put camouflage over that so they could not see the aperture. Most of the bunker would be covered with dirt. [It] Would be covered with trees. Trees would be growing on it, bushes, or whatever you want to call them. Very few trees there. If there was, our artillery would have taken them all out.

Anyway, they heard a noise and they got all excited. They threw a grenade out of the aperture. Well, they forgot one thing. They never took the camouflage cover off of the aperture. Well, the grenade came back into the bunker. There is just a small opening to come out the back of one of those bunkers, and the mailman, he made it through the opening first. The Korean, it killed him. But that poor mailman, I bet he never sat down the rest of his life. I bet he is sure glad he was a mailman, because he was just wiggling, coming out of that hole.

One of the oddest things I have had happen to me was when I became platoon sergeant. They sent us in probably ten ROC [Republic of Korea] soldiers one day, slowly replacing the GI. Well, I could not speak any Korean. I never attempted to. I did not care about their language. And they could not speak English, of course. We were in a situation where the line came down straight and went out to a point. Well, that point was where I was located that night, and I had about five or six of those Koreans out there with me. I was laying in a trench. I figured, well, I will try to catch a little nap. They were on guard duty. I tried to

catch a little nap there. And you always woke up just about 4 00 a.m. every morning, because you knew you better be awake at that time. So, I woke up. If a bird just landed in a tree, you would swear that was somebody walking at that time in the morning. It just scared you to death.

Anyway, I am looking out there after it gets light. I am looking out over the front of the aperture there, or the trench, and these Koreans are standing on both sides of me. My eyes dropped down to the front of the trench there, and, and there were 18 grenades laying a straight line. Those guys had taken those grenades and straightened the pins on them. If you would have turned them sideways, they would have fallen out. See, that is a cotter pin that is in there. When you see these guys in movies pull them with their teeth, they do not pull them with their teeth. There is no way you could. Boy, you would have to give a jerk on it. But anyway, they had those pulled. The point of it was, if I would have reached down there and knocked one of those, not know what they had done. When I saw that, I almost had a stroke.

I had a young man come in one time. I took him down. He came in at about 2.00 a.m. I took him down and put in on a place along the line there. I said, "Now, there are grenades along there if you need them." The next morning I go down and he says, "Those grenades, they were not any good." I said, "What do you mean, they were not any good?" I knew there were about 15 of them right there. You know, he kept so many. He said, "Well, I threw them all, and not one of them went off last night." [Laughter] I said, "Did you pull the pin?" He said, "What pin?" I said, "You did not even know that there was a pin to them?" I made him go out and pick them all up, bring them back and put them there [Laughter] But there are a lot of little stories that I could tell like that.

B Yeah

F But anyway, I picked up my points. You got your forty points and you would rotate home. I did rotate home after eleven months. I can tell you about coming back from Korea.

B Before that, though, was there any time limit that they had as to how long you could be in combat? I mean, like 30 days?

F About 30 days

B Is that what it was?

F Thirty days and they would pull you off. I was on a number of outposts. Now an outpost is an area that is probably a mile or more. It is a hill sitting in the open and that they would pick, and it was out in front of a main line. If anything happened, then you would always tell them in the back. When you went to an outpost, you went out there for about 15, 20 days, no longer than that. You only had so much drinking water. You could not shave. That was when I decided I

would never had a beard, because you could not wash, and your face would itch something awful. I decided never to have long hair. But we would go out there and we would take so much C-rations along with us. After 15 days they would pull you off. Then you would rest up. If you were up in line, maybe 30 days you would go back, maybe ten or 15, just to take it easy.

You had cooked food there. They always would bring you up one hot meal a day. [They would] Try to get you one hot meal a day. I was at -- just to show you how cold it is there -- at Thanksgiving time, they had a regular Thanksgiving dinner, just like you would have at home, just like you would have it in the Army base. And they brought it up on line for us. Mashed potatoes, gravy, turkey, dressing, those red berries. What do they call them? I cannot think of it.

B Cranberries

F Cranberries. They even had those. And hot coffee. The temperature was forty degrees below zero that day. By the time you got settled down, your gravy was frozen.

B Oh, my goodness.

F. That is how cold it was. When I went back for R & R to Japan, the temperature that day was 45 degrees. Now, we were dressed for 45 degree temperatures below zero.

B Oh, my goodness.

F. We got on that plane at Kemp Air Base. One of those tiny box cars, which are not pressurized or anything. You could see the rivet right next to you, it would just be vibrating. It was not tight. They flew us back to Osaka Negoria in Japan. When we got back to Osaka Negoria, it was 40 degrees above zero.

B Oh, my goodness.

F But when we got on the plane, they gave you a May West life jacket, and they gave you a parachute. I do not know whether they thought I was going to use them or not. They would have never gotten me off of that airplane. They could not have gotten me to jump. I would have never used that parachute. You sit alongside the wall in a flying boxcar in just a little round seat, and the wall was your back rest. And when you sit down you sit down on your parachute, and you had that May West on. In case you land in water, you pull that out, and you would float, so they said. I know I never wanted to try it.

But I spent five nice days in Japan there. We went to a military hotel. No dinner was more than two dollars. I ate steak twice a day, every day for five days. Man, and I always ordered a quart of milk. [We] picked out what we wanted, and little Japanese girls would serve us at a table. We just sat there in beautiful

rooms, really nice. I did not want to go back to Korea. I was there ten months. I almost had my forty points before I got my R & R. And I went back. I did not want to go back, because you get some thing like that, and I knew something would happen. But, it was not bad, those five days of R & R. Okay, you had a question there, and I got sidelined. Oh, how long I stayed up on the line

B Right. You answered that. What about your leadership, like officers and lieutenants, and people like that. What do you think of those?

F. Well, I had a great platoon leader. That is the only guy we got to know. We did not get to know anyone in the battalion. I had a great platoon leader, Lieutenant Moore. He was a state highway patrolman from the state of Washington. He was excellent. Then we got an ROTC officer in. Now, I was a platoon sergeant at that time. He was the platoon leader. But the first couple days there we had to go on a patrol. When you go on a patrol you always take out comma wire to hook to your radio.

B A what?

F A comma wire, communication wire. It is a roll and it squawks when you walk. You took that out. The radio man had it. You had sound powers with you, too, but you also had that radio.

B What is sound powers?

F Well, that is what you hooked on to that comma wire. You would squeeze the button, and you blow into it, and then you could talk.

B Okay

F And you would hook that comma. A regular radio could operate back and forth. But the reason you took the comma wire with the sound powers is because the radio man could get hit. And that happened one time. He got hit, and the radio was gone. Everybody still had the sound power. Anyway, just to show you what he wanted to do, he was ROTC. He said, "Let us take the comma wire out in the daytime." And then he said, "We do not have to carry at night." I said, "You mean to say, you cannot see anything wrong with that?" He said, "No, that is a good idea." I said, "Now, what would happen if a round would come in, in the daytime. What if they were watching you when you went up there, they knew exactly where you were going to go, and they sent up an ambush patrol? And he said, "Well, I guess we better not do that." I said, "I guess you are right." [Laughter]

So one day we had a squad that was tied down out in the valley, and most of us are just sitting there. There were tree stumps. Our artillery just took all the trees and green, and whatever you had there in Korea was gone. We were sitting

there watching them, and he come running over. He said, "Let us go out there and help them." I said, "No. Do not go out there and help them. They will work their way out of it. You will get more guys tied up out there than you can handle. Let them work." "No, I am going," he said. I said, "Well, I am not volunteering. If you want to volunteer, you go." He went. He came back a half an hour later. He was almost killed.

You know, some of those guys, the guys that went through the regular Officer's Candidate School, or guys that are life-time officers, they could go over there. But these guys that are just coming in, they had a lot to learn. I was with the same guys for quite a period of time, you know. Most of us would get there at the same time and rotate together, and rotate back home. But some of them just did not have it. You know, the thinking part of it. And I do not have anything against ROTC. That helped a lot of kids. That helped a lot of kids get through college, but it does not help in combat. You do not have that background. The longer you were there, you could tell. You could hear a round coming in. You knew exactly where it was going to be. But when I first got there, I did not have the slightest idea where that round was going to be. I was down all of the time. Everyone coming in was. You could just judge, well, it is going to be way off there someplace. You just do not think about it.

B. Speaking of leadership, I know you were saying you supported MacArthur. Did you have any comments about when Truman fired MacArthur?

F. A lot of the guys seemed to be upset about it there, you know. Most of the guys, they wanted to get it over with.

B. Right.

F: You watch MASH, that program on TV?

B. Yes.

F. You know how they talk about it. That was the same type of talk. "Let us get it over with. You had them on the run once, let us do it again." I think I was home at the time he was fired. The war was over in 1955, I believe. And I came home in 1953. I think he could have been fired after I had come home. I know when I came home I was a little disturbed about it. I liked MacArthur. And Ridgeway did a good job there, too. I do not have anything against him, but I thought MacArthur had the right idea. "Once you have them running, keep them running."

B. From the perspective of today, do you think Korea was a necessary war? What did you think at that time?

F. Well, at that time, they knew I was at college. I graduated from college. And that Lieutenant Moore, he knew that I was his right hand man. Anytime there was a

speech to be given or something where he could not give it, I was always requested to give it. I had to talk on Korea to convince these guys why we were in Korea. I do not know whether you could convince some people, but no one seemed to disagree with you like during the Vietnam War. I cannot remember anyone being on drugs. No one ever thought about drugs at that time. We were allowed so much beer a month. Not up on line, but it was back. When we were in reserve we could get so much beer a month. It was not enough that you could become an alcoholic. There was one guy, I think, that may have been an alcoholic. He came up missing. We never did know whatever happened to him. The last time somebody had seen him, he had a five pound can of Spam under his arm and he was heading for North Korea, they said. That was the last time we ever heard about him. That was the only man.

We had some guys, of course, [they] came to combat, they had a nervous condition. And there are people that way. They just could not take it. They ended up back in the battalion, holding up sides of tents and things such as that. And some of them pulled that, too, to get out of it. Patrol, like when you went on a patrol, if anyone had a bad cough you could not go on that patrol. Well, some of those guys had a bad cough 24 hours a day. You knew someone had to go. It just was not like the Vietnam War. Everyone seemed to go and take it.

I know when I went in at Fort Meade, Maryland, and when I came to Indiantown Gap, there were 44 of us on that football team. Just about every one of us had graduated from college. But they needed infantry guys in Korea, and it did not matter what kind. Unless you wanted to go to Officer's Candidate School, or unless you were in premedical, then they would send you to Fort Sam Houston in Texas, which was a medical center. But you knew where you were going if you ended up at Indiantown Gap, and it did not matter whether you had a college degree or not. I thought for sure, being out of college, I would stay and be a physical education trainer someplace. They did not need them at that time. They did not need them.

B Talking about Vietnam, we hear a lot about Vietnam today, and very little about Korea. How do you feel about that?

F. It upsets me.

B Does it?

F It certainly does. That Vietnam War has been over for a period of time, and I think we should forget it, unless there is something about this Agent Orange, you know. Get that straightened out, but let us not just complain and bring it up all of the time. I see now, it has been 35 years since the Korean War has been over, and we get our first monument now in Washington D.C. Ann Landers was a big pusher on it. She has collected almost a half a million dollars. She writes about it in her articles all of the time. They had it on TV, and they just needed another million dollars and the monument will be started. It just upsets me to no end to

see a bridge in Youngstown, the Vietnam War Bridge, the Vietnam War Park, the Vietnam War this

The Korean War only lasted from 1950 to 1955. I should not say Korean War Harry Truman called it policing, and that upset me to no end Convince those 55,000 that were killed that it was policing And the Vietnam War went on for how long, and they just have not many more than 55,000 killed in it. They say, "They came out of combat so quick " They could not have It is no different than when I came out The only difference that I had, I came back by boat. It took 17 days or 18 days to come back by boat I landed in San Francisco We went to the camp there [We] Flew from there after two days to Fort Custer up in Michigan I was discharged after three days there I was discharged and out of the service less than 39 days after I came out of combat

B How did the people greet you? Any problems?

F No There was not any problems at all I was still thinking about combat all of the time I remember I worked at the tube mill. I got a job at the tube mill, and they were cutting pipe down there. I came on by, and they would cut one of those pipes, and I hit that floor so quick It embarrassed me That was the only time And I just do not remember people, as I said, on drugs or drinking or anything such as that, that I hear about with Vietnam I cannot prove it, but I hear these stories, you know And I just feel that that war was no different Think of those guys in World War II Some of them were in prison camps for years and years. I would say the Germans were much better fighting people than those Vietnamese But that is just my opinion

I am glad now I am glad that they are getting something for the Korean Veteran, at least in Washington D C I think it is about time. John Glenn, Senator Glenn, was the one that pushed it And I am glad he brought that up, and he had said that in one speech He, more or less, insinuated that maybe we should be forgetting about the Vietnam War and getting along with other things.

B Well, I think we can finish up now Is there anything else you wanted to say about it that we did not cover?

F No There is nothing I do not know whether it was needed It bothered me a little bit We still have North Korea We still have South Korea Did we gain anything? I do not know whether we did or not Now we have North Vietnam and South Vietnam. I do not know whether we gained anything that way or not But I will say one thing if we were going to send guys to Vietnam, if we are going to send guys to Korea to be killed, maybe we better be doing more about South America That is awful close Why should we allow those people to come down there and take over We should have known we were not going to allow from those two countries That is pretty close That just disturbed me

B Yes, well, thanks a lot.

F I enjoyed talking about it. It has been a long time. A lot of these things I have never written down. As I look at these pictures, I remember things, some of the guys I was there with. Really, I have never talked to one guy I was in the service with since I have gotten out.

B Oh, really?

F Paul Lachina, Linzio Paul Lachina, he was football coach at Ravenna. We met every so often. He was with a heavy mortar outfit in Korea at the same time I was there. He was the center on our football team. Deluski came up and stayed at my place, about a year after he got out of the service. That was the last time I have seen him. Jones had a heart attack. I have not seen him since he had that heart attack. But you are welcome.

B Thank you.

End of Interview