

Interview with William (“Bill”) Piper

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, July 6, 2007. This is Mark DePue. I’m the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I’m here with Bill Piper. I’m sure you were born William Piper. Bill is not only a neighbor of mine, but also a Korean War veteran. He got to the Korean War via the Illinois Army National Guard. Bill, what I’d like to do is have you start and give me a little bit about your background, like where and when you were born.

Piper: Mark, I was born here in Springfield on October 5, 1930, and went to school here in town. Graduated from Lanphier High School here in Springfield, and got married. DePue: Does that mean you were a “Northender”?

Piper: Oh, yes. Proud of the old north end. That’s back in the good old days.

DePue: What was your address then?

Piper: 1431 Maryland Avenue, which was about two blocks from high school. So I was able to come home every day for lunch and get home rather easy after games and all kinds of things. So anyway I applied for a job. I had to work, according to my mother, so I had to go out and apply for jobs. And I went and applied at the telephone company and, lo and behold, they actually called me; then called after I took a test they said, “You’re hired.” So that took care of my summer. I’d only left school three weeks before.

DePue: So this would have been 1947 maybe?

Piper: 1948. I graduated in 1948. So that started me with the telephone company. That worked pretty good until I got married in 1950 and had a little daughter. A lot of my friends that I played basketball with were in the National Guard, 44th Division, 123rd Regiment, and Regimental Headquarters. We played basketball with other National Guard units around Illinois and they talked me into joining it so we could still continue to play – which I did.

DePue: The 123rd was an Infantry Regiment?

Piper: Yes.

DePue: And was the headquarters stationed here in Springfield?

Piper: Yes, it was.

DePue: You didn’t mention your wife’s name.

Piper: Her name was Ann Cawley, who also worked at the telephone company, and that’s where we met.

DePue: How do you spell the last name?

Piper: C-A-W-L-E-Y

DePue: Married again at what time?

Piper: We were married December 2, 1950.

DePue: You had your childhood during the Second World War. Did you have an interest in the military at that time? Had you had it in your mind that you’d possibly join the military?

Piper: No, not at all.

DePue: So it was strictly because you had some friends who—

Piper: —played basketball. Plus, it was going to give me a little extra money due to attending meetings and things like that, which would have been helpful back then.

DePue: As far as you were concerned, the likelihood of actually having to go to war someplace was slim?

Piper: Farthest thing from my mind. Had no idea!

DePue: (chuckle) Well, okay, that happens occasionally.

Piper: Yes, it was an eye-opener to say the least.

DePue: Okay, let’s fast forward then to June 1950 and the North Koreans invade the South. What was on your mind at that time? You were in the National Guard by this time.

Piper: Yeah, I’ll tell you, not anything serious related to my future—not when the war started. Naturally, being somewhat of a patriot I always considered myself that – didn’t see any real difficulty with what our objective would be and that is to beat North Korea and the Chinese or whoever was over there. But I didn’t anticipate that I would be part of that—at that point.

DePue: When did it become apparent that you might end up being a part of that?

Piper: Well, when the rumors came out they were going to activate the 44th Division or portions of it, from Illinois, the rumors started flying around. Of course, locally we still didn't believe that would involve us. And, lo and behold, it did. The reality of it came about when we went to a meeting and our particular group who was a communication group, was informed that we would be going to Fort Riley, Kansas, to get some training prior to going into the active service mode which would involve our organization going to California. And that was about October-November '51.

DePue: What was your specialty? What were you trained in and the specific section that you were assigned to?

Piper: Well, I was in the communications section and I was a field wireman. We had the switchboards and telephones to set up.

DePue: Well, I know enough of being a field wireman to know that you haul wire around and it's a hard back-breaking job sometimes.

Piper: Oh, it was when you got away from the WD110. That was on a spool and you could run like crazy, but the bigger ones, you're absolutely right, that took a man and a boy.

DePue: Did your training get a little bit more serious as the months rolled by after the beginning of the Korean War and you guys thought perhaps something might be happening?

Piper: No, not that I recall, Mark. We didn't really have any urgency to do anything different, to bone up, to sharpen our skills. Nothing like that, that I recall. We continued our weekly meetings and, if I recall right, I went on one summer deployment where for two weeks, as you recall, you would go away and actually pretend like you were in the Army and concentrated training was a little more in depth than it had been.

DePue: Weekly meetings meant you met one time a week in the evening?

Piper: Yes, we met on a Sunday.

DePue: Oh, on a Sunday?

Piper: We always met on a Sunday morning.

DePue: Sunday mornings. Why I'd never heard that. That's interesting. Do you recall what month and year the unit was actually activated?

Piper: Well, I believe, that could have been, actually I'm a little foggy on the dates because I think it was different for different people. For the particular group I was with, which was in the Advanced School in Fort Riley, Kansas, if I recall, which

started in November. We wound that up probably the end of January. That would have been '52.

DePue: So started in November '51 and finished in January '52?

Piper: That's right.

DePue: At Fort Riley, Kansas

Piper: That's right. And shortly after we returned, then the whole unit was activated to the point where we then moved to Camp Cooke, California.

DePue: Okay.

Piper: And that would have been somewhere like February.

DePue: February of 1952. And how long were you at Camp Cooke?

Piper: It seems like to me we were there probably about three or four months.

DePue: And how long were you still affiliated with the 44th Division? Or did that get broken up pretty quickly?

Piper: No, still the 44th. It was the whole Division, as I recall, that went there.

DePue: Did you train as a Division?

Piper: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, some of my good friends were in a tank outfit out of Springfield here and I believe they were in a different Regiment than the 123rd --

DePue: Yeah, they would have been.

Piper: And they were out at Camp Cooke with us and, that's where we stayed for about four months, as I recall.

DePue: Did you think at that time that you would be deployed to some place, Korea, maybe, as a Division.

Piper: That was on my mind, that we would move as a Division. Yes, or at least, as a group.

DePue: That the Regiment would stay intact.

Piper: Yes, that's right. Then a lot of these people, as I mentioned earlier, were friends of mine including the Commanding Officer who was a fellow employee at Illinois Bell. I don't know whether you're interested in this or not, but it's a story that's always stayed with me. My wife came out with our small baby, just had a wife and a baby not over a year.

DePue: This would have been your daughter. Her name?

Piper: Terry. Today, Terry Jordan. But anyway, they came out, we got a place to stay, and about the first week after they’d been there I was at the Camp going home on weekends, maybe. I get a call after about the second week that they had been here and the wife was rather distraught, unhappy where she was staying in Santa Barbara which was some 60 miles away. I had an urgent need to go and try to retrieve her from this bad situation so I went in and asked for an audience with the Commanding Officer who was a good acquaintance of mine.

DePue: Was this the Company Commander or the --

Piper: Yes, the Company Commander.

DePue: So a captain.

Piper: Captain. Dave Panches. Good guy. Well known, well respected and played his part extremely well. But anyway, I got in to see Captain Panches and reported as you normally do and told him my plight and that I needed to leave the base to go straighten out my domestic affairs. He looked up and said, “Piper, as you may or may not know, in the Army, and you’re a part of that now, it’s not a democracy. (chuckle) You have a job and it’s here and your personal life is your business, but not ours. And you had best understand that your first...” and I got the riot pretty well spelled out to me as I stood there and I’m thinking to myself, “ Well, you Charlemagne, you chameleon, I don’t know “—well, anyway and he said that loud enough for the front office to hear it. And towards the end of this tirade he looked over and said (in a lower voice) “Here, Bill, here’s your pass; get back in 24 hours. If you can’t, give me a call.” (DePue chuckling) YES SIR! So I turned around and walked out, greatly relieved to say the least. Anyway, it worked out fine. I picked up the wife, the daughter, all the clothes and furniture, put it in our car, drug her back to Lompoc, California, and we went from there.

DePue: But you knew you had to downplay that you were getting out for twenty-four hours with the rest of the guys.

Piper: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. It was quite an event. But, welcome to the Army.

DePue: I’m sure Ann appreciated that you got away for 24 hours to help her out.

Piper: She did. She did. And it worked out great. Anyway.

DePue: Okay. Let’s get you over to Korea. But somewhere in that process it became obvious to you that you weren’t going over as a unit. What was your reaction when you found out that you guys were all going to be divvied up.

Piper: Well, very mixed emotions. Because that really was the first time we had given it a thought that you wouldn’t be going as a unit. And at least I think we may have been some of the first replacements ordered out of the 44th Division – to go elsewhere. At

least, to my knowledge, in my little sphere of area, our particular group was the first --the communication section-- to get split up. So they would notify us, I think we had two weeks and we went home. DePue: Home to—

Piper: Back to Springfield. Drove back in the car. And we drove back there and I spent the remainder of the two weeks in my hometown. And I reported back to Camp Stoneman, San Francisco and went into the, what I call, the Repo Depot. There's people from all over, all those different kinds of units, and who knows what brought them there.

DePue: Yeah, replacement detachment is what it stood for, but never called that.

Piper: Yeah, that's just about right.

DePue: And, so, once you got to the Repo Depot you kind of lost any distinction. Were there any other members of your old unit with you?

Piper: No.

DePue: So you were shipped overseas with a bunch of strangers?

Piper: Yes. I did see some in the ship that we were on, but not at the base at Camp Stoneman.

DePue: And so you shipped over, you didn't fly over, obviously.

Piper: Yeah, we were on a ship.

DePue: What kind of ship?

Piper: Well, I think they called it an APA. I can't recall specifically, but it was a smaller troop ship I guess. It wasn't like the old ones in World War II.

DePue: But not too luxurious.

Piper: No. Merchant Marines ran it and I think there were either four or five bunks up a wall, probably four. But there wasn't much space, I can tell you.

DePue: Smooth sailing?

Piper: No. We got in to the tail end of a typhoon. All by ourselves – that ship. And all these land lubbers. I think it was the worst night and several days that I spent in my entire life.

DePue: So you were a little bit seasick?

Piper: No.

DePue: You weren't seasick?

Piper: I was not.

DePue: But there were plenty that were, huh?

Piper: Out of the – it seems like at least a hundred, maybe more, in the compartment that I was in –there were two guys not seasick. I was one. And our job was to haul the 55-gallon drums, or almost equivalent, that had been used by all the rest, up the stairs, down the hatch, over to the galley and then give it to the Merchant Marines who would dump it out the door. Now they did everything they could to make us dump it, but we didn't. So we had to keep hauling.

DePue: So the Merchant Marines were kind of taking delight in the fact that you guys couldn't handle it?

Piper: Well, they were mad because most of them were sick too. And that was the problem. I mean we didn't eat for two days – crackers, they brought the crackers down and finally I got up on deck about the second day, the highest waves I've ever seen in my life – 30, 40 feet, the whole ship vibrating and tossing, it was a real, real fiasco.

DePue: So you had to be wondering if you were even going to survive making the trip to Korea.

Piper: Didn't think we would. By the way, something I didn't mention, which I thought it would be interesting to see if they even recorded this anywhere. It was about three o'clock in the morning, maybe two, of the first night and we were down below the water line. And the guys in the compartment in front of us came running in to our compartment saying that the water was coming through the bulkhead. And, it was. So there was a big "honk, honk, honk" and all kinds of things going on, they vacated the whole damn thing, buttoned up the door and so we had more people in this area that we were in that were already miserable. The Merchant Marines, I don't know what they did – the ship didn't sink, obviously—but they did something to at least retard the water coming in and eventually fixed it in a couple of days. But the compartment had to be vacated and tightened up and left alone. And it was one that provided access to a head. Now there were other heads – toilet facilities –butnot that one. So it really was a miserable, miserable couple days. I think the name of the outfit and I could be wrong, I get it mixed up with the ship we came back on, but I believe it was called the Telfair, USS Telfair. I'm not positive, but that's what strikes me.

DePue: Okay. So you were happy to get to Pusan finally.

Piper: Well, finally, we went into Yokahama Harbor in Japan. They carried guys off on a stretcher who they said hadn't eaten for almost two weeks. They looked as white as a sheet. They said that they'd gotten seasick; they were not any that I knew, but I saw them. They had gotten seasick about a half hour after they left San Francisco so it wasn't but a couple of days we had this big storm and they said they hadn't eaten anything, just liquids.

DePue: Holy cow!

Piper: And they had to be carried off. I mean to tell you, they were tough looking people. I felt good. We all felt pretty good at that point, glad to get off that damn ship, and went, I believe it was Camp Three, the First Cav.(cavalry) had been there and they had their insignia painted all over the smoke stacks and buildings. They were not there.

DePue: Near Yokahama.

Piper: Yes, Yokahama.

DePue: How long were you there then?

Piper: Well, I was there about a week and then I got called out again. I have no idea how they arrived at who they arrived at, but I went to a, I was told that I’d be going to CBR – Chemical, Radiological, Biological warfare school, which I didn’t even really know what it was. But I did. So I got a great train ride through Japan. And went on down to, I don’t recall exactly the name of the town, but went down South and went to school for two weeks and then went on farther south to the next island down below. I believe, Honshu or Okida, I’m not quite sure right now, but it was going farther south and that’s when I went in to another little holding center for a short time – just a few days. I got on a smaller ship and went over to Pusan.

DePue: And you arrived in Pusan roughly what time frame?

Piper: Well, that’s a little foggy, to be honest with you, but I would think somewhere around August or September of ’52, I believe.

DePue: So Pusan in August or September time frame. Then what happened?

Piper: Well, we were in another replacement center for just a few days they gave us some orientation about not wandering around the area and then not feeling too trustworthy of whoever you run across – whether they be kids, women, adults, all kinds of skullduggery going on there and there was. And so, protect yourself . But anyway, after that kind of orientation, they told us that we were going north and they would tell you this as an individual because we didn’t move as unit. You just went by when they called your number, or your name, and it could have been two guys from your barracks that you were in, it could be three, it could be you, the only one. I was there a couple of days and then went to a train and rode an old wooden-back train up to Pusan; from Pusan to Seoul. And we got off there and went in to another little holding area and got into some deuce and a half trucks and went on the road, went in to another holding area. This all took probably a week. Then they called us out again, a couple at a time, and I found myself in a Jeep, along with a driver and about three guys and we were driving to wherever we were going to be they said. So we asked the driver, “Where we going”? And he said, “Well, you’re going to Heartbreak Ridge.” I had not heard of much about the Korean War, but I had heard about that place.

DePue: There were a couple of nasty battles there in 1951.

Piper: That's what I heard. That's what I had heard. And that probably sobered me up as much as going underneath the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, where you knew you were now out of control, you had nothing to say about where you went, when you went, what you did.

DePue: I suspect you were going through this whole experience and you were having difficulty seeing what logic was at play.

Piper: Could not believe this could happen to this kid from central Illinois, you know, what in the world had I done. Anyway, that's where we went. That's when I became attached to the 40th Division.

DePue: Now you say "attached", not "assigned"?

Piper: Assigned.

DePue: 40th Division, what specific unit?

Piper: Well, I was in the Second Battalion of the 160th Regiment.

DePue: Infantry Regiment?

Piper: Yes.

DePue: And were you assigned as either a CBR position or as a Communications -- ?

Piper: Well, I was back to the field wire.

DePue: Okay. In the headquarters of the Second Battalion then?

Piper: Yes. And we were on a bunker alignment behind, what would it have been, Easy, Fox, George Company. They were down at the point of Heartbreak Ridge; we were in the first, higher hill, I might add, behind it and that's where our section of the Battalion headquartered.

DePue: So what specific kind of duties did you have as a wireman in the headquarters?

Piper: Well, we had to keep the wire, of course, in the switchboard, and the companies and their observation posts and all the connections, connected to this giant switchboard. We didn't have to do a lot between there and Regiment. But we had to do it all between Battalion headquarters and our companies to the artillery outfit, or whatever was in our area.

DePue: When you talk about you also had to make sure there are wires out to the OPs, the Observation Posts, in front of the lines, right?

Piper: Well, no, not for me. The forward observers that were with Artillery; they were off to the side and out, but we didn't provide wire to that. I don't know whether they strictly had radio, I'm not quite sure, but I know to our own locations and company commanders and platoons and they had some of their own guys down in the company, but we had to run everything out to them.

DePue: Did you lay it on the ground? Did you bury it? Did you string it up in the trees?

Piper: You just put it wherever you could throw it. And that's just about the way it was. I hadn't been there but a couple of days and about 11 o'clock at night they came and rousted about three of us up and said they heard a tap on the wires, so get your gear and weapons and you're going to run that wire to George Company, find out what's going on. Of course, we couldn't believe that either, you know, how do they know that?

DePue: Well, what would it mean that they heard a tap on the wire?

Piper: Enemy or someone that shouldn't have been there had --

DePue: Spliced in to the wire?

Piper: Had broke the integrity of our connection. That's right. That's what they said. That's what the communications officer said. So, three of us got in a Jeep and I think there was a Jeep driver and three of us wireman and we had all our gear and guns and the Jeep was going to drive us around the corner from where we were and down the hill about, oh, maybe, four or five blocks and that's where the wire crossed under the culvert and we would pick it up on the line side, so to speak, and go from there down to the company headquarters. As we went around this road, we didn't have our lights on, as you would imagine,

DePue: This is at middle of the night?

Piper: Yes, about 11:00 at night. They had the running lights just little bitty square. You couldn't see beans. We were on the edge of the high portion of the hill. And, wouldn't you know, the guy's left front tire ran off the road.

DePue: So are you skirting along the ridge line of Heartbreak Ridge? Because it's going north and south, I believe.

Piper: This was the portion right behind it that allowed us a little westward movement to go around the crown of the hill and then go down towards the company location -- down for a ways -- then we'd have to get out, like I say, and check the wire from there to the company headquarters, which had probably have been a half a mile or more down through the hills and vales. But anyway, the Jeep was going to take us down that far. Why, I don't know, but that was the assignment. So off he goes -- the left front wheel. The guy beside me was a young, black fellow -- good guy, the guy up front riding with the driver was another of the threesome that's going to fix their problem. When that vehicle went off the road I put my hand down on the black

friend's leg and bailed out of the Jeep –to the right, by the way, over him –out of the Jeep and was standing on the road.

DePue: Without even thinking about what you were doing.

Piper: Never gave it a thought except to get out of that Jeep. And I did. I was gone. I had my weapon, I had everything I needed. He stopped. The Jeep didn't go over. But I mean to tell you, it was hanging precariously. Really couldn't believe it. So we got the guys all out and the little black man came up to me and says, "I didn't really appreciate what you did." And I said, "Well, what happened now? What's wrong? What's wrong"? He said, "Well, you wouldn't let me out." And I said, "Well, I had no idea, I'm just trying to get out of that." And he said, "But you held me down, I was trying to get out, too." And I, of course, I apologized profusely and later we had a good laugh over it, but he couldn't have moved if he had wanted to. From there, we went on to do our duty. There was no problem, as you would imagine, that we confronted, but we didn't go in the Jeep.

DePue: Now, it couldn't have been too long after that because I know on November 3rd –a fact I'm sure you didn't know –the North Korean 14th Regiment had a concerted attack on your battalion.

Piper: Well, I heard that here recently. I did not know that then except for one incident that has stood out in my mind. And I've related this several times to people, telling them about your experience. I was only in the field wire section probably a week or two – at the most two.

DePue: Okay. Then you were reassigned to another –

Piper: A guy came down, a Lieutenant, and said, "Hey, we need some people in this group, this battalion, Headquarters, S-2 section." And I wasn't really familiar with what S-2 section was. So he told me, took a map, we went up on the hill, and he said, "What's this?" and "Where's that?" "What would you call this?" "Would that go down?" You know, gave me a little twenty questions. And said, "Hey, I'd like to have you in our section. Are you willing to come over"? And I said, "Well, what do I do"? And they told me about it, what they do. Sounded good to me! Sounded interesting.

DePue: What did he tell you?

Piper: Well, I was going to be a member of the S-2 section of the battalion and we manned the observation post, battalion observation post. We shot azimuths for shell firings, that you can see at night – or daytime, if you could see them; shot an azimuth with a compass and all; I'd call it in, saying they can triangulate this course and find out what this location was and fire back, and that sort of thing; count the shell reports; any activity we saw over the line. We had big binoculars and all kinds of stuff. And that all sounded pretty intriguing. They didn't say much about patrols, although they did have patrols, recon, and things like that, little contact, but they hadn't really gone on much of that, according to the lieutenant. Yeah, so—

DePue: Did you mention his name?

Piper: Pacini.

DePue: Pacini.

Piper: A little Italian from Boston, Massachusetts. It sounded intriguing to me so that’s what I did. I hadn’t been in the job more than a week, just getting comfortable with the guys in the organization, find out what to do, how you report and stuff. But I had the night shift in the observation post all to myself.

DePue: The observation post was in front of the line?

Piper: In front of our line, yeah, Battalion Headquarters, pretty high point on the ridge.

DePue: So would that have been behind the company lines?

Piper: Yes, behind the company lines. We could oversee the Company Headquarters down below – it was down below us some.

DePue: But it’s the kind of position that makes you a nice target to the enemy.

Piper: Yes, it does.

DePue: Because they know you’re up there looking.

Piper: Yes, I’m sure they did. But I’m setting there kind of like midnight, 11:30, lonely time, as you would imagine, and, all of a sudden all hell breaks loose. I mean to tell you, never saw so many tracers and bombs and bombardments, everything – going crazy!

DePue: Both directions?

Piper: No, coming towards us. You could hear it, you could hear it right in the bunker that I was in and I rang my ol’ 008 [field radio] and told them, ”Hell, they’re coming – the whole ball of wax is coming”. They said, Oh, no, don’t get excited about that; just look up there and see what you see. Of course, I told them where they could go (laughter). You could still hear it, I mean tracers, all kinds of things and –

DePue: Fired exactly at your position, or just around the perimeter, the other hills, the other positions?

Piper: Oh, yeah, the company locations, our location, and quite a breadth of coverage. It would be our whole battalion, maybe even more. I mean, damn near everywhere you looked. So that went on for probably a half hour, 45 minutes – pretty long time. Occasionally I’d stick my head up and try to take a look, but there was just too much activity to keep it there. I didn’t want to take any chance. We had little slotted openings, as you’ve probably seen these damn things, it wasn’t that much, but

something could come through there. They told me that is was just the North Koreans and the Chinese zeroing in their weapons. To my knowledge, nothing other than that happened that night.

DePue: You don't recall specifically then when this would have been? Let's see; Echo, Foxtrot and then I think Charlie and Alpha companies were attached to the battalion at that time, too, and were hit really hard. This would have been November 3, so you don't recall that specific action?

Piper: No, I really don't.

DePue: Okay. I know the battalion suffered 73 casualties that night, at least according to the official records, and 19 of those were killed in action. As actions go, that was pretty severe, I would think.

Piper: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember Lt. Col. Robert Pell?

Piper: Yeah.

DePue: What do you recall about your Battalion Commander?

Piper: Didn't see much of him, to be honest with you. That's not a slam, I just never saw him, heard his name, primarily. He was a captain and I can't recall his name, to be honest with you. He was a West Point guy, as a matter of fact.

DePue: He was your Company Commander then?

Piper: Yes. And I can't recall his name. Really can't. But I do remember him; he was a good man, sharp, with it, and showed his interest in the guys. He was there where we were. He had a location where he stayed.

DePue: The time that you went up on the OP [observation post] and you were all by yourself in the middle of the night. This is November in Korea; it had to be a little bit on the cold side.

Piper: Colder than hell. Yes, it was, very cold.

DePue: Did you have the right equipment to keep you warm in those places?

Piper: Pretty good. Pretty good. If I recall right we didn't have anything in the observation post.

DePue: Anything in terms of a heater --

Piper: Heater. No we didn't have anything that I remember. We had them in our bunkers. We had all those little oil stoves, that --

DePue: Pot-bellied stoves.

Piper: Yeah, pot-bellied stoves. And, for the most part, they worked pretty good. You had to clean them out once in a while. Guys would throw stuff down there and clog up things, but generally, if you've used oil, and didn't get carried away, like some guys did – mix it with gas, and they did blow up- some of them – not ours. But if you did what they said, they provided heat, and it was good.

DePue: As a replacement did you feel ostracized or alienated from the rest of the guys or were people there to help you break in?

Piper: Well, no, I did not feel ostracized, probably because, from the time I left Camp Stoneman really, from then on I was never with a unit, so to speak. I was just with a glob of guys, you know, some went here and some went there and that went all the way through Japan, to Pusan, the train ride up, to Seoul and beyond to Heartbreak and was always with a group of guys I didn't know. So, naturally, you could sit like a bump on a log, or you could talk and there was always a joke or a laugh. The guys really were quite stable, in my opinion, on the surface. They tried to act very nonchalant, take it with a grain of salt, make the best of what you had and they really did. And I think all of us really did.

DePue: So you were able to form some pretty strong bonds pretty quickly once you got up there.

Piper: That's right. And break them once you left. You really didn't get to know them too well. Had several things that impressed me along the way. We had some real problems on occasion and I remember seeing a big country, strapping, jock, so to speak; there was no hill too tall, no tree too tall, no ditch too deep that he couldn't handle with a little strength and show-me, and so forth. Got into a real problem one night with a lot of shelling and stuff like that and the next morning, that guy goes running down the hill, bawling like a baby. He's out of it. Why? Nobody could figure it out. Never did figure it out. And, he, of course, never came back. The guy that you would think would do something like that – I remember a guy named Don. Don Byrley. who was always a little gun shy, always a little crouching and leery of an explosion or noise or anything like that, that's the guy you thought would - and , instead he was steady as a rock. Never, ever showed any apprehension, no, you know, fright. Anything that was thrown his way, he tackled it, did it and never looked back. So you learned some things about people, even though we didn't really know each other very well.

DePue: The unit, I know, spent a few months up in the Heartbreak Ridge area, but was then rotated out. Where did you go after that?

Piper: Well, as near as my memory serves me, they told us one night, "Get ready. We'll be leaving in the morning and we're going to have to walk down this hill and the vehicles will be waiting down at the bottom of the hill." Early in the morning we had our stuff and an outfit comes walking up, we go walking down. It had to be

like, in maybe February or March, because I noticed when we got down toward the bottom of the hill, guys that had mustaches were all frozen, there was drips hanging out of peoples' noses, their eyebrows. I mean to tell you, if they didn't look like – We looked like a bunch of ragamuffins. We really did. And they plowed you in these trucks and away you went back to another holding center, down south below this area. We went down there and spent some time there. I can't recall exactly what length of time. I do remember staying there; we were able to get showers and new clothes and pretty shortly we were back in the trucks. We were heading, as near as I can recall, to the east coast and they told us we were going to take a ship down to someplace down south. Had no idea where, why, or anything.

DePue: Well, your dates pretty well match up, because I know it was January 30 - at least the division's records show they went into the 10th corps reserves –so so they would have come off the line at that time. It certainly would have been cold at then

Piper: Yes, that was colder than a well digger, I'll tell you. So, we found out, too –by the way, which was intriguing –when we get to this ship, we're going to have to climb a rope ladder. Now, can you believe that? Infantry guys,, we've been through all this crap and they can't get us on that ship without having to climb that damn rope ladder? And everybody was kind of teed-off at that one. We did it, but there were some people that had a tough time, as you would imagine. You had all your gear. You had to be young, let me tell you, to do it,

DePue: So, you're probably carrying what – 60 pounds or so on your back?

Piper: Oh, yeah, oh yeah, my God. And disgusted with the whole damn thing because we still didn't know where we were going and the water was pretty rough out there off shore, as you can imagine. We weren't very far off shore and there were pretty good waves. Well anyway, we went down south into this area and all we've heard was that the place was called Koji-Do. That's the way I remember; that's what I heard. And it was a prisoner-of-war island, where they had a whole bunch of POW's [prisoners of war] and we were going to [go] in and take over an area and do what had to be done.

DePue: As far as you can recall the entire regiment went down for that duty?

Piper: Yes, as far as I know. I know the battalion went, that's as far as I recall – our outfit.

DePue: What was battalion's mission once they get down to the island?

Piper: Well, number 1, they talked about the ability of the North Korean and the Chinese that were there to communicate with the north in less than 24 hours. Our job was to see if we could determine how they were doing that. Now there have been other people assigned that, of course, but that was one of the things we were told in my particular S-2 section that we were going to be doing. This required several things. We had to set up maps of the area, and people took a look at night to see where lights came from and, you know, record all this kind of activity that may be

suspicious, may not, how do you know, that kind of stuff. Then we also took part in what was called administrative searches.

DePue: Searching the prisoners themselves?

Piper: Yes. In the middle of the night, like one, or two, three o'clock in the morning, you round up about 100 guys, 150 guys. You would be in front of the three or four fence gateway and had to open it up in a big hurry. We'd all go running in and kick them all outside and they'd have to drop all of their clothes, and we took everything out.

DePue: Now were you aware of all of the controversy that had gone on in the POW camps on Koji-Do Island before you got there?

Piper: No.

DePue: There wasn't much discussion about the fact that the camp commandant, General Dodd, was actually captured by the prisoners and held hostage for a while.

Piper: Never heard that.

DePue: Okay. Well, that's interesting. Because I'm sure that happened in 1952, before you guys got there.

Piper: Yeah. Probably did, because it sounds like some of our mission was in the area of something like that because they said they had a whole museum there which we, our group, the S-2 guys, went to and they showed these weapons that were improvised, made, by people who supposedly didn't have anything to make weapons with. Like toothbrush holders, like a spear, or a short razor blade – they'd break them in two and put them in this toothbrush holder and they had spears and they had things that they carved out of wood to make it look like a gun and painted black, by the way – it looked like a gun. I mean they had all kinds of different things that were found in these administrative searches. You would never believe they could come up with all that. I wouldn't.

DePue: I've done some reading on this and I know that the problem was that there were a lot of both North Koreans and Chinese who had absolutely no intention of returning to the North or to China. And there were hard-core Communists in these camps as well. Do you know the essential nature of the prisoners in this camp when you were there? Was it a mixture of those? Was it the hard-core prisoners?

Piper: To be honest, Mark, I never had a feel for that at all. Had a feel about the communications, and, by the way, we did find out, it wasn't just us that found this out, how they communicated. It's the American ingenuity of course, and regimentation, put all the barracks in a row, windows in the same place, a light at a window can pass from one end of the camp to the other in a matter of minutes. And someone in the hill could catch it from the third cabin, fifth cabin, this is picked up.

DePue: Was it Morse code that they were passing?

Piper: Whatever code they used, I have no [idea], we never could figure out what it was, but we did see it in motion and we did see around the hills because there were hills all around this camp. Now the area that we were in –I can't really recall –but it seemed like to me we had probably twenty barracks. It didn't hold more than two hundred, a hundred and fifty—two hundred, something like that --

DePue: You're talking about American barracks or POW barracks?

Piper: POW barracks. All built in a row with a fence around it. And they had fences between so they couldn't run all over. They had all that pretty well identified, but they didn't think about the windows. And we're too civil to have a place without windows.

DePue: Well, they had flashlights even.

Piper: That's right. They did.

DePue: Were the flashlights issued to them? (both talking)

Piper: Where would they come from? Not that I know of. But they had light. And they did have their own – that's where I first heard the word – "kangaroo courts." They had them.

DePue: They, being the prisoners.

Piper: The prisoners.

DePue: Explain that a little bit.

Piper: Well if somebody fell on the wrong side of the leaders of the barracks, for whatever reason: could be rumors, could be fact, they may suspicion they were in cahoots with the Yankees; you know, that sort of thing. They had a trial and, if that guy didn't come out with a thumbs up, he was thumbs down and that's the way you found him the next morning.

DePue: It sounds like the camp you were at was definitely controlled, dominated by the ones who were still sympathetic to Communism, who were intending to go back.

Piper: Yes. Never heard the thing about guys that didn't want to go back. I'd never heard that.

DePue: You weren't there all that long; it must have been just a few months?

Piper: About two months. Month and a half or two months.

DePue: Were you then shipped back up to the front lines?

Piper: Well, we were shipped back up to a place where they have a tungsten mine. Can't recall the name of the town. It could have been Taegu or it could have been something, I know it was a "T". But they had tungsten mines there. And our particular battalion group, S-2, along with some of the other guys in the battalion went to this location. It was in an encampment surrounded by rock cliffs with an opening out to the road, but pretty well protected from any outside activity with fences and that sort of thing. And there's where we stayed for about a month. Our assignment there, all I did, was post the maps of where we were, where our company guys were. George, Easy, Fox, they were not right where we were. Never quite sure why we were there. Because tungsten – I did get to see the mine. I never went in it, but in a Jeep, we drove over to it, and went under a great big opening into the side of a hill, all kinds of guards around; ROKs as well as our people.

DePue: ROKs being Republic of Korea?

Piper: Yes. And, saw the area in the town, typical Korean town, you know, typical Korean town. But then we probably weren't there more than three weeks, something like that, then we moved on out up towards the valley –I'm not quite sure whether it was Kumwha or Chosin –but a valley where the "Triple Nickel" had been—that was an artillery outfit.

DePue: The Triple Nickel was in a battle in or near the Chosin reservoir. I can't remember the specific location now but they were overrun.

Piper: That's right. That's what I --

DePue: So this would have been the Chosin reservoir area.

Piper: And an outfit, we were told - I have no idea how factual –but we did get some replacements in our organization from an outfit who left their post up there and allowed the Triple Nickel to be overrun. It was an outfit from down south and –

DePue: An American unit?

Piper: No. Puerto Rican, from what we had heard. And we got some replacements, Puerto Rican replacements who, very sheepish, would have nothing to do with us, any of our group. Once we had heard the story, it was a reciprocal thing; we didn't have a lot to do with them. But, obviously, very unhappy, very disturbed. They didn't stay very long – and they were gone. And that was getting towards the end of the war and some kind of truce was signed and it ended.

DePue: So, just from your comments right there, I know that you guys did get back up in the lines again, but at the end of the war it just kind of petered out so to speak, as far as you could tell?

Piper: Yeah.

DePue: There wasn't a lot of discussion at your level of what was going on in the armistice talks?

Piper: No. No.

DePue: It was just background noise as far as you guys were concerned.

Piper: Yes. And us making things as comfortable as we could because you had a little more time; you didn't have to do a lot of the things you normally would do. And we were losing people; they were taking people here, and there, and sending them back home.

DePue: So the "they" here is the army. It was moving people about?

Piper: Yes.

DePue: Were the losses primarily because they hit the certain number of points they'd earned?

Piper: Yes, in many cases. Like myself. We were told thirty-six points and you go home. At four points per month.

DePue: If you're in combat?

Piper: Yes. If you're in a location where it's considered combat.

DePue: Well, would the prison camp earn you that many?

Piper: Yes. The first assignment, and the prison camp. I don't believe the tungsten mine would have, in my own personal opinion, but those others would have, along with the last one that I went to before they signed the truce. But we never really got any activity up there at the Reservoir towards the end; there was nothing really going on. We're all deployed, but no activity, no shells, no bombs, no nothing. But, eleven months, I think it was, that I was there.

DePue: And you got your thirty-six points?

Piper: I had my thirty-six and I was on the way back.

DePue: That was August, September?

Piper: I think it was around August.

DePue: Okay. Let's go back before war end. Do you recall the time when, I think in the June time frame, somewhere around there, that Syngman Rhee, the President of South Korea, suddenly released all these disgruntled North Korean and Chinese who had no intention of going back and just released them and let them walk out of the prison camps? Do you recall that?

Piper: No, I really don't. I don't really recall that. I remember Syngman Rhee and so forth, but not an event like that.

DePue: Let's go with some more general questions then. You're impression of the soldiers you served with.

Piper: Good. Good American guys, draftees. RA's [regular army] kind of resented the National Guard boys and the draftees as, you know, powdered-nose rich kids, or whatever they sometimes called us. But, generally, after you'd been through a couple of incidents with them, they found out we were just like them and we found out that they weren't as cynical and as bad as we might think.

DePue: Now you mentioned earlier you had a least one black soldier that you were with. This is, of course, the first war in American history where there was an integrated army. Did that seem to work?

Piper: Never had a bit of trouble with that individual as long as there weren't too many in one organization. Now before that unit, an incident that I was just talking about, before that was over, we had several replacements that came in that were black and what I experienced was a tendency of them to get together and leave the group they were with at times when they had their free time. The atmosphere would change from a blended kind of work-together kind of crew to, they were kind of on their own and did their own thing.

DePue: This is during down time though?

Piper: Yes.

DePue: How about the officers, the NCOs and the officers you work with? I have to believe that a lot of these people were World War II veterans, especially the senior NCOs.

Piper: The senior one, the West Point guy, was a senior guy. Not what I would call the typical West Pointer. He didn't look sharp, like a sharp soldier.

DePue: This was a captain?

Piper: Captain. What I'm getting at is that his posture, his deportment on the surface, would not project that kind of an image. His actions, the way he conducted himself, ran his company, would let you know that he was a well-thought-of guy by the troops. Not all were, as you would imagine.

DePue: Not all officers?

Piper: Not all officers. And a lot of the officers were not high on West Point graduates to say the least. The officers that I'm talking about, the first and second lieutenants and stuff like that, they were guys just about like me, except they were from National Guard or maybe they had been drafted and went to OCS [Officer Candidate School], or been in college programs and that sort of thing. And that was

the first experience of any kind for them too, in that kind of a role. So they had a lot to learn, too. They'd had the schooling but they didn't have the – how do you make guys do things you want them to do. Not everybody is agreeable to your way of doing things and things like that.

DePue: Well, that's where the NCOs (non-commissioned officers) come in. The NCOs are supposed to be the ones running the army.

Piper: That's right. And the second lieutenants, the ones that I had, were as green as I was, were looking to you to help them, whatever they had to do, knew when they had to take charge, do this— They finally got it figured out after a short experience and grew into their job pretty darn good, I'll have to say that. Almost everyone I had.

DePue: What was your rank when you were in Korea?

Piper: Well, I was a corporal and then went to a sergeant and then I came out as a sergeant first-class [SFC]. I got that in the S-2 Section.

DePue: Sergeant first class at that time was an E-6? [a pay grade designation]

Piper: I think so, yes.

DePue: Because that's a point of confusion for me, at least, because that's an E-7 now and there's a staff sergeant at E-6 and you didn't mention that rank. I've heard that there wasn't that staff sergeant position, that the E-6's were called sergeant first class.

Piper: No, I was a staff sergeant for a short time –not not very long. I went from a private first class here to a corporal over there, to a staff sergeant then to the SFC.

DePue: Then you skipped sergeant E-5.

Piper: What's --

DePue: Sergeant first class is what's on your DD214. So you came out as a sergeant first class.

Piper: Yes. Five stripes. Three up and two down.

DePue: Okay. Well, that's an E-7, at least in today's army it is. How about the ROKs? Did you have much experience with the Korean soldiers?

Piper: Yeah, yeah, we did. Primarily with the first and second assignments. What we had is, a guy in about each squad, platoon, there would be a ROK.

DePue: Did they call them KATUSAs [Korean Augmentees To the U. S. Army] at that time?

Piper: Well, they called the guys that were not a soldier, KATUSAs where I was. They were people who were South Koreans, but they helped move things, carry things, they were called KATUSAs.

DePue: But those weren't really soldiers?

Piper: We never took them as soldiers. The ROKs had a uniform and they were with us and they had their own outfit. As a matter of fact, when we were on the ridge up there, they had an outfit just to our west that was a ROK outfit. But we had ROK soldiers in our unit. As a matter of fact, one of the times that we were down in the rear, we were swimming in a river—we were getting showers, that's why we were down there – a shower was swimming in the river. One of the guys in our squad was a heck of a fine young kid; probably twenty, twenty-one years old, just loved Americans, couldn't believe you'd live in a house as big as they are as you show them your family pictures and stuff like that, tried his best to learn English and was really just very warm, welcoming, kind of guy and – great kid – drowned that day. Broke that whole damn outfit up, was in that river, have no idea what happened. I had been in it, but I was not there at the time and here they come dragging this kid in and here it's this little old Kim somebody. Good kid. Lovely family, from what he told us, showed us pictures. So you had a heart for them. However, I did not feel real good about the ROKs as a unit in maintaining their position.

DePue: But the Korean soldiers who were incorporated into your unit, you thought they were more than carrying their weight?

Piper: Yes, I did. And the rest of us did.

DePue: How about the Korean people? I assume you had some opportunities to encounter them.

Piper: You know, not a whole lot. The encounters we had were in Pusan. We were in a closed enclave and we couldn't get out anyway, but everything was more in the warning vein: being careful of guys who resented you being here, kids who were orphaned or you don't stick your arm out the train window or reach out to give a kid anything, he'll take your watch or anything else that you had. So right off the bat, you were given kind of a little scare tactic to stay your distance, so to speak. By the same token, I'm thinking some of the places I was at, like we would go out in the hills down at Koji-Do and you'd run across people down there and they were very cordial, very, almost to the point where you felt they shouldn't be that –not subservient –but they would bow and get off the path and let you walk and –

DePue: Very deferential to you.

Piper: Yeah, but very respectful. One would treat you in highest regard, but you didn't quite trust him. But they really—I never ran into any problems with any of them.

DePue: How about the enemy, your impressions of the enemy you faced?

Piper: Looked like they hated me every time they saw me, especially - my best experience would have, of course been in Koji-Do where we were right there. And they looked at you with contempt; of course, you got pretty callous to that. If he didn't move, you didn't let them show one ounce of rebellion. That's the way it was.

DePue: Chinese or North Koreans?

Piper: North Koreans. Now they said some Chinese were there. I couldn't tell the difference.

DePue: I think they might have different uniforms, but by the time they got into prison camp, uniforms were tattered.

Piper: That's right and they'd changed them. When we had these searches, you know, those uniforms went. You took everything. So, and you didn't throw them much in return either.

DePue: Changing gears here a little bit. You mentioned you were already married; you had a young daughter by the time you went over. How did you manage to stay in touch, or did you?

Piper: Oh, yeah. Letters, all the time, wrote letters, received letters. Good mail service!

DePue: Well, I'm sure Ann wrote plenty of letters. Was she a one-a-day writer?

Piper: A couple a week, probably, with pictures of the daughter, things like that.

DePue: How about some of the other living conditions that surprised you there. Was food okay, up on the line?

Piper: I'm going to have to get a drink.

DePue: Okay we'll pause here for a second. (pause in recording) (begins again)

Piper: The question about food, the kinds of food that we had. For the most part at Camp Cooke and Fort Riley, Kansas, big mess halls - good. I mean it would sustain you, wasn't mother's cooking. My first experience with KP and that sort of thing kind of shook you a little bit to see how they made things and put it all together, but it was amazing; most of it came out tasting pretty good. A place like Camp Stoneman - a consolidated mess - was bad, in my opinion. There was never anything tasted good but bread and butter. On the ship, once we got things settled down and you could eat again, was not bad, I would have to say mediocre; it sustained you. Got to Korea though and surprisingly good, I thought, maybe I was getting used to bland, just quantity and not quality.

DePue: But even when you were in the front lines, it was—

Piper: Well we had cans of stuff, I think we used to call them C-rations, but then there was another name, too. I don't know whether it was Ks or something, but, hey, that's, of course, that's when we started smoking, all of us. Free cigarettes, free candy, you'd see some fruit.

DePue: Those items came with the rations?

Piper: Yeah. I remember the one thing—there was a couple things that were really in demand – apple sauce, everybody in my unit loved apple sauce and naturally there'd be only one can in a package, or something like that. I think the package served so many people. There was always a rhubarb about who gets the apple sauce. (chuckle) Generally though, on the line, we had a field kitchen and we'd get a hot meal every day. I don't ever recall missing one.

DePue: Usually the supper meal?

Piper: It seemed like to me it was noon, but it could have been. Always had coffee in the morning and that sort of thing. But the locations down the way from the holding positions to the ship that took us to Koji-Do, at Koji-Do back to Tungsten mine area, the food was all edible, varied, was not what I call real bad at all.

DePue: Of course, compared to what the Koreans were trying to survive on, I'm sure it was luxurious.

Piper: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Well, that's one thing that really impresses you and that, to me, was always why we were in the position, our military, to win the war. Our ability to supply our troops and get it where it was needed was probably unmatched. We were able to do it. They couldn't and that goes for munitions as well as the food – the way we did it. I think that speaks volumes for the outcome.

DePue: Did you have leave while you were there?

Piper: No, I had a chance to go to Japan, but I turned that down.

DePue: You would have had to go to Japan and then come back, and then stay longer at the tail end.

Piper: Yeah. What did they call that, R&R? [rest and relaxation]

DePue: Yeah.

Piper: Guys would go and come back.

DePue: Did you see any entertainers over there, or USO or anything like that?

Piper: No, no, no. There might have been something like that in a camp we went back to while we waiting to go some place, but I never went to it. Or, at least, I never knew about it in enough time to get there.

DePue: Any other particular incidents that have stuck with you all these years. Let's take incidents that involve combat first of all.

Piper: The closest – I've told this story before –the closest I ever really got to being hurt. We were walking one evening about six o'clock, seven o'clock at night from our location which was Battalion Headquarters down to George Company Headquarters, and the line, which was right in the front of us, was probably a mile away. You know you had to follow trails around. We're down there about three-fourths of the way on a real narrow path, rocky and all that sort of thing, and you could hear the overhead coming in. All of a sudden, one of them was closer, and you knew it, than it should have been. So, down we went. There was three or four of us and I hit the ground first and this big guy hit on top of me and there were rocks underneath and, of course, it pushed up to my ribs and everything. I thought I'd been hit by everything. Well, it was our own round, short round. That shakes you. As a matter of fact, I swore I was hit. That guy got off of me; I was feeling all over my chest, my legs, I could hardly move. I couldn't hardly breathe. Naturally, it didn't hit any of us, but it hit right below us; it could have very easily. That's one incident I'll never forget because of the pronounced feeling of being hurt. I felt all the injury and yet there wasn't one.

The saddest incident that I was involved in involved this same – no it might not have been George Company, it might have been Fox Company, I'm not sure about that. But I was in the observation booth and my position and it was a Saturday morning. and They'd called for some air strikes by our people for positions in front of our line where we had seen activity. They came in –these were navy planes, as I recall; this is what we told our office because we asked all about it. But anyway, I'm standing up observing the air strike and our air panels were out on top of the positions so they knew which way was the line; sometimes they got confused. We had guys standing up in the trench, not high, but you could see them down there, they were watching the air strikes – our guys. I'll be damned if one of our planes came through and a round hit the, I think it's the Fox Company's CP. How that could ever happen we'll never know. Of course, we called it in immediately as others did, and you could see how it had affected our own people, and it did. As we're querying about how they communicated this, , we went to an artillery outfit and they said it was a navy pilot. He asked to be released from further duty and they said he returned to his ship. And then they asked us how many people were injured and we really didn't know.

DePue: When you say that he asked to be released on that particular mission, or from flying missions in the future?

Piper: On that mission. There were about five planes.

DePue: So two incidents that you've related both involving friendly fire. How does that make you feel?

Piper: That you’re in the risk zone the minute you step into areas like that, not only from the enemy, but from the events that take place involving your own people.

DePue: Angry at the pilots or the artillery?

Piper: Confused as to how that can happen. However, knowledge that whenever you have people involved –and there is no doubt that the guy was trying to do his best –but some little slip-up, some little event – just like the short round, why didn’t it have sufficient powder in it to make it go the projected distance it was to – who knows?

DePue: There are only a hundred different variables in that one, probably. Okay, bring us back home then if you would.

Piper: When I got word that I was rotating, there were other people rotating at that point, we got in a familiar old deuce-and-a-half truck and away you go again. I’m trying to recall where we actually got on a ship. It seemed like to me it was on the east coast somewhere; it might have been Pusan, but I’m not sure about that. I don’t recall. All I know is that I was on a ship and away we were going. Lo and behold, I ran across probably half a dozen guys that had gone over from Camp Cooke, 44th Division guys, who were going to wherever they were going. We never ended up in the same place, But we were going back to the states together.

DePue: Because the math worked out; they all had the number of points they needed.

Piper: So that was refreshing. We had some good times, good weather, a good trip. Got to Stoneman again, got on a train—took us to Camp Carson, Colorado. I had a duffel bag and stuff like that and got on that train. I got the worst case of diarrhea I had ever had in my life. I think it was from the meal at Camp Stoneman; they said it was because it was so rich after eating all that “overseas” crap, which I don’t believe. But anyway, bad. I think I lost probably twelve pounds and I couldn’t eat anything for two or three days – water.

DePue: That sounds like food poisoning to me.

Piper: Oh, gee, Mark, I’m telling you, it was terrible. When I had to lift the damn duffel bag, the beads of sweat would come out on me because I could hardly move. But anyway, went to Carson stayed there for about three or four days – at least a couple. Got our muster-out pay, bought a train ticket from Colorado Springs back to Chicago, back home and back to the real world.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about the reunion with the family.

Piper: Great, great. My mom came up, my dad, and my wife, the baby---

DePue: Came out to where?

Piper: Went up to Park Forest which is up by Chicago and they picked me up on a train that I got off of up there, met me at the train. We had our “hellos” and all that sort

of thing and drove back to Park Forest where my sister had a home. We stayed there over night then drove back down here and Ann and I went off for three or four days. My mom and dad took care of little Terry, and we got to know each other again. The little kid was very reluctant to accept me and thought I was taking her mommy away; she was not a happy camper for several days.

DePue: Who is this guy?

Piper: Yeah.

DePue: How old was Terry then when you came back?

Piper: Well, if I recall, she was born in September '51, so she would have been probably about one and one-half to two years.

DePue: Just at two years old. How about the rest of the American public? Now I would guess that you recall the big hoopla at the end of the Second World War, especially when all the soldiers came back. How would you compare that to what you experienced?

Piper: Never experienced any of that until we went back to the guard unit here. I didn't report right away; at this stage, you really didn't give a damn. You really didn't. That was an impression, by the way, I've left out, and I don't want to back track, but –

DePue: Go ahead.

Piper: One of the most sobering things I ever saw, was going from the Pusan area up to this first assignment in Korea: the trains coming south with the guys on it that were coming from the line. The most forlorn, hardened, bitter-looking people I've ever seen in my life and that's what some of the NCOs in our group said, "Those guys are coming from the line and you can tell by looking at them". And he said, "The one thing you don't want to do: don't make any jokes, don't have anything to do with them, don't say anything unless they say something to you. They are up-tight and would tear anything apart they could get their hands on". I looked at those guys, because they looked just like us, except for this very somber, hard, facial-strained looked. Looked like they hadn't slept for weeks. They looked bitter. They stared. They were not laughing or talking like we were. I thought to myself, "Well, those are the guys that have seen it and coming back probably considers themselves lucky, but don't want any crap from anybody." And when I came back here that's kind of the way you felt. I don't think I looked like that, but you really didn't want any crap from anybody. You felt you could tackle the world. DePue: So it changed your perspective on things.

Piper: That's true. But as far as the people greeting you –nobody other than your friends. We went back, finally, to a meeting at National Guard and it's just like going back to this old school. When I went back to work now, got my job back; of course, they held our job. The telephone company treated us great. My wife got paid for a year,

well, the whole time I was gone. The difference between what my pay check was and what I would have made here, she got that.

DePue: That was very generous.

Piper: Yes, it was. All the benefits. I got a Christmas present every year, rolls razor, the kind that you strop, things like that. It’s just a great outfit. Got your job back.

DePue: This is AT&T at the time or –?

Piper: Illinois Bell.

DePue: Illinois Bell.

Piper: So, from that standpoint, there was no folderol from the community. I mean no great big parade, or welcome back or anything that I’m aware of. There may have been;nothing I went to.

DePue: So you quickly got back into civilian life since you got back to work so quickly.I’m not sure everybody had that fortunate a transition.

Piper: Yeah, that’s probably true.

DePue: You got back into the National Guard, but you didn’t stay in the Guard too long after that?

Piper: No. I think I enlisted for three years and it was just about up -justhad a few months to go.

DePue: And, you’d had enough by that time.

Piper: That was enough. I don’t know that I ever went to a legitimate meeting after that. I’m not sure I did.

DePue: Did you join any veteran’s organizations?

Piper: Oh, yeah. American Legion, VFW, all up and down the state of Illinois really – Sterling, Rock Island –because I lived a lot of different places. I usually went because a lot of telephone guys did anyway, so it was kind of natural.

DePue: Are you still active now?

Piper: No. Haven’t been for many years.

DePue: Well, I’m going to back you away. But before we do that, any humorous incidents that you recall from over in Korea that you haven’t already mentioned?

Piper: Humorous—nothing comes to mind, not really.

DePue: Well, you impress me so far; you remembered a lot of different things. I really appreciate your taking the time to do this.

Piper: Well, I hope it was helpful anyway.

DePue: You bet. Take a step back. You might think that these are somewhat unfair –you were a young kid at the time –but do you think the war was justified, did you understand why you were there?

Piper: Oh, yes. I felt I did. A lot of people I argued with didn't.

DePue: Other GIs?

Piper: No. No. Just people that were not involved – like my uncle or people that you work with that couldn't understand or, thought "Who gives a darn about that".

DePue: Was this before you went, or after you came back, that you were having these kinds of discussions?

Piper: Really both. Immediately before, because now I was going to be a part of it as we were activated and then coming back as you would meet people; I was back to work and, you know, talking, social events, and all that sort of thing. Talking about a waste of time and money and all this kind of stuff, and even some of my own family. But back then, at least my criteria is, that we had signed a treaty and a truce, not a truce, but an agreement with a country that we would defend them. And here's this dastardly outfit came charging down and wanted to take away their freedoms. You just don't abandon your friends like that. Well, I've always felt that way.

DePue: How about the way the war ended?

Piper: Did not like that. Most of the guys I was with did not like it, after we got back home.

DePue: What was it that you didn't like about it?

Piper: That we capitulated when we had a chance to continue it on. In other words, MacArthur was right and Truman was wrong. Why Harry backed off we couldn't understand. Why didn't they go in to win it? They did initially, but then they backed off. Could never quite figure out what was behind it and yet, have an awful lot of respect today for Harry Truman. That's tough decisions that he was involved with.

DePue: So, this many years from that point in time, we're past fifty years beyond that now, your opinion about the way the war ended has changed?

Piper: Yes, it has. I think it was probably the right thing to do. It was trying to stop the spread of Communism and it did. I think it's probably true, we would have agitated China much more than we wanted to and I don't know that you'd ever win

something with those people, plus at that time, the Russians were just standing on the sidelines. So that stopped them too, to that degree.

DePue: So, you're proud of your service in Korea?

Piper: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. And feel that old Harry was right and MacArthur was wrong. And I didn't used to think that.

DePue: And it took a while to make that change, I would think.

Piper: Yes, that's right.

DePue: How do you think going to Korea, this experience, changed you – changed your outlook on life?

Piper: It broadens your perspective on the world. Little guy from the Midwest; land lover, so to speak; had an experience to go across an ocean twice; stay in a foreign country in Japan; get some cultural shocks there. More, when you went to Korea, and saw how those people lived. Back in the 50's now, they had a pretty rough way to live. I remember a couple of places where –it was a bay we were overlooking –and the bay was full of buckets of dung and all kinds of stuff that they threw out there.

DePue: There were just using it to dump the garbage.

Piper: Dump the garbage, yeah. And waste, so to speak. We were setting up on the hill high enough that when the wind came in – it would gag a maggot, it was terrible. They just had a different culture, a different way of advancement, and so it opens your eyes to the world – a little bigger than what you thought initially. There are different ways to live, but our way seemed awfully good.

DePue: (chuckle)

Piper: Compared to theirs – much better.

DePue: Did it take you a while to readjust? I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you mention that you kind of felt like those guys you saw on the train when you came back – chip on your shoulder, perhaps/ Did it take you a while to readjust?

Piper: You know, Mark, not really. And I think that's because I had a mom and dad and a daughter, and a wife, and I had a job to go to. When I came back with the guys, they were some of the same guys I had left with, and very open, welcoming, that sort of thing on a small scale basis. And I walked right in to the job and was expected to produce. You say your "hellos" for about ten minutes, but buddy, got something to do, let's get going. And so I was immediately taken with that way of life. Yeah, you kind of walked into it; I didn't run into it, but got into it rather quick. I never really thought much about it from then on.

DePue: This war that you fought in, by the 1960s, especially by the time we were in the middle of the Vietnam War, seemed like the American public had kind of forgotten all about Korea. There was still a lot of memory connected with World War II, but not Korea. Has the fact that Americans have overlooked the Korean War bothered you over the years?

Piper: You think about it on occasion, more in the past than now. Vietnam: I think probably that’s the one that made you a little resentful. Guys from my era, anyway, some that I’ve talked to, kind of resent all the attention they got and felt they really didn’t carry their weight. They were crybabies; that’s the way we felt. We came back – at least the ones that I know –we didn’t cry in our beer and demand more respect and more this and more all that. I’m not saying they got what they should have, but the point was, they seemed to, as I view it, is the Vietnam veterans felt they didn’t get the respect they deserved – by their country or their fellow Americans. I just kind of think they whined more than any generation before them. That’s the way I see it.

DePue: Yeah. Any reflections of that Korean War experience with what’s going on in the world today?

Piper: It’s come a long way, but when you look at it, we’ve got basic problems that are very similar – the Middle East being the prime example. You’ve got a group of people that don’t care for our way of life. I think some of the others that we used to be skeptical of, I don’t believe we can say boy, we’re bosom buddies now, although some people say that, but I don’t think Russians any more admire our way of life than they did before. I know China does not. I think they’re more appreciative that we buy stuff from them, but not about our culture. But the real problem I see is that we have similar kinds of problems in the Middle East, that were probably there then, but it hadn’t fermented to the point that they have today. So it’s probably my assessment of problems in the world: there is a great, if not greater, problem today than ever.

DePue: Here is the final question for you. You can make any general comment you’d like. This is your opportunity to offer any advice to anybody who’s going to listen to this down the road.

Piper: Listen to this?

DePue: Yeah.

Piper: Well, just probably that you take some of it with a grain of salt, because it’s coming from little crinkles in the brains from fifty some years ago. You have a tendency, they tell me, to forget the bad and remember the good. I never really felt that way in our discussion. I had good and bad. We had tough times on a ship, I remember, tough times in Japan, a lonely feeling of you didn’t know anybody next to you, in the whole town, on the whole train, and where are you going. I mean you could feel sorry for yourself, if you weren’t careful, but that wouldn’t get you by and these

other people were in the same boat. I kind of felt we have a great way of orienting people to grow into their jobs here in our country, in our society. And I think I was an example of it. Who would ever think a guy from central Illinois would have those experiences. It's like somebody said once, and I say, "It's the greatest experience in my life, but I wouldn't want to do it again". I think I have a lot of reflection, but glad that I experienced it, and kind of feel some people that didn't, missed out on some things along the way.

DePue: So that is part of what defines you?

Piper: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DePue: Any final words?

Piper: No, no, not that I can think of, Mark.

DePue: Well, Bill, thank you very much. It has been a pleasure to talk with you and it will be fun to continue working on this. Thanks again.

Piper: You're welcome, my pleasure.