

# **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

**Donald C. Kruse**

conducted by Martin W. Thomas

May 12, 2004

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library  
in partnership with the Library of Congress

## **Part 1: Introduction:**

**This interview is being conducted on May 12, 2004 at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, IL. My name is Martin Thomas. I am speaking with Mr. Donald C. Kruse. Mr. Kruse was born on September 18, 1931, in Chicago, IL and now lives in Burr Ridge, IL. Mr. Kruse learned of the Veterans History Project through the Indian Prairie Public Library newsletter. He has kindly consented to be interviewed for the project. In addition, he wrote a brief account of a combat experience in Korea. During this interview, I will be using that account as a basis for many of my questions to him today. Here is his story:**

**Mr. Kruse, how do you prefer to be addressed during this interview?**

Don.

**I have a copy of your manuscript here, and with your permission I would like to add it to the transcript of this interview.**

Oh, that's fine.

**What prompted you to write the account?**

Well, out of the blue one Sunday evening about five years ago a fellow that I served with in the Army over in Korea called me. And he said that his son had located me over the Internet, and, you know, he asked me, like if I was in the Army and what outfit I... And when I told him, he said, "Bingo!" you know, "Lennie Gaeta!" And I remembered Lennie immediately, even though it was 50 years ago. We were close friends in Korea, and shared some memories. It was wonderful to hear from him, and since then I've kept in touch with him.

**When he called you, how long had it been since you had talked to each other?**

Oh, 50 years.

**About 50 years? Well, before we get to the incident that you describe in your written account I'm going to ask you some other questions about your military experience before that time.**

OK.

## **Part 2: Entering the Military:**

**When did you enter the service?**

In October of 1950.

**Where were you living at the time you entered?**

In Chicago.

**What were you doing at that time?**

Well, I had graduated from high school and I worked that summer. I worked for a tree trimming

company, and then of course Korea hit and I felt the need to enlist.

**So you weren't drafted. You enlisted.**

No, I enlisted. In the United States Army.

**And why did you join?**

Well, I was young, and I felt this patriotic duty. I absolutely couldn't wait to get in, and get over there at the time.

**So you wanted to go to Korea.**

I wanted to go. I wanted to go to Korea.

**And why did you pick the Army?**

Well, I wanted to join the Airborne, which I did. I was a paratrooper. That's why I picked the Army. They had the Airborne.

**What about the Airborne appealed to you?**

Well, it was exciting. I guess I was a bit of a risk taker when I was younger.

**Where were you inducted, Don?**

At Ft. Campbell, KY.

**What were your first days at Ft. Campbell like?**

Well, it was OK. I never really complained much. The one thing (chuckles) I remember the most was like my first dinner in the Army, going through the chow line. Putting a piece of meat in the mashed potatoes, and the next guy put Jello on top of my mashed potatoes (interviewer laughs) and I never forgot that (laughs) and I just kept moving along. I didn't say anything, enjoyed the meal and... My wife always says I'm one of the only guys she knows who never complained about the food in the Army. I always.... To me it was fine. I never... The Army was good.

### **Part 3: Training:**

**Now your basic training, was that at Ft. Campbell?**

Ft. Campbell, right. Boot camp.

**Tell me a little bit about your boot camp.**

Well, it was pre-airborne. I mean, everybody in boot camp, we were all going to jump school after boot camp, so it was pretty rough. Everything we did was double time. Everywhere we went was double time. Go to the mess hall, double time. Get up in the morning, double time, double time. And I remember some of the cadre, especially a Sergeant Soper and Sergeant Bogardus. They were tough on us, but fair. They were fair. And I have to say I enjoyed it. I

mean, everything about it. You know, when you go in you're green. You don't, I didn't know how to march or to do anything, but I picked up on everything very fast. I have to say I kind of enjoyed it.

### **How long was boot camp?**

As I remember, I could be wrong, I want to say 12 weeks. You know, I'm not positively sure how long it was.

### **And after your boot camp...?**

I went to jump school at Ft. Benning, GA

### **What was that like?**

Oh, that was exciting. I mean, we did five jumps before we graduated. The last day we did two jumps in one day and...oh, I do remember, that was very... the last day, the first jump, they call them "sticks." They had a stick on each side of the plane. We jumped out of "Flying Boxcars." And I remember I was like the last guy in the stick, and the guy ahead of me froze. Because when the green light went on and the jumpmaster said, "Go," everybody started going out the door, and the man ahead of me froze and couldn't get out the door. So by then, they pulled him out and I still had to jump. So he put his arm around me and said, "If I tell them to go around the drop zone again, will you go?" And I said, "Yes," so I had to jump out by myself the last jump.

### **Now, to get you ready to jump out of the airplane, how do they train you to jump out, and land, and that sort of thing?**

Well, some of the things I remember, one was like a three foot stool and we practiced "PLFs," which are parachute landing falls. There's about 12 types, ways to do it. And then you'd go from there to a 34 foot tower where it's a mock airplane, and you jump out, and you're hooked up to the harness, and you drop about ten feet and then slide down. And that 34 foot isn't far, but to a lot of guys it looks.... that's where probably more guys wash out, on the 34 foot tower. And from there you go up to a 250 foot tower, free fall. They pull you up the chute and all, and then they release you when you're about 250 feet.

### **Sort of like Riverview. (A former amusement park in Chicago)**

Right! Exactly! It was. That's what I thought. And I have seen guys, though, float into the tower and get into trouble, and they had to get them down. I never had any problems. Everything went smooth. Graduated, and, you know, was Airborne.

### **Did they have any other types of jumps to prepare you for the actual parachute jump, like jumping out of the back of a truck, a moving truck?**

No, just, as I remember, we had the little three foot stool practicing PLFs, parachute landing falls, you know, it'd be the ball of your feet, the side of your leg, your buttocks, and your shoulder, and we'd practice rolling like that. And the 34 foot tower, and the two hundred... Then, of course, to the airplane. Five jumps. And graduation.

### **Did you pack your own parachutes?**

No, we did not. But we had the option, we had the buddy system. When you'd stand in the line, or we call it a stick, you could refuse to jump a chute if you didn't feel like it was packed properly. This was what we were told, and if that were the case, the guy who packed it, his name was on it, he was forced to use that chute to jump with. I don't know if it was true, but that's what they told us. And we had the buddy system. The person ahead of you, you would check his chute and if you saw any little bit of silk coming out of the pack, you'd push it in. And then the last guy on the stick would turn around, and the man second to the last would check his chute for, you know, silk and all that. Of course, we all wore a reserve chute too. And I can honestly say I never pulled a reserve. I've seen a lot of guys do it. Lot of guys, hundreds. We were told that if you didn't need to pull your reserve, it was a bad thing to do, because you had your reserve open and your main chute open and they would be stealing air from each other. I've actually seen, I've seen this several times, too. You know, when a stick goes out of the plane so fast, I mean it's just 1,2,3, as fast as you can go, and I've seen guys land on top of other guys' chutes; the chute'll be open and you'd land on it. Well, then, trying to get off of it, up in the air like that, his chute will be stealing air, so it could collapse your chute. So then they have some guys pull their rip cord on the reserve and kind of throw it out to catch air. I never needed to pull a reserve. I never did.

## **Part 4: Going Overseas:**

**Well, Don, after jump school, what happened next?**

I went back to Ft. Campbell, for a very short period of time. Korea was flaring up, I mean, Korea was raging. And there was an outfit over there called the 187th Regimental Combat Team which was all Rangers and Airborne, in one regiment.

**And where were they?**

They had made two jumps in Korea, and they had come back to Beppu, Japan. And I went over as a replacement and hooked up with them in Beppu, Japan. I was there for awhile, made a few practice jumps, got into a little problem there.

**Now, before we get to the problem you had with the practice jumps, when was it that you went to join the 187th?**

It was the early part of '51, probably, I'm going to say February - March, probably March '51.

**And so you went directly, where did you leave the U.S. to get to Beppu?**

We left out of Seattle, Washington.

**And how did you travel?**

We traveled on a boat, a ship called the Private Joseph Martinez, which was quite an experience, it was a rather small boat, not a General.

**How many troops were on the ship? Do you know?**

I don't remember exactly the number, but we kind of were running out of food. They were rationing the food towards the end. We did go over with weapons and live ammo, and I

understand from guys that came after me that they discontinued that because of they had a lot of “SIW’s,” self inflicted wounds. So they stopped that and...

**To your knowledge did that happen on your transit?**

I think we did have a couple of SIW’s. We were told we did.

**How long did your cruise take?**

I think it was about a week, that is what stands out in my mind. Maybe even a little longer. It was a long ride. We had a stop, we made one stop in the Aleutian Islands. They got us off the boat, marched us around, I guess exercise; I don’t know if they put fresh water on or what and then we got back on the boat, and then to Yokohama.

**Part 5: Japan**

**Now, you referred to a mishap when you were training with the 187th Regimental Combat Team. What happened?**

Well, it was a training jump, and the drop zone was supposed to be clear. They, normally on a jump, the first guys that jump are called path finders, and the path finders are supposed to make sure the drop zone is perfectly clear of all objects, vehicles, whatever on the drop zone. I don’t know why, but they missed. There was a big old honey wagon sitting at the end of this drop zone, and I came down and I hit the honey wagon, which was a, they used to call it a honey wagon, it was a wagon full of buckets, honey buckets, well you know what was in honey buckets. And anyway, I was going pretty fast and I hit that, broke both my ankles and I did hurt my neck, too. And went back. We had a hospital in Beppu. It wasn’t a very big one, but anyway, they treated me there, and from there they sent me to Ita Jima, in Japan. It’s an island where we had a larger hospital. And I recuperated there for a few weeks with casts and a wheel chair. That was kind of the end of my jumping days.

**So they made the decision you were no longer qualified to jump?**

Yeah, right, and that was OK with me. I kinda wanted to go to Korea... Again, young, why I joined, wanted to go, couldn’t wait to get over there. So they sent me over and I wound up in the 3rd Division, the 7th Regiment.

**Part 6: Korea**

**What was the mission of the 3rd Division, 7th Regiment?**

Well, as I remember we always had two divisions on the line, one division back in reserve. The two divisions on the line, they would always have two regiments up front, one regiment reserve, and it was, you know, we did mostly patrols, and we dug bunkers all day long. I think that’s how they kept the GI’s morale going, I mean kept us busy just digging, digging, digging. We dug bunkers and trenches and all day you had to be careful because incoming artillery was constantly a problem and when you could have...after a while it was easy to identify incoming versus

outgoing. We used to call it mail, but it was artillery. That was a very big concern. And then of course the patrols, that was something we did frequently.

**So your division was right on the front line?**

Yes, yes it was.

**Geographically in Korea where would that have been? What would have been the closest major cities?**

That I couldn't tell you. I really, the geography of where we were and everything, I...

**Have you ever seen it on a map?**

Not really. I sure walked up and down a lot of mountains over there and hills, and went through a lot of villages and towns, you know.

**Don, what was your rank at that time?**

I was a PFC. Then I made Corporal.

**How long were you in Korea all together?**

Uh, Korea itself, it must be about a year.

**OK, now I know you did a lot of things and a lot of things happened to you during that year. And so it may not be easy to answer a question to apply to the whole year, but what was life like for you in the Army at that time? During the year you were in Korea?**

Well, we were scared a lot over there. It wasn't glamorous. Once you get into a combat situation or a combat area you're kind of up-tight a lot. And it's more, it's different than being spit and polish of Airborne, and this that and the other. It's you know, I guess the officers let you relax a little bit more. They knew that any minute you might not be here. But again, the Army, you know, they really, I had really no complaints with them, I mean we got three meals a day even if it was in the fields, and we lived in bunkers and when were on the line we lived in bunkers, you know, just holes in the ground, you know. I remember one night, specifically, a rat as big as a cat, I was in my sleeping bag and the thing crawled over my legs. We had a lot of rats over there. You know, it wasn't a fun place to be, but the guys I was with, we were all in the same boat; we did laugh a lot, we joked, we made the best of a bad situation. Again, I don't see what else we could have done differently. We were all in the same boat, all from different areas of the United States, but you find out everybody's pretty much the same. You make friends, I made friends with guys from all over, you know, and we became close. When you're in combat, I'd say you're probably closer to that person than maybe anybody in your life. He's a guy in a tight situation you hope he's got your back and you hope and pray that you've got it in you to watch his back, you know.

**I'm going to ask you a number of specific questions about being in combat and we will want to talk about your relationships with some of the guys that you fought along side of; but first the day to day living. What did you eat, what was the food like?**

It was decent, you know, we had breakfast, was typically maybe cereal, out of the box with powdered milk that they'd made up. And after a while it doesn't taste too bad. Occasionally you'd get those scrambled eggs, those powdered eggs.

**So, you got three meals a day?**

Yeah, as I remember, generally. I don't remember missing meals. You ate them in funny places sometimes, you know, but the Army was, they did try to, I think they realize, the Army was you know, you had to, stomach was important, morale, you know.

**Did they bring mobile kitchens up?**

Yeah, they did, right. We had mobile kitchens.

**And sometimes you had C rations, or did they call them K rations?**

Yeah, we had that too. We called them C rations. Of course I ate a lot of those. That was a big thing, and inside them was cigarettes and gum and little candy, you know, pork and beans and all that. It wasn't horrible. It was OK.

**Was Spam a part of your diet?**

We had Spam over there, yes. And a lot of tuna fish, cans of tuna fish and then once in a while a truck would come up with a load of beer. Of course we were all young (laughs) we, nobody questioned, nobody checked an ID at that age, (interviewer laughs) or that area. They were good. The Army was good. The only thing we didn't get was hard liquor.

**Was the beer free?**

Yeah, as I remember it was. There was plenty of it, cases and cases of it. I don't remember buying it. They didn't give the troops hard liquor. That was out. I guess the officers got the liquor and we didn't (both laugh), and that was probably a good thing.

**Well Don, during that time, during your time in Korea how did you stay in touch with your family? Or did you?**

Well, by letters. We wrote. I wasn't real good about writing letters, but I wrote to my mother, and my mother and my sister would send me a letter now and again. We had mail call every day, and they would hand out the mail and it was a thrill to get a letter and you did cherish it, and it was nice to get a letter from back home.

**When you were off duty how did you entertain yourself?**

Well, we didn't have a lot, every once in a while, I remember I met a good friend of mine over there. He was a guy I went to school with. He was in the Marines. We got together over there. And another guy, he was in the Army, he was in a different outfit, my, I knew they were there, and I don't even recall how we communicated to get together, but somehow we did. And I remember asking my captain for a pass. Over there they didn't have any fancy ways of pass. He took a piece of scrap paper and wrote ONE DAY PASS, and I signed it, and that was my pass. I hitched a ride with a tank, and 2 1/2 ton truck and, I don't even remember now where I met

them, but we did get together. That was enjoyable. I really enjoyed it. I still see both of these guys today. They were friends of mine from Chicago. We went to school together. Occasionally I do see them.

**What are their names?**

Bob Callahan was in the Marines and Charlie Ward was the Army guy.

**You say you still have contact with them?**

Yeah, I see these, them occasionally. And then, you know, you'd be, the way tried to make it, you'd be up on the line for I forget how long, and then you'd go back in reserve and they'd pull the reserve back on the line so that they always tried to keep fresh troops up on the line. So, when you were back in reserve it was, they'd try to keep you busy training and you know, so that they.... That was a big thing, trying to keep everybody busy over there.

**Now you said there were three units, two on the line and one in reserve.**

That's how they tried to do it, as I remember. They'd always keep two up on the line and one back in reserve.

**So, your time back in reserve, that would be a matter of days or weeks?**

Maybe a week, then they'd switch back, you know.

**While you were in Korea did you ever attend any USO shows?**

I did see a couple of shows.

**Any famous entertainers?**

I remember Danny Kaye, specifically. And I went to another one and I want to say Bob Hope and Marilyn Monroe, because that's what I honestly think it was. I'm not absolutely positive. Or it might have been Marilyn Monroe with Danny Kaye. But I just remember that. Another thing we did, we had Division boxing championships, and again, I guess it was just a way to keep guys entertained, and busy. I did box for my Division, you know.

**Oh, you represented your Division?**

Yeah, right.

**How'd you do?**

I think I won the first fight and I think the second one was a draw. But I had a good cheering squad, all the guys in my outfit. It was fun.

**Did you, in your written account you mention going on R&R after the combat mission which we're going to talk about here real shortly. Where did you go on that R&R?**

I went to Tokyo.

**How long was your R&R?**

Five days, and it was really, really a wonderful five days.

**Anything memorable that you'd like to share on that?**

I don't think I can tell you about that time, (both laugh) but it was all good.

**OK, good. (laughs) Well, before, another question I want to ask before we get into the combat, it's going to be on a lighter note. Do you have any particular humorous or unusual events of your time over there that you'd like to share? Anything that struck you as being funny?**

Gee, I'm sure there were, and for some reason my mind's drawing a blank.

**At the end of the interview, when we wrap up, I'll come back to that question.**

I just can't think of any specific things.

## **Part 7: Combat**

**Well, if you're ready, Don, we'll start talking about your combat experiences.**

OK, Marty.

**When was your unit first in combat?**

Well right from, really the day I got over to Korea I remember going up in a Jeep up on the line, and getting out of the Jeep and everybody telling me to, "Get down, get down," that there was incoming, artillery coming in and of course it was my first day, I didn't know what the heck was going on, that the shells were whistling and, you know, all the guys were dug in. They had tanks pulled up to the line, you know, with bunkers all around them, and they were firing out. That's what I remember my first day on the line, it was, you know, all a new experience for me. But boy, you learn in a hurry to duck and where to go. I remember one thing was that whenever there was an air strike, that was always a good thing. When I, when we'd look out and see the Air Force bombing or strafing runs out in front of us, that was one time when we felt we could really relax, stand up, watch it, we knew there'd be no incoming. Because the Air Force kept everybody, they kept the enemy pretty busy. There was one time we could relax.

**Now, when you mentioned air strikes, did North Korea ever engage air strikes against your troops?**

No, I don't remember that.

**Not to you?**

Not, I can't say that.

**Don, roughly how many combat engagements would you say were you in?**

Well, we had frequent patrols that we used to go on. Probably on a dozen patrols. Then of course, the other thing we had, when we were on the line, out in front of you they had different outposts, like listening posts and you might have to go out 100 yards ahead of the line, and sit in

a listening post, which was not a good place to be because you were the first line, you know. But if you heard something you'd have to radio it back to the line. We used to string barbed wire up in front of the line. We'd string beer cans on the barbed wire. Though at night, you know, you'd be laying up there. The idea was that if somebody was trying to cut the barbed wire to get in you'd hear the beer cans twinkling and you were told to just fire away at will. And we did, there was beer cans twinkling you'd throw a grenade out there or... One thing I do remember, there were, we had ROKs attached to our division.

**Now, when you say ROKs you're speaking of R-O-K's, Republic of Korea?**

Exactly, Marty, Republic of Korea. And, they were our allies, they were considered the good guys and there was a name for spies. I can't remember the name we called them but they were ROK's and they would dress up like the North Koreans or Chinese, and we slipped them out and maybe they'd be gone for a week or ten days or two weeks; but it was very, very difficult getting them back in sometimes. We used passwords, and again, you have an itchy trigger finger and hearing somebody coming in two weeks after they'd been out, we'd yell out a password and I've seen times where they didn't answer and I've seen ROK's get killed that way, I mean because guys would throw a grenade out there, or it was unintentional but it was just something that happened, and it was not a, not planned at all. It didn't happen often but I had unfortunately seen some of the ROK's killed that way.

**Now, you mentioned that you, yourself were on frequent patrols, and you mentioned that twelve. Are you saying that there were twelve where you actually had combat engagement?**

Well, I won't say combat engagement, but close calls, some combat engagement, you know. Just being out in the front of the lines, you know, that was...

**(Door to interview room is opened. Discussion is temporarily interrupted.)**

**We had a brief interruption with a visitor here. Don, before we went off record we were talking about combat engagements. You told me you had roughly twelve of them. Are there any that stand out in your mind more than the others?**

Well, there certainly is one, Marty, that...

**Is this the one you wrote about?**

Yes, it is. It happened on the fourth of July. And to this day, I guess it's 54 years ago now, I'm Catholic and I go to Mass and Communion every fourth of July. Because I don't know why I was saved that night, but God was good to me. But we went out, we were informed by a, Lieutenant Franklin that we were going to be going on a contact patrol. Meaning that we were to have, meet, have contact with the enemy. That was our specific purpose for this patrol.

**Did he say why they wanted you to make contact?**

Well, I guess, you know, intelligence or something told them that there was the enemy out in front and a new division moved in, or something like that. And they wanted us to make contact with them. So we did, we, they briefed us and we all had our positions. Actually it was a squad.

There were about nine of us, but he took six extra guys, a total of about 15 guys, was a reinforced squad. And we took a 30 caliber machine gunner with us and a couple of extra guys to carry the ammo, boxes of ammo.

**You mentioned in your written account that you had this 30 caliber machine gun. What kind of gun was it? Do you recall?**

It was air cooled, SP 30 caliber machine gun.

**Belt fed?**

Yes, yes, oh yes.

**Now the two ammo bearers, did they also carry their own weapon?**

Yes they did. They had M-1's. Specifically they carried boxes of ammo.

**And, you mentioned that you had a special night vision scope. And I'd like to ask you some specific questions about that in a little while, but, I think you mentioned in your written account that they wanted to try it out. Was that possibly part of the reason for this particular patrol?**

If it was, they didn't tell me that. They just said that it was a new experimental device, and to guard it with your life. Don't let the enemy get it.

**To your knowledge had it been used before in that area?**

I don't think it was. I hadn't heard of it.

**Well, the device itself, what did it look like and how did it work?**

Well, I carried a battery pack and it was a large one, on my back.

**About how much did that pack weigh?**

Gee, I don't know, maybe 15 pounds maybe. It was pretty heavy, pretty big. And coming out of the battery pack there was a wire going to a scope and the scope was attached to a carbine. The way it worked, you would, well, in the patrol, after we'd started on the patrol, we'd single file. Should I talk about the patrol?

**Sure.**

We left the base camp and we single file went down a hill to a river. I don't remember the name of the river, but it was about 30 - 40 yards wide. There was ropes going from either side of the river. We had flat bottomed boats we piled into, and pulled ourselves across the river. We assembled on the other side, took up our positions. I was the last man in the patrol. They were all single file, we had the point man, he would look straight ahead. The next man to the left, next to the right, and so forth and so on. I was the last one, and every time the single file patrol would stop, my job was to look behind us and use my night vision scope and when you'd pull the trigger on the scope it was red. And if there was a man out there it would show up on the scope, like a black silhouette. That's how we did it. And Lieutenant Franklin was right in the middle of

the single file. He didn't wear his bars that night, he looked just like a buck private. He was giving orders from the middle of the patrol. And then we got to the top of a hill called Big Nori; there were two hills, Big Nori and Little Nori, and we went up the Big Nori and we stopped at the top. There had been a trench around it and some bunkers. We stopped there and Lieutenant Franklin surveyed the situation and told us to move out. We were going down the hill towards the enemy and I got about half way down. I was the last man in the patrol. And as I got about half way down, mortars opened up on us. It was a tremendous shelling of mortars that was, (pause) I mean they were good with their mortars. They probably had this thing sighted in. They were hitting all around us.

**What was the size of their mortars, Don?**

I really don't know.

**What was the approximate blast radius?**

Oh, very big. When they hit, gee, you know you just hear the shrapnel and dirt and, you know, just flying all over, hitting your body and your helmet. I just remember trying to hold my helmet, scared to death, and then...

**Were there any casualties?**

Yes, right, we had two guys get hit.

**Were they killed?**

They were killed, yes. There were a total of five guys killed that night out of the fifteen. But Lieutenant Franklin gave the order to head back up to the top of Nori, and when I had been the last guy in the patrol, now I was first, and I ran up as fast as I could; jumped in the trench, and the rest of the guys behind me. We all took up our positions in the trench. Lt Franklin had the machine gun set up in a perfect place, because, shortly after, the mortars kept coming, you know, and when they stopped (pause) there was like silence for a while. (pause) We were all pretty shook, you know. Then these white phosphorus flares, there were just loads of them. We called them willy peters, they lit the sky up that night. It would look like daylight. And then...

**How did they deploy those flares?**

I guess they came out of mortars or something. And they they'd explode, and they'd just open up. They'd come out like a little parachute. Shortly thereafter, when everything was all lit up, and all that we just heard all these bugles and drums and loud noises. I think they were playing them over a loud speaker. It, then they estimated later, Lt. Franklin, about two platoons, maybe over a hundred of them come charging up the hill. The machine gunner, I just remember thinking what a, thank God, because the guy just was relentless. He never stopped. And I looked over at him, there was blood coming down his face, I don't think he even knew it, you know. The guy next to me is a friend of mine, (pause) Howard Dougherty, on our left flank, one of the North Koreans jumped in the trench and he shot and killed Howard Dougherty. The guy right next to me. Lt. Franklin saw that. He was up at a higher point than we were, and when he saw that he zeroed in on this North Korean and he shot him. So, that was a good thing, cause I might have been next. So that kept up for a long time, Lenny and I talked about it a lot. In my

recollection we started about 11 at night and it lasted till daylight.

**The engagement lasted all night?**

Yeah, and Lenny said I'm wrong, he said it lasted longer. It started about eight at night, but...

**(End of Tape)**

**We just ran out of tape so I switched the tape over, and Don, the last thing that we recorded was how long the engagement lasted. You said that your friend Lenny said it started at eight in the evening, and that you remembered eleven at night. Would you continue from there, please?**

OK, Marty. We were out of everything. I had used up, I threw all my grenades. I didn't have any of them left. I picked up Howard Dougherty's M-1 and started using that. I had taken the battery pack off that had the night scope, and, uh, because for some reason the carbine that I had, must have had dirt in it or something, because it was misfiring. So I used, I took Howard's ammo belt and his M-1 and used that. I was out of grenades. Lenny was out of grenades, too. I think everybody else was, too. We were just about out of everything.

**Did you have radio contact back with...?**

Well, I think Lt. Franklin did. I'm not sure, but I'm pretty sure he did.

**But no reinforcements came?**

No reinforcements. I talked to, when we got back that night and the next day, I talked to some of the guys who were in the back, and they said they felt for us because they saw all the flares and the guns, and I mean the firefight, and the bullets and the grenades. They didn't think any of us were going to come back. They were surprised when we did get back, because at some point Lt. Franklin...we kind of drove them down the hill. They stopped coming, you know, and Lt. Franklin, while there was a lull, I don't know if he figured they were going to regroup and come back, but he said, "Let's get the hell out of here." At that point we did get our wounded. I tried to pick up Howard Dougherty, and I couldn't. He was a much larger guy than I was and, he just, you know, it was impossible. I couldn't do it. Plus, we had several wounded that we had to attend to.

**Well, you said that of the 15 in your squad you had...**

Five dead.

**Five killed, right?**

Five KIAs, right.

**Two by mortar and then three in the fight.**

Right.

**And you said that there was probably an estimated 100 enemy soldiers attacking your unit, your squad.**

That's what they told us.

**Do you have any estimate as to how many casualties you inflicted, your squad inflicted?**

Yeah, you know, that's interesting, 'cause I do remember looking when kind of there was this lull. I put my head up over the trench and I did see a lot of dead bodies out there. We must have killed 20 or 30 of them anyway. I mean, I could see them laying all around. So I assumed... enough to where we drove them back, I know that. We did stand our ground that night and Lt. Franklin said we go, and we got out of there, and he helped just like the rest of us. He was just, he wasn't giving any more orders other than let's go, and we helped our wounded and some of them were badly wounded. I mentioned that our black sergeant who was a young guy, just a wonderful soldier and he was hit very badly by a grenade that was tossed in the trench. And he was really mangled very badly.

**What was his name, Don?**

I don't remember his name. I can't remember it. I can picture him I, if he was here in the room I could pick him out. We had another guy, Sergeant Greenbaum, who was also very courageous that night. I remember Sgt. Greenbaum was from New York. He was very good that night, he really kept things going. But we did, we got back down by the river we all got the wounded and put them all in one boat, and we all just went back to the other side where we were greeted by a large contingent of guys; and they had a bunch of jeeps with stretchers on them and we put the wounded on the jeeps in the stretchers, and they took off, and that's when I remember, I don't remember this fella's name either, but I remember him, I could pick him out, too. I could picture him. He was an American Indian, and he was in our outfit, and he was a good guy. Quiet guy, never said too much, but always did what he was told. We come back and he went through the whole thing and he just literally broke down and started crying and moaning and he just was completely, I guess shell shocked, you know, I, from combat. And they took him away too, and I never saw him again.

**So you don't know what happened?**

I don't know where they took him, or whatever. I do know that, I can remember, you know, did you ever hear the term "combat fatigue?" Well, I was so wired until I got back and it, that is, a true feeling, fatigue. I was so tired, I remember that after it was all over that I, gee, I think I, when they took me back to the lines I think I slept for like twelve hours or something. I was just completely fatigued, you know.

**Do you remember anything about your emotions while the engagement was going on? I know it's a number of hours to cover, so you probably had, were scared.**

I was scared, you know, scared.

**Certainly, scared. Anything else you were feeling? Anything you were thinking about while...**

I remember anger. I remember when I saw Howard get it, you know, he was right next to me, and the guy had some kind of like a burp gun or something because he just literally tore Howard up, right across his chest. He must have hit him like ten times. I remember being angry at that.

I felt really bad. When after, when Lt Franklin shot the North Korean, I was kind of happy about that. I was thinking, (pause) you know, (pause) I didn't have any love for the guy, let's put it that way. I don't know how else to put it. I didn't feel bad that he got it. I thought he deserved it.

**Sure.**

That was my feeling at the time, you know.

**Do you know if you inflicted any casualties that night?**

Oh, I'm sure I did. I was, because when they were running up the hill I was throwing, I had a bunch of grenades, and I threw all my grenades in the middle of them. I would stand up and shoot the M-1, and, so I'm sure I did. You know, I do know that I've never fired a gun since. I've been asked to go hunting and all kinds of things, go shooting and I don't have any desire to ever shoot a gun.

**Now, you were wounded, yourself.**

No, well I got hurt. I did get hurt.

**Do you know how that happened?**

Marty, I do know part of it happened, I cut myself pretty good right in here. (points to web between thumb and forefinger)

**Uh huh.**

And, it was bleeding, and I have no, you know what I mean, I don't know how that happened. I think I broke my little finger, too. I cut myself right in between my thumb and forefinger. And it never did heal, I've still got a scar. We always said over in Korea, when you got cut, like from barbed wire, anything in the sun, nothing ever healed over there. So I carried that thing, I carry the scar today. I did burn my hands on what we, I, trying, the night scope, I hit it several times with my carbine. Cause the carbine wasn't running and I couldn't, it was all plugged up with dirt and everything, so I used that like a baseball bat and I just smashed it, and then I crawled out, and Lenny did, too. I picked up some white phosphorous with my hands and put it on the scope, and burned my hands with that.

**Well, uh,**

We did destroy the scope. I mean, we left it there, I didn't bring it back with me. But, it was beaten, burnt, and it would be of no use to anybody.

**Well, you had, of the fifteen that went out, five were killed; how many more were wounded?**

Wounded. Well, I think there were five of them. And a couple of them were hurt very, very seriously, that, had they, again, I never heard. When they took them away to the hospital, but, I wouldn't be surprised if maybe two of them died. I mean they were very badly injured and bleeding and just torn up really bad, especially that black sergeant. He was, it was horrible.

**So, five killed, five wounded, and then the one man that broke down afterwards.**

Yes, right. It was a bad night.

**Nobody came out without...**

Yeah right. I know, the VA, I've been to the doctor there, and he asked me if I wanted to go, you know, they have a program for combat guys. It's a post traumatic syndrome, you know, that they send you through. And I, he scheduled me for it, and then I broke the appointment and didn't go. I mean I'm not, I don't think I'm seriously mentally affected by it. But, I do think about it a lot, especially after Lenny called, and the last couple of years. But I really never talked about it. I never, I'm married, three kids, I never told them, or my friends. You know, it's hard to explain. Unless you've been through it it's hard to discuss it with somebody. Like, unless they've been there.

**Well I have a few questions that relate to the incident we just talked about.**

OK, sure, Marty.

**And some of these were developed from reading your written account. You mentioned the ROK spies. Did they work with you regularly?**

Yes.

**Did they live in your compound?**

Some of them did.

**Did you get to know any of them?**

Yeah, I did. They were really nice guys, too.

**How did you communicate?**

It's funny, you know, they picked up a little English, you picked up a little Korean. Well, you know, you were there. It's a, I don't know, we just didn't have any trouble communicating.

**Roughly how many of those people were with you?**

Well, I couldn't give you a number, but we had them with us.

**Don, also in your written account you mentioned the black sergeant, in fact you told me about him a little earlier. So, your squad was integrated.**

Well, he was the only black in our squad. And he was the man. He was a young guy, he was probably about my age. And he just got torn up horribly, I mean.

**By the time we were in Korea were integrated units common?**

Yeah, there were. You would see blacks in different outfits over there, yeah.

**Was it unusual to have a black in charge of an integrated squad?**

It might have been a little unusual. You didn't see too many non-coms, or commissioned officers.

**I was going to ask you next about black officers.**

No, I can't honestly remember any of them.

**I just had a couple of follow-up questions about that night vision device you talked about earlier.**

OK.

**You said that if there was a human being out there that they'd show up like a black...**

Like a black silhouette

**Would you see any other features around them, or just the silhouette of the person?**

You know, I had so little practice with it, I only got it that night, and about a five minute dissertation on it, and.... That's all I kind of remember, because before we went out I practiced a little with it, and I only remember seeing people, you know what I mean? I don't remember a tree showing up, I suppose it might have, you know, but the object was to spot a person that you normally wouldn't see in the dark.

**Did you ever fire the weapon while the scope was turned on?**

No. Because when I tried to the carbine had jammed.

**It already jammed.**

No, it didn't, because it had no bearing on the scope, when you. Yeah. I think I did get off. Now, having said that I think I did get off a few shots, kind of remember that. I did get off a few and then it jammed.

**Do you remember what the scope looked like when you fired a round? Did it flare?**

No, it didn't, not because it had no bearing on the scope when you were firing your weapon. The scope was a, you pulled a different, it had a little trigger, too. I remember that would like turn it on, and then it would be like red and like I said, and if there was a person there would be a black silhouette. But at that point I wasn't thinking of using it or anything, I mean it was of no value once the fighting started. My whole thing towards the end of it was that, like I was told to destroy it and I think I did a good job of destroying it.

**Now, after that night, you did tell me that you had an R&R. Is that when you went to Tokyo?**

Yeah, we did, right.

**And then you were still in Korea, after.**

Then I came back to Korea, right.

### **And what happened then?**

Well, I had several requests to go to a couple... It's funny, I saw a Captain, Paul Ellison, who was my company commander at Ft. Campbell, through boot camp. He was now an officer, a captain, over in Korea and we talked and he told me that he needed combat veterans in his outfit, and he would like me, because he knew I was ex- airborne. He knew I'd been through a few things. He would give me a sergeant's promotion right away to get into his outfit. I had no desire to do that. My thinking then was to get home in one piece, and to try to stay out of combat. I figured I was lucky. I didn't want to trust it again. We had another sergeant, Carusso was his name. He was a really nice guy, too. He was a super guy, a guy you would follow in combat. He wanted me in his platoon. He told me he would make sure I became a sergeant. I said I didn't want to, and I'd heard that there was an opening in HQ company to drive a jeep. I applied and I got it. That was, that's what I did for maybe a month, and then I got sent home. In that month we did have an experience where the company commander for the headquarters company, his name was Captain Gables, and I drove the jeep and he was in the jeep and he wanted to get a prisoner. He said, "Let's get a prisoner." It wasn't high on my priority list. I was not real thrilled about doing it, but we did get a prisoner. We got a young kid, he was probably about sixteen.

### **How did you go about doing it?**

Well, we were, we drove out to the front line. To get there, there again, I was driving a jeep down this little twisting, winding road, and you know, the enemy could see you, I guess, the jeep driving down the road. They were throwing mortars at me left and right. I was like, oh, my God, I was going about 60 down that little winding road. Then when we got up to the front line, Capt. Gable actually got the prisoner. It was somebody that they had, I guess, were interrogating, and he brought him back. He got five days R&R for that, I remember that.

### **So he got five days R&R, what did you get?**

I got zippity-do-dah, (interviewer laughs) but that was OK. I'd just been on my R&R and I was happy with it. Like I said, my, I really didn't want any more combat. I didn't. One thing I did seem to remember, Lennie and me, I talked about it to Lenny and he remembered, too. We had a guy in our outfit, his name was Red Moore, and I think he was from Massachusetts. He was from the east somewhere. He was a really nice guy, too. He was rotating to go back to the states, and the last night before he was going to leave in the morning, he didn't have to go, but he volunteered for patrol that night. And Red got killed that night on the patrol. I never forgot that, and I still think of him a lot, too. Lenny remembers, too, Red as being a real nice guy and all that. I thought, gee, there's a guy that didn't even have to go on patrol, he volunteered and did go and got wasted that night. So I wasn't up for any more volunteering. (chuckles) I think I did my part. I guess if they made me go I would have, it wasn't something that I wanted to do anymore. All I wanted to do was get home.

## **Part 8: Return to the United States**

### **So after you did come back home...**

That's interesting.

**You say it's interesting?**

Well, my next assignment.

**OK, let's talk about your assignment.**

Well, yeah, because I'd never been an MP, or a prison guard or anything, you know. My MOS was I was an infantryman, that was it. And when I got my assignment after Korea I went to Ft. Leavenworth, KS as a prison guard. Well, that was exciting, too. The best thing about it was the hours, we were 24 on, 48 off. But I remember I had like three days orientation to become a guard. That was my training to be a guard at Leavenworth. My first night in Leavenworth, the deal was you were 24 on, 48 off. And when you were in the prison, if there was an uprising, or a break, or a fight in a cell or something, at that point you had lock down, and you couldn't just leave the prison until you had everything under control. So, you might be in the prison longer than 24 hours, but when everything was under control, then you could march out and the new shift would go on for their 24. Well, my first night in Leavenworth, we had eight guys in death row. And I remember this guy, we had a guy named John Riggins. He had killed a cab driver in Chicago, and he was on death row. He was an ex-boxer, heavyweight, big guy, and we had to, you know, twice a day you had to let them out in the exercise, you know, and then get him back in his cell. They didn't have any shoe laces in their shoes, or anything like it, so they couldn't hang themselves, or anything like that. But, bringing him back to his cell my first night he grabbed a fire extinguisher off the wall. He started hitting, there were about six guards bringing him back. This guy weighed about 240, and he's swinging that fire extinguisher. So, it took all six of us to subdue the guy. And then get him into his cell, and lock it. That was my first night in Leavenworth. (laughs) I remember that. Now why, my MOS was never, I never knew how they got me to be a guard. Anyway it was a...

**How long were you there at Ft. Leavenworth?**

You know, I'm thinking, Marty, about six months I guess.

**Roughly how many prisoners did they have?**

Gee, they probably had, I don't know, it's been so long. Maybe 500, I know we had eight guys on death row, and then we had what we called "PC," protective custody, where we had all the gays and the guys that were like rats, that would tell on a guy, like we used to put them in protective custody so the general population wouldn't kill them, you know what I mean. Cause these guys were, boy, they were brutal. I mean when you wound up there it was an automatic dishonorable discharge, there was no, you know. And I seen guys go in there for three to five years for a felony, minor charge, really, maybe trying to escape, or get in a fight, and before you know it they had a hundred years tacked on just from being in the prison. But I always remember, during my three day training period, there was a Colonel who, he said, "Just remember one thing, it could be any one of you guys could be in there." I did kind of keep that in mind. Some of these guys were not bad guys, they just did a bad thing maybe and ruined their life over it. But that was (chuckles) my prison guard experience.

**That was your last...**

That was my last duty.

## **Part 9: After Service:**

**Well Don, let's talk about your life after the service. First, just describe for me what it was like the day that you got out of the service.**

It was different, it was weird.

**Where were you discharged?**

I was discharged from Camp Crowder, MO.

**Do you know how to spell that?**

C-R-O-W-D-E-R

**And when were you discharged?**

October of 1953.

**And you said it was weird. How was it weird?**

Well, the last day, you know, you're thinking, "This is it, I'm out." And I think I took a bus home. I think I missed a lot because I had joined young, and all my friends and all that when I got home, I think they'd moved on with their life. I didn't, I felt a little different at first.

**What did you do in the days and weeks afterwards?**

I drank, probably too much, went to the bars. Then I knew I had to do something, and a couple of guys I knew got a catalogue from Arizona State University. They said, "Do you want to go to school?" I hadn't really thought too much about it, but the more I looked at the catalogue, and all that, and I thought, "Well, I got to do something." I did, I went, four of us total from Chicago, went out to Arizona State.

**So were you out there...**

I was there three years.

**You got out in October '53, when did you...**

Went to Arizona State, I think I went there in probably '54, '55, '56. I got married in '57. My wife's from Chicago, went to the same grammar school I did. You know, we were communicating and writing back and forth.

**When was this that you were communicating?**

You know, all the time I was in Arizona.

**But not while you were in the service?**

No, not... No.

**Was your education at ASU supported by the GI Bill?**

Yes, I did get the GI Bill, which was terrific, I had no complaints. It was great.

**What did you major in?**

Industrial Arts. I only went three years, I didn't get my degree.

**And you got married in 19..?**

'57

**1957. And you had a family?**

We have three children, two girls and a boy. I have six grandchildren.

**Now, normally at this point I ask if you've stayed in contact with any of your war time buddies after the service, and of course we've already talked about Lenny Gaeta.**

Lenny, right, and I...

**Any others that you've...**

Yeah, I had another guy, Jim Flood was his name. Super guy. We, he was from Cleveland, and I went to Cleveland and we got together and he'd been to Chicago and we got together.

**You knew him from Korea?**

From Korea, right. And he got a divorce and I don't know, after that I never heard from him again, but he was really a wonderful friend, too. I had another guy, Paul Kane, was from the Bronx in New York. Paul passed away. He was another good friend.

**Now in your written account when you mentioned Lenny Gaeta you said that he reached out and located you.**

Yes, right

**And in your written account you mentioned you'd like to get together some time.**

Yeah.

**Whatever happened with that?**

I did get together with him. Lenny was sick, he'd had a couple of heart attacks and he had diabetes at a later stage and he didn't think he was going to last. He wanted to come to Chicago. He told me he wanted to see me before he died. So I said, "I'll tell you what, Lenny. I'm in better shape than you." So I got a cheap round trip ticket on ATA, I flew into Ft. Lauderdale. He lived in Margate, Florida, and I stayed down there for three days, or four days and three nights, you know, and we got together, went over to his house, met his wife. We had dinner together, we went out all day, you know, just reminiscing and talking, and we still talk every couple of weeks, every three weeks on the telephone. Unfortunately, Lenny's wife just passed away about two or three weeks ago. And Lenny seems to be hanging in there pretty good.

**Was he on the patrol with you the night you talked about?**

Yeah, he was, Lenny was. We were.

**I think you did tell me that.**

Yeah he definitely was. A great guy.

**Have you ever joined a veterans' organization?**

I'm a Legion, American Legion, I'm not real active but I am in the Coulter Post in LaGrange.

**Have you ever attended any reunions?**

Reunions, no. And the 187th has a lot of reunions. I've been asked by a couple of guys to, that have located me, and told me that the 187th Regimental Combat Team has a reunion every year, and that I should go, and this, that and the other, but I never have. I'm not too big on that.

**One interesting, another interesting thing you mentioned in your written account, you referred to Mr. Gaeta's son downloading from the internet the photo attached to your account. Have you ever seen the web site that he got that from?**

No.

**Do you, by any chance know that web address or how he found it?**

No

**OK.**

I think he just, I don't know. I think he just went on, one of these, maybe switchboard or this, that and the other. Just put my name in and Chicago. I remember he told me there were several, I think ten or eleven with my name. And he was calling every one of them. And he had already called five or six and he said, "You're like the sixth." So when he got me he was, "Hey," I do remember that.

## **Part 10: Closing:**

**Well Don, I've asked about all the questions I could think to ask, but in closing a couple of questions. How do you think your service and your experiences, especially in Korea, have affected your life?**

Well, (pause) I don't know. I can't, it wasn't a pleasant experience but yet, I guess it had to be done, somebody had to do it. I wanted it, at the time I volunteered, I had no beef, I've always said that. It's not like they made me go, kicking and screaming. I was gung ho, I couldn't wait to go, and I got my fill of it. I don't think it's affected me. Emotionally I mean, I, certain things, like I never watch war movies or anything because I do feel bad sometimes, you know. And it does kind of bring back some bad memories. So I try to stay away from situations, like reading war books or war movies. I don't really discuss it too much, I don't have...

**In that regard, did your military experience influence your thinking about war or about the military in general?**

Well, you know, again Marty, I kind of liked the Army. After all these years I've often said or thought about, I could have easily re-upped and made a career out of the military. I didn't hate it, you know what I mean? I think it's really a good life in a lot of ways. I mean, to me it was. I liked the life, I liked that living and you know, it was okay.

**Don, is there anything you'd like to add that we have not covered in this interview?**

Marty, this was a very thorough interview. I don't think you've left out anything.

**Thank you.**

I can't think of a darned thing. I usually don't talk this much, (chuckles) I can tell you that. I feel like a talking machine here.

**Well, thank you Don for taking the time to come in today and for talking with me.**

Thanks for asking me, Marty. I appreciate it.

**We're going off record.**