

Interview with Gay Lewison

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, April 27, 2007. This is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here with Gay Lewison, a retired Master Sergeant.

Lewison: Sergeant Major

DePue: Sergeant Major. Sorry to demote you there, Sergeant Major. That's a terrible thing to do. In fact I knew that. I apologize for that. We're here to talk about your experiences in both Korea and the Viet Nam Wars – some of the more trying experiences that this nation has certainly had. To begin with I want to get some background information on you Gay, if I could. So let's start with where you were born, where you grew up.

Lewison: I was born in Whitehall, Wisconsin, grew up in Wisconsin in various places – initially in the Eau Claire, Black River Falls area, and then managed to work our way—my dad was a jack of all trades, master of none, but as a head sawyer at a saw mill—we moved to Iola, Wisconsin and that's where I managed to go to four years of high school. Following high school I enlisted in the Army

DePue: Now, where is Iola?

Lewison: Iola is about sixty miles west of Green Bay between Appleton and Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

DePue: Okay. That means that are you a Green Bay fan, or are you a...

Lewison: Yes, Green Bay. (laughter and chime in the background)

DePue: Okay. Here's part of the experiment. We're sitting at somebody's kitchen table and we get to hear all the background noise, but I don't think that will be a problem at all. You said you enlisted.

Lewison: Yes

DePue: This would have been what time?

Lewison: Ah, 1 November 1949, right after high school. Employment was pretty tough and three of us went out west to work the harvest.

DePue: Which harvest?

Lewison: North Dakota

DePue: Wheat harvest then?

Lewison: Well, back then you had the combines coming up from Texas and all the old stuff. We still shocked wheat, and combines were just starting to come, really. And the first year—we also went after my junior year—we worked the wheat harvest, and then the second year, after we graduated, we wound up in Red River Valley and worked in the potato harvest.

DePue: Okay. So you were out there for not just a summer, but for a while?

Lewison: For the summer working.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: And then came back, uh, and unemployment was pretty high back then and didn't have all the goodies you've got today. But three of us decided we wanted to join the Navy. Well we found out that the Navy would only take one so the other two guys were brothers so they made an exception for them, and so then another fellow and I decided we wanted to go to the Army. So of the two of us made it. The third fellow was a classmate and a ball player and he had a trick knee.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: (laughter) We were over in Green Bay and taking our physical. And when they asked him to squat down, he couldn't do it. So he flunked and the two of us went, so we went west to Green Bay and went to Fort Riley, Kansas for our basic training.

DePue: Was joining the military something that you had been thinking about for a long time, or was this something more of a whim for you?

Lewison: Well, I'd thought about it. Of course this was, you know, relatively close after World War II.

DePue: Right.

Lewison: Ah.

DePue: And I thought there was a draft at that time, as well.

Lewison: There was kind of a...I know from prior classmates there was a kind of a strange deal, like only one year or something.

DePue: Um hmm.

Lewison: My dad's first cousin was killed on the Arizona on Pearl Harbor, and my dad's brother, my Uncle Harley, he was a senior in high school in December '41 and as soon as he could he joined the Navy. So he spent all of his time in Southwest Pacific.

DePue: Well, you had a personal reason to be joining the Navy after that, I'm sure.

Lewison: Yes. And I had two uncles that were in what they called the Army Air Corps back then.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: So, the military sense within the family was still there; it was always on my mind. But, it really was, joining was the last ditch to get employment.

DePue: At the time you joined...

Lewison: At that time, you know, 75 bucks a month (both laugh) and no promotions.

DePue: Well, of course, it was...

Lewison: The recruiter didn't tell us that either.

DePue: Yeah. It was a much better economy after the war than it was before the war, but it was still pretty tight, as I understand.

Lewison: I know many times, I think through everybody's career, you say I want to get out of this.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: But when I'd go home on leave, there was still unemployment, dissatisfaction, and each time I did so, when re-enlistment time came I just re-enlisted.

DePue: So when you first enlisted you probably weren't thinking: Hey I think I'm going to make a career out of this.

Lewison: No, no, I'd get my three years in and go home.

DePue: Yeah. Get a little adventure and then get a real job. These things have a way of taking there own course after a while. So you went down to what was that?

Lewison: Fort Riley

DePue: Fort Riley. Tell me a little about your basic training.

Lewison: I think, if I remember right, basic training then was twelve weeks.

DePue: You should have mentioned this before, you joined as an infantryman.

Lewison: Well, I didn't know what I was going to be.

DePue: Okay. When you went down to basic, you still weren't sure.

Lewison: Basic training I had no idea because we hadn't our battery of tests or anything else. This was all done, back then—it's a little different now—you went to your basic training, and for the first week or so that's all you did is all your testing and different, various things and administratively got that all done before you would start your training. Then you just took what they considered as basic soldiering for their basic training because you were going to get your career field after.

DePue: So you went through basic training and still didn't know exactly what they expected you do.

Lewison: No. By the tenth week, I think it was, they announced the top ten percent of the unit would be allowed to go to a leadership school, which was eight more weeks. I made that list and I decided to take it. You know, there was a very good course and a lot of method of instruction, so I had a head start on a lot of the other guys going to their units.

DePue: [background beeping] Well, I don't know what that was – it's still recording here.

(Pause)

DePue: The first file [on the recording chip] was very short because I, as the interviewer, made the terrible mistake and forgot to plug in the machine. This is Mark DePue. We're again talking with Gay Lewison about his experiences. We have you, Gay, in basic training, and just in the process of finding out what you're being assigned to once you finish that. Go ahead.

Lewison: Okay. As I said, I took the assignment to leadership school; that was eight more weeks which was still at Fort Riley there's some pictures of old Fort Riley—and still didn't know what I was going to be. I think it was about the last two weeks of that course they finally made an announcement that what had happened to the people that had dropped out, were being sent to Europe. Because it was a pretty tough course.

DePue: This would have been in late '49 or early '50?

- Lewison: This would have been fifties now, early '50.
- DePue: So January or February?
- Lewison: March type thing or April, even. So that made twelve months that the graduates would be going to the Far East. Of course, that raised a big question: why can't the graduates go to Europe and the (both laugh) flunkies go to the Far East. (more laughter). Wow, I'm give you a standard answer, but the Far East needed good people so still didn't know where I was going until I got my orders. Wondered if I was going to be an infantryman or belong to the Company I 29th Infantry in Okinawa.
- DePue: Company I
- Lewison: Company I, the 29th Infantry.
- DePue: Now, when you graduated from this leadership course did you come out as a PFC or...?
- Lewison: Still a private.
- DePue: Still a private
- Lewison: Started off as a recruit and then you made private when you...
- DePue: So PV2?
- Lewison: Yeah.
- DePue: Okay.
- Lewison: Had a wave and went to Camp Stoneman, California which is now closed – that was a repo depot – and shipped to Okinawa on the General Nelson Walker.
- DePue: For those who are listening here, a repo depot is the replacement detachment
- Lewison: Right. Big experience there that I remember: it didn't make any difference what grade you are because they had all grades mixed up in barracks and everything was about barracks. When they needed a KP they took a whole barracks, sergeants and all. And, of course, the sergeants got the supervisor jobs and whoever reported to the mess hall got the best jobs first—the first ones there—so a couple of us thought “Well, we'll be servers. That ought to be easy.”
- DePue: Uh-huh
- Lewison: That was a dream (chuckles). We never dreamt that you would be serving about 1,000 guys at once (both laugh). Your arms actually got tired with the potatoes. (laughter). Anyhow, from there we shipped out to Okinawa. The

experience on the ship was not bad, except they held us out of Okinawa because of a typhoon. We were on the edge of this typhoon on this big ship, and it's going around like a cork.

DePue: What's the name of the ship again?

Lewison: General Nelson Walker.

DePue: Okay.

DePue: A Civil War general, I'm thinking – I can't recall.

Lewison: Nelson Walker? I'm not sure.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: There was no Walker that got killed in Korea.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: Yeah. So, anyway, we got to Okinawa and this is where you started your unit training.

DePue: Well, I wanted to back up and ask a couple questions about what you were doing in basic training. Were you trained on some of the weapons?

Lewison: Yes, the weapons doing in basic training. You were trained on some of the weapons they had at that time, but only the light weapons.

DePue: Any machine guns?

Lewison: Yeah, the 30 caliber. Any of what they called "heavy weapons", like the heavy machine guns, the big mortars

DePue: The recoilless rifle?

Lewison: The recoilless rifle hadn't come in yet. Ironic that you said that because I became a recoilless rifle person later in Korea.

DePue: A bazooka?

Lewison: They had the 2-2-3-6 back then, but we didn't get trained on it.

DePue: Hand grenades?

Lewison: Hand grenades, yes.

DePue: Go through bayonet training?

Lewison: No (emphatic) that was another big event.

DePue: So...

Lewison: Later (laughter)

DePue: So how would you say, now without getting into any detail – because we'll certainly get there soon enough – how would you say how good was this training for you?

Lewison: Well, it was all right, but it was basic soldiering. Not just a drill or manual of arms, map reading, first aid and weapons training. By the way, at that time – I'm left-handed and once I had something wrong with my right eye – you **will** fire right-handed.

DePue: Oh, really?

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: So that put you at a disadvantage right from the get go?

Lewison: I wanted to put a big cheek and lip. (chuckles)

DePue: Well.

Lewison: But it again turned out to be handy. Didn't make any difference which way I wanted to go, I could go with it.

DePue: A little bit ambidextrous then.

Lewison: Yeah

DePue: Okay. Let's get back to Okinawa then. You were assigned to I Company of the 29th Infantry Regiment which is not affiliated with any division, is it?

Lewison: No, it was a separate Regimental Combat Team.

DePue: Why don't you tell us a little about the organization of that regiment, because I know that many of the regiments and divisions and battalions were under strength, severely, at that time.

Lewison: Yes. You know I joined and pretty much we had two battalions or three battalions all under strength.

DePue: Now I had read someplace that there was a first battalion and a third battalion.

Lewison: Yeah, but there was a second that was broken up and filled the other two.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: The unit I joined had two rifle platoons and one weapons platoon.

DePue: And what were they supposed to have for their...

Lewison: Three and weapons, and to be full strength probably about 40 people to 45.

DePue: In a platoon?

Lewison: These were about 30.

DePue: So you had a light platoon, and you were short one platoon on top of that?

Lewison: Yeah. And then primarily the training started off: I was assigned to a mortar squad, and a weapons platoon. We did have some mortar training. We had a platoon sergeant that was a World War II veteran in Southeast Asia, a very good man, and he did his best to train us. But there was a lot of guard duty back then, too, so it seemed like we were pulling guard duty all the time, more than training.

DePue: I would imagine that in a tiny place like Okinawa just finding a range that you can lob your mortars into was a hard thing to do.

Lewison: Well, yes, (chuckle). We were in Camp Na (unintelligible). My daughter and son-in-law wound up in Okinawa and they said there was no more Camp Na (unintelligible). Camp Na(unintelligible) was Quonset huts. There was an open area across the road from the battalion and a jungle beyond that. That Sergeant would train us with the mortars. You would be back in the jungle. You could see the flat parade – what we called the parade field – and we'd lay panels out there to hit. One day we were out there shooting and we were shooting tear drop. This Okinawan was riding down the road on his bicycle and we had fired and were watching the round and lost it.

DePue: A tear drop is a...

Lewison: It's a...

DePue: An illumination round?

Lewison: It's just a fake mortar round.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: So it's a round with a thud, but it won't go off. Anyway this Okinawan was riding down the road on his bicycle and all of a sudden he jumped off his bike (laughter). Starts running, and we didn't know what was going on. (laughter) So the Sergeant gave us another fire mission and we shot again. We couldn't see that one either. Then all of a sudden we heard "clang". The battalion

headquarters was right across from our company at the gate. This tear drop went off at the headquarters building.

DePue: **Oh**—what’s not supposed to happen. (laughter)

Lewison: So the next thing to see was somebody running out, jumping in a jeep and heading our way. (DePue laughs) It was the battalion commander. It got interesting for the Sergeant.

DePue: Yeah, I bet. (laughter) Did he keep his rank?

Lewison: O, yeah.

DePue: Kept his position?

Lewison: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Okay. (laughter) You recall the name of the battalion commander?

Lewison: No. Well, it was Colonel Mott. Colonel Mott.

DePue: I thought he was the regimental commander.

Lewison: Well, no, well he may have wound up as the regimental commander.

DePue: Lt. Colonel Harold Mott.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. And you were in the third battalion.

Lewison: Third battalion. The worst colonel was Colonel Mott.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: No, I don’t have a book on that name.

DePue: Do you remember your first day in Okinawa, roughly?

Lewison: Ah,...

DePue: Was it April?

Lewison: No, it would have been, it would have been late May or June, early June.

DePue: Which means you didn’t spend a lot of time in Okinawa?

Lewison: No. When the Korean War broke out, in fact most of us didn’t even know where Korea was.

- DePue: I was going to ask you, how much talk was there about, I'm good here. Was there any talk at all about that something might be happening very soon or any discussion at all about political situation?
- Lewison: Other than what happened, all we know was that it happened.
- DePue: Okay. That would have been the 25th of June, and probably the 26th you heard about it.
- Lewison: Yeah.
- DePue: But no discussion before that time. No thought that you guys would be possibly heading into danger in the near future.
- Lewison: We were supposed to be preparing, I don't remember if it was the 24th Division or 25th Division of Japan. We were supposed to be defending the island against attack, and one of those divisions is going to be attacking us from Japan.
- DePue: Yeah, and of course they both made their way to Korea as soon as...
- Lewison: They went to Korea and we followed. We were alerted, and the way we knew we were alerted was, we started loading ammunition that was piled up out in the jungles.
- DePue: So what's your first thought when you hear, "I'm going to Korea, don't hardly know where Korea is but I know I'm going there and sounds like I'm going to get into some action."
- Lewison: Well, I think everybody at 18 years old feels like "Let's go". You still think you're superman.
- DePue: So you thought you were ready?
- Lewison: Oh yeah, we thought we were ready. We were supposed to go to Japan, supposedly, until this, to get more training –two weeks or so –then go to Korea but that didn't happen. They diverted us straight into Pusan.
- DePue: What mortar system do you work on?
- Lewison: Sixty, sixty mortar. It used to be at unit level.
- DePue: Company level or battalion level?
- Lewison: Company level.
- DePue: So that's a pretty light mortar system.

Lewison: Pretty light mortar system, with that unit.

DePue: How many members in that crew?

Lewison: Six.

DePue: That many?

Lewison: Yeah, but we never had that many until we got some KATUSAs [Korean Augmentees to the U.S. Army] in Korea to be our ammo bearers.

DePue: Was there much of a fire direction center with that or was it pretty much eyesight?

Lewison: It's FO, FO deal.

DePue: Forward observer

Lewison: Yeah, forward observer. He's calling missions and then once you get your mission you're set in your tube to where you want it to be, then you fire it.

DePue: What did you have for a rifle?

Lewison: M-1

DePue: Okay, and that's what you had...

Lewison: Or I had one carbine.

DePue: Okay. Do you remember which one you had?

Lewison: M-1 carbine.

DePue: Did you have any marksmanship training during the time you were at Okinawa on the rifles?

Lewison: No, only had basic training.

DePue: Okay. So you probably thought on the 25th or 26th or shortly after the Korean War actually started with the North Koreans invading the South, that you guys were heading to Korea. And what happened after that. You said you were going to Japan but that never happened.

Lewison: Never happened. We were on what we called a Japanese prison boat, on the Nagasaka Maru. This boat did not have any bunks or anything down in the hole;

there were just pens, and supposedly this boat was used to haul – still even at that late date – Japanese prisoners from Russia to Japan. They wanted us to stay down in the hole, and you couldn't stay down in the hole. It was **bad** – stinky, hot; and ran to Pusan and it was hot. We were quartered there until we got a mission.

DePue: I know that you saw action at Hadong, and I think that was the 25th that you actually got in that area on the 26th of July. So that's roughly about a month. Were you in the Pusan area for most of that month, or were you back in Okinawa for most of that time frame?

Lewison: Most of that month. I don't remember how long it took us to sail from Okinawa to Pusan. It probably took several days.

DePue: Yeah. A couple of days at least.

Lewison: Yeah. We were in Pusan I don't think more than a week, and I remember being in a schoolhouse.

DePue: So it was probably a couple of weeks back in Okinawa before you shipped?

Lewison: Yeah. And then from Pusan we went to Chin Ju. We were housed there again.

DePue: While you were still back in Okinawa, obviously some intense training, or didn't have the opportunity?

Lewison: Didn't really have the opportunity. We had some training is all I can say. Did a lot of guard duty.

DePue: Really? So most of the training that you got in Okinawa happened even before June 25th?

Lewison: Before July 25th.

DePue: Well, June 25th was when the war started.

Lewison: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Okay. So from that point then I know that your regiment, the 29th, and this was when the army is reeling back, when it's primarily the Okinawans – but I know the 24th was...

Lewison: Yeah, Pe Jung.

DePue: And that was General Dean's command?

Lewison: No, the 25th was General Dean.

DePue: Okay so both of those...

Lewison: No, you're right. Dean was with the 24th because he got captured.

DePue: Had you heard about some of the things that were going on, like a task force? Had you heard about that?

Lewison: No.

DePue: What were you hearing? I mean, you're waiting down at Pusan...

Lewison: We're not getting much of anything. We're not. We're not really briefed about anything. All the time sitting around wondering where we were going.

DePue: So you didn't hear that this task force, this organization that was just slopped together by the Army to be a stop gap –and of course, the Americans go up and figure, "Okay, we're Americans, now the North Koreans will see us and just kind of surrender en masse" and ...

Lewison: If I remember right, we heard it wasn't going good, but we still had the confidence that, okay, we're watching John Wayne movies, and all this stuff (laughter). You still think you can do it.

DePue: You hadn't heard that General Dean, a division commander, had actually been captured?

Lewison: No, I don't believe so. I don't remember that—until much later.

DePue: What was the level of confidence among the folks that you were with?

Lewison: I think we were all confident. We figured we were the American Army, and we should be able to handle this.

DePue: Okay. And so, eventually, then –I think it must have been roughly about July 24th or somewhere in there –somebody passes down orders to your regimental commander and you guys head west to Hai Don, and that's where you're going to intercept the North Korean 6th Division. How much did you know about the nature of the enemy?

Lewison: Not much.

DePue: Did you know it was the 6th Division you were going to head into?

Lewison: No.

DePue: So you didn't even know that these guys were basically veterans of the Chinese Civil War?

Lewison: No

DePue: North Korean soldiers but veterans of the Chinese Civil War. These are some of their best soldiers they had in their military.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. I'm doing more talking than I should. Won't you talk about from the time that you guys, I assume, board deuce-and-a-halves [2 ½ ton trucks] or trucks of some type to head west?

Lewison: Well, no. We went to Jin Ju on foot.

DePue: You drove from Pusan to Jin Ju,

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: And that's what, about 20 miles or so?

Lewison: Um, I'm not sure.

DePue: It looks like it's about 20 or 30 miles.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: And then on the road we spent, uh, I don't remember if it was one night or two nights, dug in, kinda dug in, before the attack was launched at Hai Dong.

DePue: But from Chin Ju?

Lewison: Yeah

DePue: Chin Ju. You drove there and then it's how far to Ha Dong. Another 20 miles I believe.

Lewison: Yeah, I would guess, yeah. It's not on this map.

DePue: How long do you remember being on the road marching toward Ha Dong?

Lewison: I can remember spending one night, so it would probably have been two days.

- DePue: I think I'll just shut up and let you talk about that experience from here.
- Lewison: From the time we left in the morning and headed for Ha Dong, our company was the reserve company. We got to a bend in the road and going up a hill and they had us drop our packs. (pause)
- DePue: So you guys are carrying the mortar systems?
- Lewison: Right
- DePue: What job did you have specifically, do you recall?
- Lewison: I was a gunner.
- DePue: Which means you had ammo?
- Lewison: No. Our ammo bearers had to carry what ammo we had. It got rough just carrying a tube and a base plate and a bi-pod.
- DePue: Which one did you end up with?
- Lewison: I had the tube. (pause) We dropped our packs and eventually were called forward. There was fire fighting going on all the time. And, of course, after, it was just a blur. Uh, I can remember being in the river. Our commander was there and the command was given, "Every man for himself."
- DePue: If I can back up a little bit. Just from reading about this experience – John Tolan did a very good job of laying this out in some detail – you guys had basically walked into a classic horseshoe ambush.
- Lewison: Yeah
- DePue: So when you drop your backpack that's when the enemy had initiated this ambush?
- Lewison: We were getting rounds from the rear of us which we thought were short rounds of our own, and it was really theirs. We were getting primarily fire at the same time the front was getting the fire, so we were in a trap. Of course, being a young private you're not that knowledgeable, so you just keep going forward with everybody else. But it got bad, bad enough I can remember. Lt. Macaronus was our Company Commander. Later he was captured.
- DePue: Tolan talked quite a bit about Macaronus.
- Lewison: Yes, he eventually – we read it later in Life Magazine, or something – he wrote

about the Death March. That's the only time I've ever seen him. Yeah, he was the one that said "Every man for himself.", and this way the people that were with us, around me, made our way out to the river, to the rice paddies or whatever, whatever we could do.

DePue: So, at first when initially the action is happening and you guys are at the tail end of the regiment.

Lewison: We were in the reserves, yeah. This battalion.

DePue: This battalion, the Third Battalion, is on the point – you're the last company in the battalion. How many companies were there, four?

Lewison: Yes, 'cause, let me back up a little bit. The bad part of all this, not getting the additional training is – they reorganized this quickly in Okinawa to fill us up. We got replacements from the States. I think we got people from the 2nd Battalion.

DePue: So that's what happened to the 2nd Battalion?

Lewison: Yeah, as far as I know. I was just still a private (laughter).

DePue: Yeah. And had heard you got some brand new recruits, but you're only two weeks there yourself.

Lewison: You know it's kind of a mess, really. But you're still confident. You had some training, and you think you can handle anything that's going to come up. But, the hardest part was, you didn't know everybody in the unit. (pause) You knew the old guys that you were with, and that was hard, too.

DePue: In an organization where you know cohesion is everything, there is none.

Lewison: There is none. And, I can remember coming out of the rice paddy. We'd been fired on pretty good.

DePue: Did you ever set up the 60's or respond...

Lewison: Didn't have a chance. We probably didn't even have a target, you know.

DePue: So did you hit the dirt for a while when you were trying to cover down when all of this – I would imagine you were getting fire from all sides.

Lewison: Yeah. We were in the river which was embanked and the rice paddies had their own little embankments.

DePue: Was the river behind you or in front of you?

Lewison: Well, it ran right through where we were going to go. When I came, there was heavy machine gun on us – they used wheeled machine guns. And they were at us pretty good, but even at my inexperience figured the guy couldn't traverse down anymore. So that's how that group of us made it out of that rice paddy.

DePue: Primarily, some other mortar men in your section?

Lewison: Yeah, and other riflemen and so on.

DePue: All from I Company.

Lewison: Yeah. And there was a group of people (pause) ahead of us. I don't know if they were from the other companies or what, K and L. Also there were these (pause) Koreans shouting and the guys threw their hands up.

DePue: How far ahead of them were they?

Lewison: Well, there was a bunch of them in front of me. We were going up this hill; of course it's heavily wooded.

DePue: By this time you think you're heading straight East?

Lewison: Back the way we came which would have been

DePue: Going east?

Lewison: Southeast. When they threw their hands up, I'm in the rear.

DePue: Still carrying the mortar tube?

Lewison: No, [all] I had left is the sight, 'cause they had told us to drop the tubes.

DePue: And you take the sight so the tube is disabled?

Lewison: Well, still can be used but they proved they could really use them without a sight but, yeah, I had the sight.

DePue: And your...

Lewison: Carbine

DePue: Carbine

Lewison: Yeah, had my carbine. When these fellows threw up their hands I decided, not for me. So I just dove off into a bamboo grove.

DePue: Were there some other people around you who did the same thing?

Lewison: No

DePue: Had you seen, before this time, any of your comrades, your soldiers, fallen from fire or getting hit?

Lewison: Yes, yeah.

DePue: So you were basically all by yourself. How far ahead were these people who were surrendering that you saw?

Lewison: They moved pretty quickly, and this is getting to be afternoon. I waited till there was no more sound (pause). There had been plenty of firing. Other than that, after what I would call combat was over but then I figured what they were doing was killing the prisoners.

DePue: And you were hiding where again?

Lewison: In a bamboo grove, right on the edge of the rice paddy. And, when it got quiet I went up the hill (pause) and then I heard more of them so I just layed still and waited.

DePue: And you were all by yourself?

Lewison: All by myself. So then it got toward dark (cough), and I decided to go down to the river and try to follow the river, go southeast from there. I'm walking along each and all of a sudden I hear whizzin'. It scared the heck out of me.

DePue: The beach. At the ocean?

Lewison: No, it's on the river.

DePue: Okay, so the shore.

Lewison: The shore. I heard this "Lewison", and I thought, Oh my goodness. I couldn't figure out – it was McCoy – he was from our platoon and he had a big hunk of shrapnel next to his spine. But it wasn't bleeding; it was kind of pushed over already. We decided to just leave it, not mess with it. So we both headed on an escape and evasion mission and finally got help from a Korean and got on a South Korean tugboat, and got back to Pusan.

DePue: How long did that walk south down that river bed take you?

- Lewison: Well, we went from there across the river, and then we went up a mountain and met some more guys. Then we got fired on and got separated again. McCoy and I stayed together. Then we kept moving what we thought was Southeast.
- DePue: You were heading toward the coastline.
- Lewison: Heading toward the coastline. And, (pause) we got fired again, and we managed to get away. Then we met a South Korean – we were in an inlet of the ocean. There was a South Korean with a boat, and he motioned for us to come. And – I ...
- DePue: Now you have to do that totally on faith. You don't have any idea who this guy really is.
- Lewison: No I don't. He offered to take us in a boat, and by his hand signals more or less, other Americans. So we assumed, Okay, he wanted to take us to where the Americans were. Well, he took us to a little town where there was a South Korean tugboat, just pulling out. So we fired our weapons and got their attention, and then they came back in and picked us up. There were several Americans down in the bottom of the boat wounded.
- DePue: All from the 3rd Battalion?
- Lewison: Yeah. The captain could speak some English, and he said he was going to Pusan, which was fine. We all recognized Pusan. On the way we did stop at a South Korean destroyer, and I got to talk to the captain there a little bit. Wanted to know where we had been and I told him. He didn't ask too many questions. Then we went back on our way and got to Pusan. They put everybody in the hospital, and I told them there was nothing wrong with me. I think the reason they held me as long as they did was they didn't know who the 29th was, where the 29th was.
- DePue: Yeah. You stragglers were pretty much...
- Lewison: Yeah. So we wanted to get back to our own unit.
- DePue: Were there some survivors of that ambush that headed straight East or did they all head toward the coastline?
- Lewison: Uh, (pause) you know us guys never talked about Hadong (pause) – the survivors. When they finally found out where the 29th was, which was Masan, they put us on a train and shipped out of Pusan and go find Masan, more or less.
- DePue: So that would have been the 1st Battalion of the 29th?
- Lewison: 3rd Battalion.

- DePue: Well, I know you were assigned to the 3rd Battalion, so that's where the remnants of the 3rd Battalion got together?
- Lewison: Yeah.
- DePue: Roughly, what was the number in that battalion to begin with – 600?
- Lewison: According to this thing I've got here it was 795.
- DePue: 795.
- Lewison: 313 of them were killed and a 100 or more were captured.
- DePue: And so what was left was roughly 300 people who managed to make their way back?
- Lewison: Now we're not counting wounded yet. So I don't know how many were wounded. When I walked from that room in Masan –we were again in a schoolhouse – I (chuckles) walked from that room where our platoon was, first or second lieutenant said, "I thought you were dead." I said "Well, I'm not dead." I think there were only about 12 of us left.
- DePue: In that platoon?
- Lewison: Yeah.
- DePue: Lieutenant obviously was not one of them; he had been captured. The company commander.
- Lewison: He had been captured.
- DePue: In retrospect, what do you think about his decision to tell you guys, Every man for himself.?
- Lewison: I think it was probably the only option he had. Otherwise, we were all going to get captured.
- DePue: Why such a high number of killed – you think that after they overran the position they went through and...
- Lewison: Well, I think, again a lot of this was, you know, you're young and nothing is going to happen to you and the war is attack and they keep attacking and it ain't working.
- DePue: Do you think the North Koreans came through afterwards and executed anybody who was injured or...
- Lewison: I know they did. I know they did. (very emotional)

DePue: Okay. So your first combat, something that...

Lewison: Murphy's Law?

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: When I first read this Hadong thing, I'm sitting up there...

DePue: In your library room that you have with all the books around you?

Lewison: It was like getting kicked in the stomach.

DePue: How recently was that? Was that...

Lewison: I don't know.

DePue: I mean a few years ago when you first started reading about it or?

Lewison: No, I just happened to pick it up at a VFW magazine.

DePue: The article that you gave me?

Lewison: Yeah. That was July of 2000.

DePue: Before that you hadn't given it much thought?

Lewison: None of us ever talked about it. (pause) Not even in Korea. (pause) Whatever happened here, whatever happened there, **none** of us every talked about Hadong.

DePue: Hmm. Did you get debriefed? Anybody get debriefed?

Lewison: No (pause) Other guys might have. I didn't.

DePue: I would expect that maybe the senior NCOs and the officers who survived. So the 29th, your battalion especially, has been decimated.

Lewison: In fact, in fact the same similar thing happened to our first battalion. I don't know where, how bad. **Nobody** ever talked about it.

DePue: I've seen some very brief reference to it.

Lewison: Yeah, to this day I still don't know what happened to the 1st Battalion.

DePue: But both of the battalions in the regiments are decimated, so the regiment is basically...

Lewison: Goes back to Okinawa.

- DePue: That's not what happens to the troops though, is it, to the ones who are surviving?
- Lewison: Our battalion became the 3rd Battalion of the 27th Infantry Regiment, and the 1st Battalion became a battalion of the 35th Regiment.
- DePue: Okay. And of that battalion you had maybe a hundred or so –
- Lewison: Could be.
- DePue: – were left and not one of the casualties?
- Lewison: Yeah.
- DePue: Okay. Did you stay as a mortarman then, after that?
- Lewison: I stayed a mortarman, and then became a squad leader. We had 2.36 and this is when they came with a 3.5 which was a bigger help as far as 2.34s were concerned. Then they brought in, uh, well before they brought in the 57s we'd lost two section leaders for the, bazookas, and Sgt. Hoggitt came up to me and said, "You want to be a section leader of the bazookas?" I said, "Well, why not", you know. So almost instantaneously they changed it from bazookas to the 57 millimeter recoilless rifles. We were **all** in the same... we had never even seen this weapon. We took them out of the crates, and, uh ...
- DePue: So had the grease on them?
- Lewison: Yeah. Still had the cosmoline, the whole works. Fortunately, with each crate was a manual. So we all had to sit there and read this manual on how to assemble this, and assembly this, and how to use it even, you know. So we did our own training with this recoilless rifle and I remained the recoilless rifle leader until we left.
- DePue: Um, huh. Let me go back to Hadong a little bit more, and I appreciate your being willing to discuss it at all. This is a question you might not want to answer, but did you ever have the opportunity to fire your weapon during that whole time?
- Lewison: Yes, but it was so big a glob of mud I wasn't hitting anything.
- DePue: Was that during the initial attack?
- Lewison: No, it was while I was in the bamboo grove.
- DePue: Oh really?
- Lewison: Yeah.

- DePue: So... You see, I thought you were just down there, hunkering down and hiding...
- Lewison: Well I was. It got to the point whatever they were seeing out there I had to fire.
- DePue: Do you know if you hit anybody.
- Lewison: No, I didn't because I couldn't even... It was all mud. All I was doing was just hunkering down.
- DePue: Okay. Again your first experience – every soldier remembers the first experience, and you reflect back on it – how would you critique your own performance in that experience?
- Lewison: Well in many respects, I guess, I probably did alright, and in some respects I always kind of have a little guilt. Like, I'll talk to about this with the NCOs. It was "Well what the hell. Do you want to be captured too?"
- DePue: You know, how many choices do you have?
- Lewison: Yeah, you still feel guilty. You know...
- DePue: Because...?
- Lewison: You weren't with some of your comrades yet, you know.
- DePue: That whole survival guilt thing.
- Lewison: Kind of (pause) but, uh, eventually it's the guilt gets lesser and lesser as things go on.
- DePue: Well, you lived to survive and fight another day. And they put you right back in the breach again, didn't they?
- Lewison: Yes, back in the Pusan Perimeter. The walking wounded were brought right back up, didn't get any special treatment.
- DePue: Well, this is at a time when the Army is desperate for anybody to get over there.
- Lewison: That's right. It's amazing to me – of course, they didn't have, nor did we have – the equipment they've got today. But it amazed me that the North Koreans didn't just mass and go to Pusan. They could've.
- DePue: What's your impression of the North Koreans, then?
- Lewison: I did not trust them.
- DePue: You thought they were good soldiers?

Lewison: They were fanatics. The hardest part with them was they were fanatical, but there was a reason, too, because the line behind them would kill them if they'd come back.

DePue: During this early stage it sounds like you weren't working too much with ROK soldiers—Republic of Korea soldiers.

Lewison: Not initially. This was my first replacement.

DePue: I'm going to get to that question later, about what you thoughts of them were. How about the Korean civilians you were encountering? Apparently, they saved you guys' lives.

Lewison: Uh, (pause) yes, they helped. But then in some cases you didn't know either. I'm sure there were sympathizers both ways, but to us, to my recollection, and to my unit, they helped. In fact, they helped McCauley and me on our escape evasion. I remember a little; I'm trying to remember the good things. A little fellow came up in the mountains and brought us corn meal mush. The first we had eaten in a long time.

DePue: Several days?

Lewison: Several days.

DePue: So it took you several days to finally get down the coastline.

Lewison: Well, we were some place even before we got to the coastline. And then we waited and watched – this was another funny instance too – we laid and watched the North for a couple of hours to see if there were any soldiers moving out there and there wasn't so we went down (pause) and, uh, we came up to a house with a Korean lady in it. We made a motion that we were hungry and she understood. She brought us some eggs, and McCauley was hungry enough to crack it and suck the egg. (both laugh) I wasn't that hungry yet so I went – You know they had their little house and then they had their little kitchen on the end. They had their rice pots and all that. Well she was boiling water, so I took my egg and dropped it into the water. You should have seen the expression on her face. I can still remember it today. She thought I was nuts. She stood and she watched that egg and she watched that egg; finally I grabbed one of her tools and I got it out of there. When I cracked it, her face was right next to it; she was so interested to see what was going to happen with the egg (laughs). So I cracked it, and it came out like a boiled egg. She was completely amazed.

DePue: She had never seen a hard-boiled egg before.

Lewison: Must not have.

DePue: I know the Koreans...

Lewison: I took a bite of it and then gave her a bite. I'm sure that was her first experience with a boiled egg.

DePue: I know the Koreans, though, are famous for their soups. They almost always crack an egg into it.

Lewison: I know it. I know it. But, I couldn't—there was just

DePue: Well, that's go back to now that you've survived Hadong, one of a handful who survived that. You're assigned now to this 27th Regiment. For the next couple of months, then, what's the mission of the 27th?

Lewison: Well, we were still in the Pusan Perimeter, remember. When we do the breakout, we head for Chongju, and then the other units went across up to the 30th Parallel.

DePue: Now, I should say that Hadong happened on July 26th, so it was into August well before you were back in the...

Lewison: Yeah, I think it was early August, that we were assigned to the 27th Regiment. They put us on a lot of patrol; I guess they called it retraining us, and all that stuff, and we got a lot of missions. The other units that moved to the 38th, [Parallel] or toward the 38th, and we were policing up what was left behind, put it that away, because they were moving pretty fast.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: We had a lot of patrols, a lot of mountain climbing and a lot of goose [futile] chases too.

DePue: I'm trying to figure out when Inchon happened. But you guys stayed south after Inchon and mopped up in the south.

Lewison: Then we kept moving north. When we crossed the parallel...

DePue: You were still well behind the main forces.

Lewison: Yes, they were driving north. I remember being in the Port of Haeju and rumor was that we were going to go back (chuckles) go back to Osaka, which is right across the 30th parallel.

DePue: Okay, Haeju right here, I see it.

Lewison: Then we were running patrols out of there...

DePue: Same kind of thing, mop up operations?

Lewison: Uh, huh. Whenever somebody spotted North Koreans, why then they'd report it. Eventually the Chinese, I think, came across first and kind of went back. But when the came across first, they did some damage.

DePue: That would have been late October time frame?

Lewison: Yeah. (pause) Then we got the mission to go up and relieve the First Cav.[Cavalry]

DePue: Okay, now let's back up a little bit because, again, I'm curious about what you guys are hearing. For a long time there is this sense that, Well there's nothing stopping us now. Were you hearing talk about, "We're going to be out of Korea by Christmas or by Thanksgiving"?

Lewison: Oh yeah. Yeah. Thanksgiving or Christmas we're going to be back in Japan.

DePue: When did you start hearing about the Chinese and the possibility?

Lewison: When they told us we had to go north to relieve the First Cav.

DePue: What's your...

Lewison: The Chinese part was a rumor, but it became fact.

DePue: So you knew you were heading north to replace the First Cav, and you guys were hearing rumors that it was because the Chinese were into this now.

Lewison: You know, just rumors.

DePue: Okay. What's your reaction when you're hearing those kinds of rumors?

Lewison: Well (pause) still the same (laughter)—same old thing you know. Well, we'll go up there and get to the Yalu River and that will be the end of it.

DePue: But, by now you've seen a lot of action.

Lewison: Yes.

DePue: And, you've gotten over that hump of the knot in your gut and the nervousness of the first time you're in combat.

Lewison: Mmm. You still get it all the time.

DePue: But, at least you understand, you know how you're going to react once you're into it.

Lewison: But, I think by now we're better trained; our unit is more of a decent strength.

DePue: And the cohesion of the group by that time?

Lewison: Yeah, yeah. We're very good. In fact it proved that when the Chinese met us way up north.

DePue: Okay. So let's go up and talk a little about relieving the First Cav in place. Were they already beaten up by the time you got up to them?

Lewison: One of their battalions was pretty beaten up. Where we went in, uh, I can remember the first night. It was snowing, and it was cold. We were by a 155 artillery unit and they were firing intermittent fire. Of course, we were trying to sleep in our sleeping bags and every time those 155s went off we were jumping up. So another funny incident: well, artillery's always got a mess tent and they always got hot coffee. (laughter) So I went over there, I went by to a 155 and there was one guy doing all the work. I said, "What's your mission?" He says "Well, as you can hear, just intermittent fire." I said "How come you're doing this all by yourself?" He says, "So the other guys can sleep". (laughter) Here we are, every time they fire, we're jumping up.

DePue: Well, artillery men get used to that. (laughter) You know you're sitting next to your gun, and that doesn't matter a bit.

Lewison: What a reaction. I'm doing this so the other guys in can sleep. But from there then when daylight came we just moved on up and kept going north just like everybody else was doing.

DePue: Was there a lot of traffic heading the other direction?

Lewison: No, really not at that time, no.

DePue: Were you being trucked up?

Lewison: No. By that time we were on foot. We were trucked up to that point.

DePue: When you relived the First Cav and from there on.

Lewison: There was another push, just like you were going to go on another attack.

DePue: And you were with the recoilless rifles now?

Lewison: Uh, huh.

DePue: You guys are hoofing that thing?

Lewison: Uh, huh.

DePue: That's a lot heavier than the 60, isn't it?

Lewison: Oh, yeah—a little mouth thing on it and we kind of balanced it. It wasn't bad.

DePue: You were the team chief, then?

Lewison: I was section leader; had three squads.

DePue: Okay. So you weren't the one who was carrying the tube?

Lewison: No.

DePue: What was the size of one recoilless rifle team then?

Lewison: Five: gunner, assistant gunner and three ammo bearers.

DePue: And you had three teams in your section?

Lewison: Yeah

DePue: Were they pretty much at full complement then?

Lewison: Yes because we had gotten in their KATUSAs, Koreans.

DePue: By this time you guys were old hands at dealing with the T34's. Was the recoilless rifle any good against the tank?

Lewison: Would not be.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: Fortunately we never ran into T34's but the only chance you'd have was to blow out a bogey wheel or something.

DePue: So how did the recoilless rifles get deployed, get used?

Lewison: Try not to use them at night because of the backflash. What you had to do was shoot and move because of the backflash,

DePue: Were you firing against infantry or light skinned vehicles, or both?

Lewison: Infantry. Anything that was a target.

DePue: What kind of rounds did you have? Did you have rounds that would explode?

Lewison: AT [anti-tank], WP. [white phosphorus]

DePue: So you did have WP as well?

Lewison: Uh, huh.

DePue: Did you have any armor piercing shells? You didn't bother with those.

Lewison: Just AT.

- DePue: Okay – no shape charges or anything like that.
- Lewison: No. No. That came with the 105-106 later.
- DePue: 105-106 recoilless rifles.
- Lewison: Yeah. See the difference was, we had light weapons. Back then they had heavy weapons companies, like the H Company or M Company was the heavy weapons unit.
- DePue: I know that one of the criticisms that you hear about the Army, soldiers of their own American Army, was that we really didn't have anything that could take on the T34. The bazookas didn't do it. The recoilless rifles didn't do it.
- Lewison: Well, the 3.5 would have done it. Our problem was, again, learning experience. I think this came from talking with the guys who had contact with the tanks. Most of the gunners were shooting at the turret; it's the worst place, you know. You've got to get them...
- DePue: That's where the armor's the thickest.
- Lewison: Yeah, you've got to get them on the side or the rear, you know. (laughter)
- DePue: So you've got to be patient and wait until you get a side or a rear end shot.
- Lewison: That's right.
- DePue: That's saying quite a bit, isn't it?
- Lewison: You know one of our American replacements, who came in my section, was called up from the reserve school, from St. Louis. In World War II he was in Germany in a TD Battalion, or the old half-track with the 37 millimeter gun...
- DePue: Okay
- Lewison: ...going after Panzers. [famous German tanks]
- DePue: Well, it's supposed to be an anti-tank gun, right?
- Lewison: Talk about suicide. (laughter)
- DePue: Yeah
- Lewison: We had it good compared to that.
- DePue: Do you recall any incidents when you guys, still south before you replaced the First Cav? Any particular incidents or fire fights or engagements that you got into in the mop-up missions.

Lewison: No, the fire fights we got into were brief because the people were working as guerrillas then, and they're not going to fight one. It's not to their advantage.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: In fact Sgt. Camp who was the leader of the patrol we went on jeep patrol, they gave us a map that was 1919. Well, where it said it was roads, really weren't roads, they were paths. But the jeeps could make it. We had to go up so far and then come back – sweep. We had a South Korean policeman with us. When you'd see a straggler on the road, he would identify him, whether he was friendly, or enemy.

DePue: Because you guys can't tell, can you?

Lewison: No. So as we picked up what he called enemies, we'd put them on our jeep. Well, pretty soon we had so many of them we couldn't haul them; we only had three jeeps. So we saw a Korean cop to tell them to keep going south on the road, stay on the road, do not leave it. We'd treated them well, so they didn't. Well, apparently, there were a lot more up in the hills that we didn't know were up there. They must have been watching us because pretty soon here they come too.

DePue: No.

Lewison: I can't tell you how many prisoners we had. They could have overwhelmed us alone. We would have run out of ammo (laughter) so we told them to head south too, and they did.

DePue: They might have been starving or close to starving.

Lewison: I think they were just ready to say, Okay, I quit.

DePue: And they probably had no idea that the Chinese were about ready to come into this either.

Lewison: No, I'm sure they didn't either.

DePue: Yeah. Okay, let's go up into the relief of the First Cav; is it at that time that you know that the Chinese are in on this?

Lewison: Well, yeah, I think it was the rumor was becoming more...

DePue: Confirmed.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: What were you hearing from the guys in the First Cav? Did you have any...

Lewison: Didn't have any contact with them, other than artillery guys, 'cause we moved out just like a normal attack thing.

DePue: You're hoofing it by this time; you're heading up into a position, I assume.

Lewison: We're heading, yeah, re-contact.

DePue: Okay. Can you talk a little bit more about what happened at that time?

Lewison: Well, there wasn't much going on. I can remember it was bitterly cold, and we got up into the mountains.(pause) Then they told us that they had broken through on the ROK division to our right so we had to back up. So we backed up...

DePue: That would have been the Second ROK Division, looks like

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Are you guys straddling the hard ball road at that time?

Lewison: No, we were going – got Anju on that map? – we were on the left

DePue: Yonju? On Jong?

Lewison: Anju is a city.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: Let's see if we've got it here.

DePue: We're looking at a map that I copied off the West Point Atlas in military history. There's Onjung.

Lewison: Well, anyway, we're up in here. They've got from Sorum Miyam or something...

DePue: Okay

Lewison: Pak Wan Miyam; we were up in that area on the 40th parallel.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: (pause) I think by then the south division over here was already up on the Yalu River.

DePue: Yeah. That would have been on the east side...

Lewison: Yeah

- DePue: ...of the peninsula.
- Lewison: But we got up, spent a night or two up in this mountain and got word that things were going to hell in the right flank and we had to get out of there.
- DePue: So the initial thought, when you're first relieving the First Cav, is to keep going north.
- Lewison: Keep going until we get to the Yalu River.
- DePue: Okay.
- Lewison: In fact, I guess we weren't that far away, really.
- DePue: Looks like you're about 30 or 40 miles maybe.
- Lewison: Yeah, and we withdrew back to where the designated line was. I remember it was a valley, rice paddies and then the hills like this. We got there, dug in.
- DePue: And you were in the valley?
- Lewison: Yeah, right at the edge of it. That night – talking about our unit improving – that night the Chinese hit us; we had a helluva firefight, up most of the night. When daylight came, they withdrew. Now our unit was good enough – and I'm really proud of them –everybody stayed in their fox holes. So when daylight started coming, the Chinese became, you know, clay pigeons.
- DePue: Uh, huh. Were the Chinese hitting you on all sides at this time?
- Lewison: Yeah, the whole front.
- DePue: Well, you ...
- Lewison: What they're doing is infiltrating you, or trying to, and then get behind you.
- DePue: Yeah, that's the classic discussion of the Chinese tactics. They're hitting the high ground, walking on the mountain tops and the Americans are hugging the hard ball roads.
- Lewison: Yeah
- DePue: So they're not just hitting you in the front, they're hitting you in the sides as well.
- Lewison: Yeah. What they're trying to do is get through us, then they've got us.
- DePue: Now you talked before about you got this recoilless rifle you don't like to fire at night. They're attacking you full bore in the middle of the night.

Lewison: Yeah, we're just using our smaller ones.

DePue: You were?

Lewison: Yeah because we're in our hole and they're on top of the ground. I can remember there was a heavy 30 machine gun close to where I was and he was lining up the area good enough where you could see them on top of the ground.

DePue: The silhouettes

Lewison: Yeah

DePue: Okay. So what was your reaction the first time you saw these Chinese?

Lewison: Not much different than the other ones, I guess. (chuckles)

DePue: Fanatical?

Lewison: By then I was okay. Yeah. That was the only contact we had with them. From then on I was blocking positions going south.

DePue: So after that first engagement, sounds like you pretty well lit up the – it was probably a pretty good size regiment or something like that – the Chinese are coming at you. Then you were ordered out, you weren't pushed out?

Lewison: No

DePue: The order was basically (knock on door) because the rock formations on your right flank had already broken so you were forced out.

Lewison: This happens always.

DePue: Okay, I going to put it on hold for a second.

(short break)

DePue: Okay we're running it again here.

Lewison: Yeah, from that first contact we went all the way back to Anju, which the determinator told us we'd marched about sixty miles. (pause) Air Force kept them off our back during the daylight and artillery kept them off us at night.

DePue: Were you taking all your equipment back with you?

Lewison: Yeah. Takin' it with us.

DePue: Now, many of the stories I hear about this – I don't know if you guys heard this at the time – but it was called the Big Bugout; that's how historians talked about

it. Many of the Americans in the Eighth Army were leaving their heavy equipment.

Lewison: Well, it didn't happen in our unit because we're still a small company. When we got down to Pyongyang we had the 89th Tank Battalion. When we got down to Pyongyang there were new tanks on railroad cars which the 89th wanted because their tanks are starting to get wore out.

DePue: Yeah

Lewison: Apparently they weren't allowed to do this. I think somebody got a court martial over that eventually down the road.

DePue: That whoever was in charge of that railroad...?

Lewison: Let them switch old tanks for new tanks. I don't know why, but that was the story.

DePue: What kind of tanks would those have been, do you remember?

Lewison: It would have been the old Sherman.

DePue: Okay, even the new tanks were still the Shermans?

Lewison: Yeah

DePue: Well, that says something

Lewison: The only ones that had the Patton tanks were the Third Division, that I know of.

DePue: So, you continued south. Obviously they didn't stop at Pyongyang.

Lewison: No. Again we were in a holding position and the mission there is if you engage them – and we did north of Pyongyang – you engage them at long range, so that when they come, if they're coming down the road and you've got it blocked...

DePue: Uh, huh

Lewison: ...and if you fire at them long range you're going to deploy. Well, that takes time. So while they're taking time, you're going back one more step.

DePue: Okay. So generally the way it works: you guys are in the valley putting up blocking positions; the Chinese come and they're forced to deploy. When you say they deploy, they're sending groups up into the hills to try to flank you.

Lewison: Yeah. In the meantime we're going back to the next position. All it is, is just delay.

DePue: So was your regiment, the 27th, basically right up to the front for the division most of the time? Is that your impression?

Lewison: Pretty much. Usually what happened is, the 35th or 24th would be on line, the 27th would be in reserve; or 27th and 24th would be on line and the 35th would be on reserve.

DePue: The 24th is the other regiment in the division. Because there's the 24th Division, too, and you're not talking about them.

Lewison: No.

DePue: A lot of refugees flooding those roads?

Lewison: Yes – a lot of them. In fact, so many they would be a hindrance.

DePue: Yeah. I would think that's the only advantage of being right at the point, that all of that's behind you.

Lewison: Yeah, and, it was hard if you were on a road block, which I was with a recoilless rifle a lot. You didn't know how many Chinese or North Korean soldiers were mixed in with those people. You know, just...

DePue: Sure.

Lewison: It was pretty tough. In fact, uh, I had a unit commander who almost got court-martialed for firing in one of those groups. But, his explanation to me was that they were all in step. When they checked it out, yes, they were soldiers.

DePue: Oh, wow. Gutsy call.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: And you're making that in a split second decision.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: I should have asked you this earlier. How many casualties did your particular company sustain when they were first in that blocking position, the first time the Chinese attacked?

Lewison: I don't remember. It must have been all or none because there was no talk.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: It didn't affect... I thought we just did a great job.

DePue: Yeah. The Chinese were taking plenty of casualties.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Which is just the way it's supposed to be.

Lewison: Yeah. Then those that ran out in the rice paddies the next morning, the tanks just went out and got them. They didn't have to fire a round – they just went and got them.

DePue: Did the unit sustain casualties on the way south of the successive series of blocking positions?

Lewison: If it was, it would have been the wounded or minor.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: We wouldn't get into anything until, we were north of Seoul, and we got hit pretty good. Still again we came out pretty good. That same deal going on.

DePue: So what happened north of Seoul? I mean this is after they've withdrawn hundreds of miles, and it was primarily on foot. You were moving the whole time on foot?

Lewison: Yeah, or sometimes tank.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: A lot of times tanks.

DePue: So was there a particular engagement north of Seoul that was especially hot?

Lewison: Yeah, and again, we were again in a blocking position and the British Brigade was to our left or right front, I don't remember which.

DePue: Probably, from what I understand, where the Brits were, they would have been on your left flank, your western flank.

Lewison: When they came in through us they got hit pretty hard. I remember ...

DePue: They, the Brits?

Lewison: Uh, huh. I remember one of them coming through as an officer, and he wanted to get to his brigadier because he'd lost his tank. As I understand it, in the British Army, you're responsible for all of your equipment, no matter what.

DePue: Okay – not as forgiving as the Americans were on the equipment.

Lewison: No, you really had to have a good excuse to lose a tank, for example.

DePue: Now, I'd never even thought about this, but we're talking, you know, the Chinese came in October. When you probably first encountered them was in the November time frame. This is –now when we're talking –December or January.

Lewison: Coming in December.

DePue: Korea is a cold country, isn't it?

Lewison: Oh, man. Cold and hot.

DePue: Well, talk about what it was like fighting this major engagement in the middle of a pretty severe winter.

Lewison: Well, it was tough. Not only that, but we didn't have proper winter equipment, either.

DePue: You're talking about the clothing, even?

Lewison: Clothing.

DePue: Did you have tentage that you were taking with you?

Lewison: No. If we stayed inside it would be a Korean hut.

DePue: So, as much as possible you tried to find someplace to stay inside, I would say.

Lewison: A foxhole and cover up with a shelter half or whatever you had.

DePue: Did you have a lot of guys suffering from frostbite?

Lewison: Yes, a lot of frostbite.

DePue: Trench foot?

Lewison: Probably.

DePue: Okay. How about yourself?

Lewison: On the long march, before we hit the first attack by the Chinese, I thought my feet were frozen by the walk itself.

DePue: Um hum.

Lewison: Uh, kind of fixed them up, I think. Got them heated up.

DePue: Now the walk helped.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Get the circulation going again.

Lewison: Yeah. It was brutally, brutally cold. Getting back further down when our unit crossed the Han [River] I think it was about thirty below zero that day.

DePue: Holy cow. Did you cross the Han on a bridge?

Lewison: No. On salt boats.

DePue: Salt boats. Probably got a little bit wet doing that.

Lewison: I was boat commander and that meant myself and one engineer were the last two in, 'cause you had to push. You were the last two off, which meant when the other guys were bailing off, the boat was getting pushed back further up in the water so I became a stiff board. (laughs)

DePue: Was that a little bit chaotic at the river crossing?

Lewison: Uh, we got, this was...

DePue: The Han River: was that north of Seoul?

Lewison: Han River was south of Seoul.

DePue: South of Seoul.

Lewison: Kind of, isn't it westerly a little bit too? Anyhow, I think it's south.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: Yeah, our unit got the famous unit citation for that crossing, on return.

DePue: Well, there's more of a story that I need to hear, isn't there?

Lewison: We got 7,000 rounds of artillery in ten minutes.

DePue: You received?

Lewison: No, gave. We had the power of support. We had a 700 yard beach where the river made a big turn; it was flat. Then there was a kind of a levee system on back side of that, and that's where a battalion of Chinese was supposed to be. They gave us 7,000 rounds of artillery in ten minutes of support while we crossed.

DePue: So you were crossing under fire, but the Chinese were being suppressed by American artillery.

Lewison: Yeah. So by the time we hit that first objective it was really pretty white, then met resistance further up in the hills.

DePue: So were you attacking the Chinese on the north side of the Han?

Lewison: Um hum.

DePue: Okay, and you were attacking them to give the American army enough breathing room to get across the river?

Lewison: No, we're going back north then. The allies had already been kicked out of Seoul once.

DePue: Okay, okay.

Lewison: In fact, when we were on this and the British link, we were on our way back to Seoul then.

DePue: So this river crossing you're telling me about...

Lewison: It was after that.

DePue: Okay, it was afterward.

Lewison: Yeah

DePue: That's why I was confused, I guess.

Lewison: Anyway, from where the British got hit so hard we then –I think it was right about my birthday, ...

DePue: Which is...?

Lewison: ...December 30th, that the Chinese moved us out of Seoul.

DePue: Did they fight their way through Seoul?

Lewison: We didn't, and I don't think they did.

DePue: So somebody had made the decision to make your way back to Seoul.

Lewison: We're more of less doing this delaying action thing.

DePue: Did you guys go through Seoul, or were you west of there?

Lewison: Yes, we went through part of it.

DePue: Okay.

- Lewison: In fact, the artillery was, bombarding spy positions so the Chinese wouldn't get it.
- DePue: So describe what you're seeing going through Seoul at that time, on the way back south.
- Lewison: Pretty desolate. You didn't see any civilians
- DePue: They'd gone to ground or...
- Lewison: On the ground or gone. The Chinese were coming up. We were on the railroad track, and big hills in front of us, and somebody on the big hill ran up a red flag. So I told Sgt. Hoggitt, "Do we have a fire mission?" He said, "Wait a minute". Pretty soon he said, "Okay, fire." So we fired. When the word came out, "Cease fire; there are Pakistani troops up here." Okay, so pretty soon they ran up another red flag. I asked Sgt. Hoggitt again, "Do we have a fire mission?" He said, "Wait a minute. Okay, you've got the fire mission." So we fired again. The red flag went down. Well, the next time, then they started coming. It was Chinese.
- DePue: Um hmm.
- Lewison: But this was pretty long range, and they're up in the hill. So we had time to just move off the tracks and truck through the town.
- DePue: During this whole time –from when the Chinese first came in, to way up close to the Yalu River, down all the way south of Seoul –was it almost entirely Chinese that you were encountering, or were there still some North Koreans in there?
- Lewison: Well, I couldn't tell, but I'd say the majority Chinese.
- DePue: Yeah.
- Lewison: Yeah. Because after we got south of Seoul back down – I think we got it back down (chimes in background) to where my granddaughter is, Osanosanese –the further south we went back. Then they started north again.
- DePue: Okay. I was asking a little bit about Seoul. I wonder if you could describe more of what you were seeing in Seoul itself.
- Lewison: Uh, like I said it was pretty desolate. Artillery was bombarding our supplies that we couldn't get evacuated. Some of the buildings were burning. We had a litter jeep for medics; they were timing the volleys of the artillery so they could run and get the cases of beer and came running out. (laughter)
- DePue: They'd found an American warehouse there or something?

Lewison: Well, it was a supply dock.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: You know, when we first went over there we were authorized a beer a day for every day we were on line. The Mother's Clubs of America stopped that.

DePue: Oh, really.

Lewison: Yeah. (chuckle)

DePue: Somebody decided that wasn't a good idea.

Lewison: Yeah. Look what's happening today. Anyway, the medics profited. Because, you know, being a good infantryman you aren't going to carry things you don't have to.

DePue: And, I suspect during this whole retreat you're fed little tidbits of information but you're just kind of reacting to things. You don't know the big picture at all.

Lewison: No, don't know the big picture – we were all survivors.

DePue: But you know you're retreating.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: And you know that –you've told me already –that your unit is really doing very well: it's holding together, it's got good camaraderie, they're doing a series of blocking actions. But what's the thought of the soldiers when you keep falling back?

Lewison: Well, probably it was. How are we going to get out of this mess, you know, or when are we going to turn things around. We all knew, even as young as were, that part of this was political. You know, why did you always have somebody breaking through and not having the troops there to plug the hole? Of course, now you're talking United Nations: Can we get one or two more divisions from the United States; probably all it took.

DePue: Were you hearing that it was always the ROKs who were breaking?

Lewison: (pause) not all the time, but a lot. But they had their good units, too.

DePue: Okay. So what did you think of the ROKs?

Lewison: (pause) Not very good, as far as the units.

DePue: Did you have some Korean Augmentees to your units?

Lewison: Oh, yes. I think I started out with six. Three were killed, and I wound up with three.

DePue: Killed during this retreat?

Lewison: In all of the actions as time goes by. The three I wound up with, the three that were still there, I called them Tom, Dick and Harry.

DePue: Oh, really.

Lewison: Yeah (chuckles). Harry had an interesting story to tell. He was different. You could tell he was different, and he was very young – all of them were young. He had a very interesting story to tell. He was from Nagasaki.

DePue: Oh, really? But a Korean in Nagasaki?

Lewison: A Japanese in Nagasaki.

DePue: He was a Japanese?

Lewison: His parents, when they got word that Nagasaki was going to get A-bombed, his parents put him on a boat to Korea. He was a teenager. He never had enough money to get back.

DePue: No.

Lewison: When this Korean thing started, he got drafted into the Korean Army, and then he became a replacement for us.

DePue: He spoke Korean as well?

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: I suspect that his parents sent him away from Nagasaki not because they thought an A-bomb, but because they thought the city would be fire-bombed, but it's the same result, basically.

Lewison: Same result, yeah. And, he was saving money to get back. I'm sure he heard that Nagasaki was wiped out and all that, but he still wanted to go back. You couldn't blame him. So every payday the guys would chip in, give him a little more money, so he, if he survived, hopefully he'd make it back. (very emotional)

DePue: So you guys had quite a bit of regard for these Koreans. The KATUSAs that were working with you?

Lewison: I did for the three I had. Every time I turned around and needed an ammo bearer, they were there.

DePue: And they appreciated what the Americans were doing, you think?

Lewison: Oh, I think so. Yeah. I think the average... You know, you read about all the riots they have now and people say, Americans go home and all that stuff; I think basically this is mostly young kids.

DePue: Uh-huh

Lewison: The older Koreans understand what has happened and what is happening.

DePue: So there's never any question in your mind of their loyalties?

Lewison: South Korea, no.

DePue: Yeah. And I would imagine once you got to Seoul there's just this huge flood of refugees still heading south of Seoul, wasn't there?

Lewison: Yeah. Even more, like down in Osanju, it was very hard. These Mama Sans would be carrying their whole house on their head, you know. (chuckles)

DePue: And probably have dramatic a shortage of young men, wasn't there?

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Had been scarfed up by one of the armies.

Lewison: Yeah. We had many occasions to be in reserve next to a Korean Army Training Center, be in small groups. Pretty tough training.

DePue: They were training themselves. There weren't Americans who were helping them.

Lewison: No. These people, boy they were tough. A young fellow didn't listen to them he'd find himself knocked down on the ground quick.

DePue: Yeah. Well you're going to encounter that more, probably, when you get to Vietnam, aren't you? Now that's jumping away ahead of the story.

Lewison: That's jumping away ahead, yeah.

DePue: Okay. You recall hearing the news that General Walker died?

Lewison: Yeah, I think we did. ... Kind of a dim memory, though.

DePue: Did you have any impressions of him or are you guys just too busy keeping your heads down to worry about him?

Lewison: Yeah, we're surviving. We don't worry too much about higher headquarters. (laughs).

DePue: How about MacArthur?

Lewison: Personally, I think he was a great man and a great tactician but I was happy to see him go. For one simple reason. If he'd stayed there, I don't think we'd have had rotation.

DePue: Um-hm. Okay.

Lewison: I got something here that will tell you why. In a sense he was right. About the time that in one year's time you're combat experienced, you're starting to think like an Asian: why go home.

DePue: Yeah. You're at the peak of your proficiency.

Lewison: Same thing happened to me at on that. You're really getting good, and now you're going home. This was MacArthur's thoughts.

DePue: Send more troops; we only outnumber them 10 to 1. And that's the Chinese who are saying that.

Lewison: That's right. (pause) And that was MacArthur's thought, too, so I don't...

DePue: Do you remember when Ridgway came in?

Lewison: Yes.

DePue: And that was then you were south of Seoul

Lewison: I was going to go back north, and he's the one who informed everybody, "We're going to do this right— no long dashes and leaving — we're going to clean them out as we go north." Which we all agreed to.

DePue: So Walton Walker — and hearing about his death even — he didn't have a big impression on you: a lot of orders, instructions or inspirational talks or anything. But you remember when Ridgway got there.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Because took the effort to make sure he was getting out and about?

Lewison: No, he made the effort to tell us or tell everybody what he wanted and how he wanted it done.

DePue: Did you see him personally?

Lewison: No.

DePue: But the word got down pretty quickly?

Lewison: Yeah. We had a good regimental commander, too.

DePue: Do you remember his name?

Lewison: Yeah, General Carl McCillis(?).

DePue: McCillis(?)?

Lewison: McCillis(?).

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: He became, in fact, he was Fifth Army Commander for a while.

DePue: Oh, well. So by the time Ridgway gets there morale is starting to go up a little bit?

Lewison: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Now would you ever characterize the morale of your particular company as bad?

Lewison: Not really bad, no.

DePue: Never defeatist.

Lewison: No, because most of us were young: 18, 19, some 16. The NCOs that we had that were WWII veterans –

DePue: Uh, huh

Lewison: – didn't let us get that way.

DePue: Yeah, they'd been there.

Lewison: (pause) It's just like Battle Mountain, Pusan perimeter.

DePue: Uh, huh.

Lewison: We got hit, and they'd back off and blow a bugle: Taps.

DePue: They, being the Americans, or...?

Lewison: North, Koreans.

DePue: They'd blow Taps.

Lewison: They'd blow Taps.

DePue: Before they charged or,,?

Lewison: After.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: And then withdraw. So they'd blow taps...

DePue: For their...

Lewison: No, for us.

DePue: Psychological warfare.

Lewison: Yeah. Anyway it got to the point that one night we're all pretty low on ammo – you'd only get ammo once a day from the chogi trains coming up the mountains –and the word came, "Fixed bayonets." This goes back to your question, did you get bayonet training in basic? **NO!** So you talk about things getting exciting, when they tell you to fix bayonets and you've never had any training. Anyway, it didn't happen so it was all right. But then when we got back in reserve, guess what? We got bayonet [training] (laughter) which was, you know, good.

DePue: Well, you guys were very well trained by that time, but it was all on-the-job training, wasn't it?

Lewison: Yeah. He made sure we knew what to do with a bayonet. (laughs)

DePue: When you got your recoilless rifles –I'm going back a long time now on this – did you have a chance to actually have any practice firing that recoilless?

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: Very accurate. The only thing is you had to know how to use it and be able to move. We got into a gun – this is actually across the Han River – we got into a gun duel...

DePue: Heading back north, again.

Lewison: Yeah. We got into a gun duel. My recoilless rifle section against one Chinese. We finally nailed him and got out there and checked around; he had a recoilless rifle that didn't have a sight on it.

DePue: One of our recoilless rifles? He was firing at you with a recoilless rifle.

Lewison: Without a sight.

DePue: Yeah. Okay.

Lewison: And they did that a lot with our 60 mortars, too, they'd just hold it.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: They got pretty good with it, too.

DePue: Well, what's the range of the 60, is it about...

Lewison: Well...

DePue: ...a couple thousand yards, maybe.

Lewison: We used to fire 5- or 600 yards.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: In fact...

DePue: You could usually see the rounds landing.

Lewison: Yeah. We had a master sergeant that was from Kentucky. He was in the command group headquarters. We used to call him Sure-Shot Commander of Guard. He was quite the shot. We used to shoot a mortar round for him at a distance, give him a verification of range.

DePue: Uh, huh.

Lewison: Then he'd do sniper work. But, yeah, you could see the rounds hit. We were on Battle Mountain, one of the few hills we never took. A North Korean was sitting up there with his field glasses and he's using this to direct artillery fire. So Sgt. Hoggitt said, "Let's get them." I'm still a mortar gunner then and I could line it up, I could see them up there. So I could line the tube up right with them and Hoggitt gave the range, so we fired and hit this guy right in the head.

DePue: And you're watching this?

Lewison: Yeah which was good. (laughter) There goes the FO, [forward observer] he's gone. But Sgt. Hoggitt, I'll never forget that guy. He was from Vicksburg, Mississippi. He could chew your butt and you'd have to open your ears to listen to him because his voice was no more than a whisper.

DePue: Oh, really?

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: But you knew when he was...?

Lewison: Oh, yeah, you knew. But after that happened, you know, you could see him “like I’m good., (laughter) That did it.” I It was his range estimate that did it. But it was luck. (laughter)

DePue: Well, you do it enough, you’ve got to get lucky once in a while.

Lewison: It was luck.

DePue: So you guys are driving north, heading back toward the 38th. I would assume that’s about the time that you’ve got enough points and you’re ready to come home?

Lewison: Yeah, in June, I think I was.

DePue: So things had almost started to stabilize.

Lewison: Yeah, along the 38th parallel.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: And, I think out of the whole unit there was still probably only, of the old-timers, 10 to 12 guys left, and they were taking two a month

DePue: In your company?

Lewison: Yeah, so that’s the reason I probably got out of the war

DePue: Well, I just want to reflect on this a little bit. The company would have, how many, 160?

Lewison: No, each platoon it should have 120?, 30 (adding), yeah, back then probably about 140.

DePue: So, when you say that in your company there’s maybe only about 10 or so of the old-timers left...

Lewison: Or they were wounded out. But that way a couple of guys who were wounded out before, come back, because they knew rotation was coming and you got out quicker by being in the front lines, too.

DePue: You earned more points that way.

Lewison: Yeah, so

DePue: Still, the law of averages, you think about it, you’ve got to feel like, Okay I’ve survived and everybody else that I started with is not around any more.

Lewison: People don’t calculate – of course, I don’t know what’s happening today – but people never calculated wounded. I’m just going on average, probably what

happened, if we had 5 or 10 guys wounded, we might not have anybody killed; or you could have 5 or 10 guys wounded, maybe 1 or 2 killed.

DePue: But there's, still, regardless of what with the unit

Lewison: The wounded is **way high**. We didn't have the evacuation, you know the helicopters. All we had was those little Bell two pod things. Sometimes we'd have to take the wounded down to them.

DePue: But you're obviously receiving reinforcements all along.

Lewison: Yeah, oh yes. I remember my first replacements; they were all from New York. We were going to go on attack the next day, and they had all this nice winter equipment: pile caps, pile jackets.

DePue: Is this on the retreat back from the Yalu?

Lewison: It's going back up.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Lewison: I pointed to the hill that we're going to, it's a biggie. It seemed like we always got the biggie. I told them that whatever you do is take some of these clothes off because you're not going to make it. You're going to get heat exhaustion – and here it is, about zero or something like that. They looked at me like I'm nuts. So what happens is, halfway up there I have guys suffering heat exhaustion because they didn't follow...

DePue: Even if they made it, they'd sweat their ass off up there, then they'd sit there in the cold and freeze their ass off afterwards.

Lewison: Yeah, a lot of bad experiences but a lot of – I think back – a lot of us guys sitting around and laugh and joke, too.

DePue: Yeah. Sometimes civilians have a hard time understanding that, but those are the things that you reflect on, I'm sure. Have you gone to reunions then?

Lewison: No

DePue: Okay

Lewison: They're usually so far away, like Hawaii and (laughter) because of, you know, the division thing.

DePue: Well, I think we're about done with your discussion of Korea here. Any special incidents other than the river crossing in that you recall on the way back up north, the last couple of months you're in Korea?

Lewison: No. What attacks we had, we survived them. I can remember one attack we had. When we got up there, there were so many dead Chinese you couldn't hardly find a place to step.

DePue: Uh, huh. That artillery or air strike?

Lewison: Yeah, air strikes, artillery. That was my last time. Company commander said it was time for me to go down there to CP [Command Post] and stay there. I didn't even think about rotation. But, it got me off the hill. I took about 20 to 25 prisoners down with me. They followed me like puppy dogs. Hell, they were all younger than I was.

DePue: All Chinese?

Lewison: All Chinese. And, they had the brand new Mausers, rifles, pistols

DePue: These guys weren't veterans of the Chinese Civil War, then, by that time.

Lewison: No, and we had decreased their population pretty good. They followed me just like puppy dogs. Came down the hill. They'd had enough, too.

DePue: Yeah. So you think the captain was sending you back so...

Lewison: Yeah, to make sure nothing happened. He knew I was probably next.

DePue: When did you guys start hearing of the possibility of getting rotated back?

Lewison: February I think it was.

DePue: So that was south of Seoul and then had started already working your way back north again by that time.

Lewison: Yeah. And you had no idea of who, when or how they were doing it. Nothing.

DePue: Yeah. Again you're not busy calculating.

Lewison: No, no.

DePue: During this whole time frame, this is all chaotic, I would imagine. Were you living on C-rations most of the time?

Lewison: Yeah. We started with C-1s. It was 1941. (laughter) They were bad. You'd open up a can of crackers, touch them and sometimes they'd just disintegrate.

DePue: Hot meals were few and far between.

Lewison: Few and far between. I think when I left we were on C-5s.

DePue: 1945

- Lewison: Yeah, and then as the recoilless rifle section getting a road block –
- DePue: Um-hmm.
- Lewison: – we used to get fed good. They used to give us ten and one rations.
- DePue: Which is?
- Lewison: It would be a box that fed 10 men. You'd get a big can of bacon, a big can of eggs – pretty decent. I had a squad leader who used to be a cook. So (laughter) we enjoyed getting those.
- DePue: Okay. Exhausting all this: going back. How did you get back home then?
- Lewison: I went from Korea to Sasebo Japan, and then from Sasebo we sailed home on the Victory Ship, PFC Martinez.
- DePue: Which is not a comfortable ride.
- Lewison: One stacker. 900 guys is the most you can get on there. Two meals a day. You lined up for breakfast, and after breakfast you lined up for supper. (laughter) Went up, stopped at A Deck for fresh water. Now this is June.
- DePue: A Deck?
- Lewison: A Deck, and Aleutian Isles.
- DePue: Okay.
- Lewison: We're cold, 'cause all we've go on is fatigues. Finally the Navy broke out their nice white blankets so we're all out on deck like, all wrapped up.
- DePue: Yeah
- Lewison: Get fresh water on A Deck, and then headed for Seattle.
- DePue: I can't imagine that cruise back as every single one of these guys has seen a hell of a lot of action over the last year.
- Lewison: There was a lot of sleeping, too, though. We needed the rest.
- DePue: Guys didn't talk about their experiences much on that? What were you guys talking about?
- Lewison: Oh, getting home. Yeah.
- DePue: What you're going to do.
- Lewison: Going to do.

DePue: Were you able to catch up on some of the news from America, then?

Lewison: Not on board ship. A lot of card games, a lot of dice games.

DePue: Yeah. Which one were you into?

Lewison: I wasn't a gambler. (laughter) I'm a bad gambler. Scarce money and never win.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: My money was always scarce.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: I do say though, when I left, we sailed out under the Golden Gate Bridge. When I left to go Panama, we sailed out and watched the Statue of Liberty go.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: It's got to be heart rending for a guy who doesn't know if he might not come back. Our troops don't get that anymore.

DePue: Uh, huh. They're coming back on a fast airplane.

Lewison: Or leaving on an airplane. They don't get to see that Golden Gate or the Statue of Liberty and wonder, you know...

DePue: Am I going to be seeing it again.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Did you come back through the Golden Gate – back to San Francisco?

Lewison: Came into Seattle.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: Processed us at Ft. Lawton which was a tar paper shack area at that time. Then Fort Lewis which was next to that.

DePue: So what kind of reception did you get from the American people when you came back?

Lewison: The only good reception we got was the cancan dancers on the wharf when we pulled in from the sea.

DePue: At Seattle?

Lewison: At Seattle. Other than that people didn't even... I don't know. Most people didn't even know where the hell Korea was.

DePue: So what was you're feeling after laying your life on the line for a year over there and seeing everything that you'd seen and then coming back and the public is just kind of...

Lewison: Well, I didn't get to see that much of the public because I stayed in the Army.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: All of World War II vets. It was a town that they all knew what you'd been through.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: A lot of the older, yes, the parents of sons and daughters in World War II, they knew. I missed a lot of this home stuff by staying in the Army.

DePue: Uh-huh.

Lewison: Because you could go to the club and sit down and have a beer or two and talk a little bit with the guys.

DePue: So you never had any resentment, necessarily, that you were being ignored.

Lewison: None. Totally had none.

DePue: Okay, and we'll get to that the next time we talk. Now, I was going to go a little bit farther, but I think what I'd like to do for our second session is start with your life for the next ten to fifteen years, and obviously finish with your experiences in Vietnam and talk more about getting with the National Guard. I did want to finish with this comment here. Somewhere in this process you've seen more action that most people have in this one year. You've decided you're going to stay in the Army.

Lewison: Uh, huh.

DePue: What made you decide that?

Lewison: Well, I'm twenty-one years old. I've got a wife and family and the highest rank I can get at that time is E7. The life we had, of course, Ruth liked it.

DePue: Uh, huh.

Lewison: In fact she didn't want me to retire.

DePue: With what rank did you leave Korea?

Lewison: Sergeant First Class, E6

DePue: Staff Sergeant.

Lewison: Back then, yeah; it would be a Staff Sergeant now.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: Back then it was Sergeant First Class, then Master Sergeant.

DePue: Okay. You saw me saying “now that doesn’t sound right”.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: So you got promoted pretty quickly, obviously with the duty position.

Lewison: After we’d had a couple of section leaders killed and Sgt. Hoggitt said, “Do you want the job? If you get the job, I’ll make sure you get the rank”. So it was a matter of not getting wounded or not getting killed, and he kept his word.

DePue: Did you get any medals, awards or citations?

Lewison: Not in Korea. Combat Infantry Badge.

DePue: Uh huh. Here’s my guess, that things were happening way too fast for people to worry about sitting down and writing awards.

Lewison: That’s right. It was. In fact when Sgt. Hoggitt finally got a bronze star; it was his second one. He’d already won one in World War II. He didn’t even have an oak leaf cluster. There’s a lot of guys that got wounded and never got a Purple Heart, too. They just went down to the aid station, got bandaged up and fixed with a shot of penicillin and went back up the hill.

DePue: Okay. Any final thoughts about your experience in Korea?

Lewison: Well, I wouldn’t want to go through that again, but I haven’t forgotten a lot of it. I think it was worth it yet.

DePue: Yeah. What’s your thought – this far away from it now – about how well prepared you guys were, how poorly prepared you were, for being thrown into what you experienced?

Lewison: Well, I think we were poorly prepared. I think part of it is because of peace time army. WW II was over. I don’t think anybody believed anything really big would happen again. I think all we were doing was – got an occupation medal for Okinawa – I think that’s what we were doing: occupying.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: I think pretty much the same thing was happening in Japan. Now, Europe, I think, was a little different deal than us. They were in the hot spot, because there was the Russian Army on the other side.

DePue: But it is easy to get complacent, isn't it?

Lewison: Yes it is. Very. (pause). The old saying is "You guys used to come in and say, 'First Sergeant I want out of this chicken shit outfit.'" I always gave them their wish; the guys would come back a couple of months later and say, "God, I wish I was back here". (laughter)

DePue: Well, there's something universal about a GI complaining and bitching, isn't there?

Lewison: Yeah, I know it, and basically everybody, including kids, need discipline. If you don't give it to them, they're not going to be happy.

DePue: Umh, hmm. Okay, with that comment we're going to stop this session and we'll pick it again, hopefully in the near future, and talk about the peace time army and then into Viet Nam.

Lewison: Okay.

DePue: Thank you very much, Gay.

(End of interview #1. Interview #2 continues)

Interview with Gay Lewison

VRK-A-L-2007-003.1

Interview # 1: May 3, 2007

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, May 3, 2007. This is Mark DePue. I'm the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here for part two of our interview series with Gay Lewison and his experiences in Korea and Vietnam. Part 1 was Korea. Today we hope to talk a little bit about those years in between: married life and then get back to Vietnam. Gay, you mentioned earlier that you would like to finish up a couple of loose ends on the Korean War.

Lewison: Yes. When I mentioned about the egg and the Mama San in the village...

DePue: Yes.

Lewison: ...you were real puzzled about that. What I want to say here is that we were in a remote part of Korea, this was 1950. This was a mountain village. We were on our escape and evasion until we didn't know where we were going to wind up. She probably had never even been to the next village, I would say, is why her amazement was with the egg.

DePue: I guess the point that amazed me is that I would have thought that boiling an egg would have been universal because I know Koreans break eggs into soup all the time.

Lewison: Maybe because the shell was still on it or something. (laughter)

DePue: I'm not disagreeing with you at all. I'm just surprised that that was the case.

Lewison: Yeah, I remember, of course I'm talking about KATUSAs, too.[Korean Augmentees To the United States Army] Most of the time I've seen them eat, if there was an egg involved, they just broke it raw and put it right over whatever they were eating. Going into this same trend, setting up many roadblocks, on occasion we would be by a small town or village. And when it come mealtime, my three KATUSAs, they'd want to go in and get their mess kits full of rice. The first time they did this, I asked them if they had paid or did something for the people and they hadn't. So I told them, I said, "These people are poor; you're

taking their rice. (which they preferred over C rations, I guess). I said, “You should compensate them somehow, you’ve got Yuan, you can pay them.” Well, this worked sometimes and sometimes it didn’t because – going back to the woman and probably being isolated – some of these people had never seen money.

DePue: It’s hard to comprehend, but I’m sure that was the case.

Lewison: I had no idea what they were trying to give them.

DePue: They were living entirely a subsistence life style.

Lewison: Right, and isolated. The chief of the villages of the government, the whole works.

DePue: So during the occasions where you were doing the roadblocks, I assume that would be during the time that you’re falling back from the Yalu River.

Lewison: Yes

DePue: And that’s in the coldest part of the Korean winter, too, so I suspect maybe some of these guys were wanting to get warm a little bit.

Lewison: Yeah, this gets into another little thing. It was a comedy when you think about it, but it wasn’t a comedy when it happened. The Korean houses had a kitchen on the end, the rice pots and little fire pot and they burned – pine trees only probably got about three or feet up in the mountains – and this is what they cut for fuel, and that’s probably while they’re all short. Mama San would burn only one or two to get her pots boiling. But a couple of times when we moved back and got into a hut, the GIs would go in there and stoke up the fireplace, and the floor would get so hot we couldn’t lay down.

DePue: Because they had the ondol heating,...

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: ...the tubes going under the floor?

Lewison: The whole, under the floor, was like a crawl space. On the end of the hut was the chimney going up.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: So it created a natural draft. Pretty good heating system, primitive but good. But after that we learned – the guys that go back there and start the fires – not to heat it up too good, because it got hot enough it would burn you. (laughter)

DePue: Yeah, it can believe that. I’ve slept on a few of those floors myself with that ondol heating, the piping through the floor, and it’s very efficient.

Lewison: And then you asked, How did we feel about on our march south. I remember at the time we didn't think much of it because we were cold, hungry and tired. But, we had been up in the mountains up there in North Korea, came off, had been attached by the Chinese and then started the blocking positions all the way down until we got to Chinju, and then we got on tanks. Our platoon leader had indicated that we had walked about sixty miles. During the day the Air Force would keep the Chinese off us and at night the artillery would keep firing on our flanks in the rear.

DePue: Prevent the Chinese from infiltrating along the high ground.

Lewison: Yeah. And, we stopped someplace before we got to Chinju and our captain—I don't even remember his name because they were switching so fast at that time—he was standing in front on the formation crying and telling how messed up we were.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: And to us, we were tired, cold, hungry. It just kind of went (thud sound) over our heads, I think. As you remember back, it was pretty

DePue: But you held onto that memory for fifty years plus. I know how the mind works. Maslow's Law of Hierarchy of Needs: you're hungry, you're tired, you're thirsty and those things end up being all that really matters, sometimes.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Wow, that's

Lewison: But that winds up Korea.

DePue: Well, I had one other question since you brought us back to Korea anyway. What was your thought on how that war ended? Now you were back in the United States by that time, but

Lewison: Well, it was kind of like ... we really didn't gain anything. We did in a sense: we stopped the North Koreans and the Chinese from taking over South Korea. But as far as liberation of the whole country, which I think initially probably was not the whole deal anyway, but it wound up to be McArthur's, I guess.

DePue: Yes. And Singman Rhee's.

Lewison: Yeah. Oh, I was happy for everybody that it did end and they did gain some ground up there; it's not all on the 30th parallel anymore. So, I didn't think we gained an awful lot other than that the South Koreans are still free.

DePue: And there's no place in the world, in my mind, that there's a more stark difference between two countries divided arbitrarily like that.

Lewison: Yes. You could see the difference when we were going north.

DePue: Even then?

Lewison: Yeah, and by the refugees, you know, coming south. A lot of them ... you know, when they're leaving their country, something's bad. It's like, all the criticism we have in the states, you didn't see any Americans evacuating. Everybody's trying to get in.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: (laughter)

DePue: That's a bit of a problem right now. Okay, so you came back to the United States, the war is still raging, but what I didn't know – and found out immediately after we stopped the recorder last time – is that you had gotten married prior to the time of going over there.

Lewison: Yes.

DePue: So tell us a little about that.

Lewison: Well, we were very young, and we got married when I first joined the Army.

DePue: Where did you meet?

Lewison: Ruth and I met in high school.

DePue: So high school sweethearts?

Lewison: Yeah. We went to, initially and after, we went to different schools together. Our towns were three miles apart, which was a big rivalry. My sophomore year – because my parents moved – I had to go to Scandinavia, where Ruth was—that's where I met her. We stayed there three or four months, I think.

DePue: This is Scandinavia, Wisconsin. Okay.

Lewison: Then my dad and mom moved back to the Iola district, which is where I was before. We had met and dated all the way since then...

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: ...since we were sophomores in high school.

DePue: So what was it like trying to keep the letters going back and forth while you're in the midst of this combat?

Lewison: Well, I would write when I had a chance; that was usually not until we got back into reserve someplace. Of course, the mail was free. When you got letters, it

was usually in a bunch. Ruth would write, too. But then we wouldn't get the mail until we got back down off the hill. So sometimes reading the letter – I'm sure it was for her too – you didn't have them in order. So you'd have a problem in a letter in one and another one was okay or vice versa, and you'd think, What the heck was going on here. (laughter) I'm sure she did, too. But there wasn't a lot we could do. Like my old platoon sergeant, Sgt. Hoggitt(?) again. He'd say "Dear Mom, I've been in combat. I'm okay. Bye".

DePue: Yeah. (laughter)

Lewison: That's the way he felt about it.

DePue: Now, I imagine you looked at Sgt. Hoggitt(?) as this ancient, old warrior, and he was probably...

Lewison: Why, he had to be under 40. But when they – I forget, it was several months into the war – they wanted all the guys who were 35 or older to leave, to go back and get another assignment in the rear. Because it was, climbing those mountains, (laughter) it was a young man's war.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: He didn't go back, and we all thought he was 35 or more. Maybe he wasn't, but before he rotated – he rotated a couple of months before I did – we'd catch him sitting on a rock going up the mountain, watching us. We'd all give him a little jab: What's the matter sarge, you tired? He'd go rrrrr, and then he'd start going up the hill again. (laughter)

DePue: Well, you two guys, I'm sure there was this hard core group of survivors from the very first time you got to Pusan, but I guess it surprises me that he was one of the survivors as well.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: That's great.

Lewison: Yeah

DePue: He factors into a lot of your stories.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Do you have any idea how he managed to get out of Hadong?

Lewison: No. Like I said before, other than him, just when I initially walked into that school room, he said; "I thought you were dead.". That's **all** he said.

DePue: Yeah. And you guys had to be very close to each other when the ambush hit.

Lewison: Yeah. Not too far, but when Lt. Macaronus gave the word: “Every man for himself” this is when things kind of got split.

DePue: Okay. Well, again we went back to Korea, and I’m very happy that you were willing to do that. So you’re married over there, you come back and...

Lewison: Got a daughter.

DePue: Got a daughter, and she was born when?

Lewison: April of 1950.

DePue: Okay, so not too long after you’re married. Then, so that changes your life and your perspective, I’m sure.

Lewison: Oh, yeah.

DePue: And where were you initially assigned coming back?

Lewison: Ft. Riley, Kansas. It was 10th Division, which was a training division.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: In fact, it was the same division I took my basic training in—in Ft. Riley.

DePue: What were you doing at Ft. Riley, then?

Lewison: Started out as a Platoon Sergeant, training basic trainees; became the Field First Sergeant, which they now call SDI, and eventually First Sergeant.

DePue: So you keep moving up the rank pretty quickly?

Lewison: Yeah, I made E7 in 1951.

DePue: Well, you mentioned that they used to call E6s “Sgt. First Class.”

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: What did they call E7s at the time?

Lewison: Master Sergeant, and then the only way you became a First Sergeant is when you were appointed to the job and they put the little diamond in your...

DePue: And then you became and E8?

Lewison: No.

DePue: You an E7 First Sergeant?

Lewison: Yeah, E7.

DePue: Well, somewhere along the line they decided to add that additional rank.

Lewison: Yes, and this one thing that always bugged me, you know, and it still does today, too. When you read in the paper about athletes, or different people, and saying, Oh my goodness, he's only eighteen years old or he's only nineteen years old; you've got to feel sorry for this kid and excuse him. Well, there was a lot of eighteen, nineteen, twenty and twenty-one year old First Sergeants in the Army back then, the 1950s.

DePue: Uh, huh.

Lewison: The thing that got me was the older E7s wound up with the gravy jobs. But you as a First Sergeant, that was reveille until 9:00 or 10 o'clock at night.

DePue: In a training division those are the kind of hours you're working around the clock.

Lewison: That's right. And, then when E8 came out all the old timers then came out of the woodwork and said, You guys are too young for this job. (laughter) The promotion boards generally favor time in service. I don't care what you say.

DePue: Yeah. Well, some of those NCOs, more senior NCOs, would have had Korea and World War II experience, for sure.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: But it had to be a different kind of an army because I would think the whole focus was what was going on in Korea. Did most of those kids you were training think that's where they were headed?

Lewison: Well, we started off with just basic training. Then this is when they, the Army, had shifted, too, to advanced training.

DePue: Uh, uh.

Lewison: You had advanced infantry –you had basic training and they had advanced infantry and we became **that**. That was probably – let's see, I left in '54 – it would probably have been '53 or a little earlier.

DePue: So things were slowing down by that time in Korea, anyway.

Lewison: Yeah, but we were training what they called carrier companies. I think we had twenty-four or something like that – twenty-four carrier companies that we trained – twenty-three of them went to Korea and one went to Europe.

DePue: The odds weren't very good of going to Europe.

Lewison: No, and these kids knew it. We told them, and most of us were Korean War veterans.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: We're telling you it might save your life, you know.

DePue: I suspect they actually paid attention, didn't they?

Lewison: In most cases. You betcha.

DePue: Yeah, and you probably didn't go too easy on them, either, did you?

Lewison: No. In fact, we even had prisoner training.

DePue: What to do in case you're captured.

Lewison: No. I'm talking about United States prisoners, GIs. They'd come with a bus – guys from the stockade –and each unit would get seven or eight. We'd train them all day. Bus would come and pick them up at night and take them back to the stockade. Apparently, this must have been something to do with getting their sentences reduced or whatever.

DePue: Oh.

Lewison: Then when they were done with training, they were put on a plane and sent to Korea.

DePue: Okay. No idea why they were in the brig.

Lewison: Never asked.

DePue: I had never heard of that.

Lewison: I had a corporal from Hayes, Kansas by the name of Hammerschmidt. He was our prison guard; he was a good one, too. He had a sawed off shotgun, riot gun...

DePue: Uh, huh.

Lewison: ...as his weapon.

DePue: These weren't coming from Ft. Leavenworth were they?

Lewison: No, they were from the stockades at Ft. Riley.

DePue: Okay. You only mention that, of course, because that's where the main stockade is for the Army.

Lewison: That's where the real bad guys went.

DePue: They probably didn't get that luxury, did they? (laughter) Okay, you were at Ft. Riley then until 1954?

Lewison: 1954, and then the 10th Division was deactivated, and I think the National Guard, from Louisiana or somewhere down there, came in. I know we had to have everything in the barracks: X number of bunks; footlockers; mess hall had to have everything laid out by number of knives, forks and spoons. This was a big deal. So all they had to do was come in. Everything was laid out right there for them. And, I was one of the latter ones to leave because I volunteered to take a unit that was just in their last week of training and be able to zero them out and then we're done.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: Then from there we went to Ft. Leonard Wood. So I was in Ft. Leonard Wood from '54 to '60.

DePue: That's a long time in one post.

Lewison: Yes it is.

DePue: Now was that the standard practice at that time: the Army would keep most of the soldiers in one place for up to six years?

Lewison: It depended on your MOS. [Military Occupation Speciality] What Ft. Riley did—I had infantry MOS but then they decided all the First Sergeants should go to a first sergeant school and get an MOS which is called 1502, which is really an admin MOS. The first sergeant school they sent us to at Ft. Ben Harrison really wasn't a first sergeant school, it was an advanced Army administration course.

DePue: Ft. Ben Harrison, in Indiana.

Lewison: Yeah, Indianapolis; closed now, I think. The finance center was there, too.

DePue: Yeah, I think the finance center is still there.

Lewison: And you talk about some lost, young infantry sergeants trying to get through this course was something, because you're talking Army level and all that stuff. This is way over their head, but we made it. But that MOS hung me up. So then they came....

DePue: What do you mean that they hung you up?

Lewison: Well, didn't move. That MOS didn't move.

DePue: So there wasn't much promotion in that?

Lewison: No, not much promotion nor movement.

DePue: Okay, I got you. Okay.

Lewison: So I think it was 19- might have been 58, somewhere along there, they decided, Yes, there were too many 1502s in the Army so they should be reclassified. So if you didn't have an MOS to fall back on they sent you to training, whether you wanted to be an engineer or whatever. Well, I was already an infantryman, so I just said, Knock off that stuff; I'll just go back to my infantry MOS. Which they did. So here I'm an infantry first sergeant in an engineer post. (laughter) So they caught up with me and sent me to Panama.

DePue: But up to 1960 you were at Leavenworth, you said?

Lewison: Ft. Leonard Wood.

DePue: Ft. Leonard Wood, okay, Missouri.

Lewison: Uh, huh.

DePue: I know you said that. I just lost track of that.

Lewison: I had H and S [Headquarters and Service] Company, 4th GRS, school brigade.

DePue: Well, it's kind of unusual that the two posts you served in in the 1950s then were both in the Midwest and practically the only thing that was up there.

Lewison: Very glad to jump to Panama. When I came back from Panama, there was – I think it was nine E8s, infantry going back to the states about the same time I was.

DePue: Uh, huh

Lewison: And all of them but one was going to Fort Dix. Well, I'd been through Dix, and I didn't want no part of it, New Jersey. (laughter)

DePue: I've been to Ft. Dix, too. (laughter)

Lewison: Well, I didn't like the people. I thought they were very rude, and there was one assignment—that's all they told us—eight are going to Ft. Dix and one is going to Ft. Leonard Wood. I thought, Please God, Ft. Leonard Wood. It was me, and I got to Ft. Leonard Wood.

DePue: That was back in '63, then.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Okay, so in 1960 you and the family, which I'm assuming has grown by this time, head down to Panama.

Lewison: Yeah, Ruth and the kids went up home, stayed with her parents, 'cause there was a 20 week waiting period for quarters.

DePue: That's a long time.

Lewison: Yeah. I don't remember if it was really that long, but it was a long time as far as I was concerned. I went down to Panama. What they did, after the riots in '59, they organized a battle group. There was a 20th Infantry on the Pacific side, and they had nothing, really, on the Atlantic side.

DePue: You mentioned the riots of '59. Can you talk a little about that? This is down in Panama, I assume?

Lewison: Yeah. It was just a, uh I'm not sure 'cause I wasn't there. They had riots. I don't know if they were unhappy with whatever was going on, but this was in the Canal Zone which was US territory at that time.

DePue: Right.

Lewison: So they had to use the military to quell the problem, and they only had the 20th Infantry on the Pacific side so they organized the 10th Infantry; this is a battle group, not a division.

DePue: That would be the equivalent of a brigade for us today, I think.

Lewison: It would be a battalion within a brigade really. Yeah, because later it became part of the A Brigade.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: And the problem with organizing the 10th Infantry was, they did it by TO&E, [Table of Organization & Equipment] which meant they filled everything up by MOS and grade. So that meant no promotions on the other side of the ocean for a couple of years.

DePue: Uh, huh. Because you were there for two years.

Lewison: We were already there. Of course, now you did whole skill training because you're from all over, all over the United States. And it became a **very, very** good unit and received some **very, very** good training.

DePue: Was your training oriented toward things like jungle warfare?

Lewison: Jungle warfare, yeah. We all had to go through the jungle warfare school, which was located at Fort Sherman, on the Atlantic side.

DePue: It was at that time, as well.

Lewison: Uh, huh. I went down there as a platoon sergeant and eventually became a first sergeant. At the jungle warfare school they always needed people to come and work in the training sites plus act as aggressors, and all the troops in the 10th

Infantry wanted to volunteer for this. They took a platoon at a time. I enjoyed going over there with them, too, because they had the zoo there and you had to go through all the training sites. Then you became aggressors for all the students which was fun because you were now messing over other GIs. (laughter)

DePue: Well it's also very good training on both sides of the equations.

Lewison: Oh yes. it was. We became **very, very** good—I would say jungle oriented.

DePue: As the aggressors, you're playing the enemies' tactics. I'm sure you got lots of practice doing that, and like you said, got to screw with other people.

Lewison: Yeah and then we would, as a battle group or battalion, we maneuvered. We did our big training at Rio Abjo(??) which is on the Pacific side. It's about 100 miles north of Panama City. It used to be a big air base, and when the air base was kicked out of Panama they leveled it. All that was left was the concrete pads for the barracks and admin buildings and the air strip.

DePue: Now when was the Air Force kicked out of there?

Lewison: After World War II, I guess.

DePue: Okay, so before you had gotten there.

Lewison: Yeah, before we got there. They had built metal sheds for barracks and stuff for your base camp, but other than that you spent it out in the field. The terrain ran from the ocean up into the mountains so map reading was was a problem unless you really knew where the roads were because of the way the...

DePue: Was it a very gradual incline?

Lewison: Yeah. We would maneuver—the 82nd Airborne would come down in the winter time, like in February; of course that was our summer—we would maneuver against them. It was pretty tough on them. We had a lot of fun with them because they had left Ft. Bragg in the wintertime, and now suddenly they jump out of the airplane and it's summer—hot. So they had a problem just with that alone.

DePue: Well, you were down there during the Cuban Missile Crisis then.

Lewison: Yes. We were combat loaded, ready to go.

DePue: You remember anything else about that? I mean, were people thinking, Okay this is it?

Lewison: Yeah, we thought we were going to go. I was very proud of our draftees. They all got extended, those that were in...

DePue: Involuntarily extended.

Lewison: Involuntarily extended. Many of them had already made their commitments to college, and they didn't gripe. Their good soldiering increased. I was proud of them.

DePue: Yeah. Well, nothing catches your attention like thinking your going into combat and suddenly deciding you need to get more serious about things. Now, when you say you thought you were ready to go... to go to Cuba?

Lewison: Yeah. We were stationed at Fort Davis. Where Ruth and I lived, it was in Ft. Gulick which was about three miles down the road. I couldn't even converse with her.

DePue: So total lock down then?

Lewison: Total lock down.

DePue: Well now that you mention Ruth, is it possible we can get her in on the conversation for a little bit?

Lewison: Ruth.

Ruth: I'm not sure I want to. (chuckles)

DePue: Well she's been downstairs just listening. (chuckles)

Lewison: Now don't exaggerate. (laughter) Watch the cords.

DePue: I've got to reorient this microphone a little bit here. We now have the opportunity to include Ruth Lewison in on the discussion. Now I assume you've heard a little bit—talking about your early lives of marriage—and now you're an Army wife in wonderful places like Fort Riley, Kansas and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and then in Panama. Is there anything in particular you remember about being on an Army post, raising a family in an Army post?

Ruth: Oh my, it wasn't any different really. We were in isolated quarters, you know. I mean we were not close to the base where he went. It was a housing unit.

DePue: Okay. Well let's back up a little it. What was it like being a brand new wife and having your husband in Korea, wondering every day what he's going through. Or maybe you didn't try to think about that.

Lewison: Well, you know I really wasn't familiar with what he was doing. I was too young.

DePue: And he wasn't telling you in the letters.

Ruth: Not much.

DePue: So you've heard about all of this afterwards?

Ruth: Well, yes, but I probably had an inkling of what was going on, but he wasn't talking to me about it. He didn't want to frighten me, I suppose.

DePue: Yeah.

Ruth: I had a little girl to take care of, you know, I had a small child. So I was busy, and I lived in the community where I grew up so I knew everybody. I was comfortable.

DePue: And then when he came back, you moved out to Fort Riley with him, obviously.

Ruth: Yeah, was it Riley? Yeah, okay. Fort Leonard Wood was in there somewhere.

Lewison: No, after, after Riley.

DePue: Okay, now here's a question you might now want to answer, and you don't have to, obviously if you don't want to. Was it difficult, Gay, for you to adjust back to civilian life?

Lewison: Yes. I drank a lot. According to Ruth, I was pretty rough at night when she tried to touch me or something. She got beat on a couple of times, I guess.

Ruth: If I accidentally hit him in my sleep, I sometimes woke up with a bloody nose.

DePue: Okay, just the natural reaction of how you had to survive over in Korea.

Ruth: Uh, huh.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: They probably have a name for it now. What do they call it?

DePue: Post traumatic stress disorder.

Lewison: Yeah. Now after World War II guys and Korea, you didn't even bring that stuff up.

DePue: Yeah, you know shell shock in World War I was the phrase they called it. Those poor guys were in the trenches for months on end.

Lewison: Yeah, it was... The transition was happy, but...

Ruth: But you know when I was going to take—of course I had Gail then, we had a daughter, I had a girl when he was gone—of course, my dad had a fit that I was going to take that girl off, way off, someplace, you know...

DePue: Way off into Ft. Riley, Kansas?

- Ruth: ...because they had **no idea** what an Army base was or anything, you know. So they just thought it was terrible I was going to take that little girl. Why didn't I leave her with them.
- Lewison: When they came down to visit, it was kind of funny because Grandma thought we lived right with the troops. She was surprised that we were separate, you know. Actually, if she wanted to go see the troops, she had to go where the troops were.
- DePue: Yeah. But again this is during a time when you're involved with training the new recruits. As you mentioned before, your hours are long. So you don't get to see them all that much.
- Ruth: No, but you know the whole group of women where we lived, we were all in the same boat. Most of us. Now there were others who weren't in the training unit.
- DePue: So looking back on it, would you say you liked that Army life?
- Ruth: Oh yes, I didn't mind it at all.
- DePue: The camaraderie of living with the other women and...
- Ruth: No, I didn't mind that at all.
- Lewison: She is, really, a little unhappy that I retired.
- DePue: Well that's getting a little bit ahead of the story. (laughter) We'll get there eventually. How about Panama. What was that like, living down there?
- Ruth: Oh beautiful. We had no windows. Well we had windows, but there was no glass; it was all screens. You could hear this one up, you could hear that one over there, and we had a German woman and a guy who lived in that one. They had a boy and girl; the little boy's name was Freddie, and she had an accent and everything. She'd say, "Now Freddie, how much is four and four?" And then Freddie would say something, and Bob Bauman up in this house up here he'd say, "Well everybody knows four and four is seven." (laughter) Or something like that, you know. You could hear each other.
- Lewison: Yeah, we had a lot of activities going on. She was even playing ball; I was playing ball.
- Ruth: Oh yes, and the kids were playing ball.
- DePue: Kids went to Army schools? Got a decent education?
- Lewison: Better than you get in civilian life.
- Ruth: It was a hop, skip and jump to the movie theater, and the kids would go. Well, one night they came home and left Bill laying—he'd fallen asleep in the

theater—and they left him there. I said, Dean, how could you?”, and Dean said. ”Well, he was sound asleep Mom; he didn’t want to wake up.”. (laughter) He had to go and have them open up the theater to get him out.

DePue: So by the time we’re in Panama, how many kids are there?

Lewison: Five

Ruth: Billy was in my arms, and my dad liked to have croaked when I took him.

Lewison: He was a year old when we got down there.

Ruth: Well, my dad had a fit when I was going to take him.

DePue: Being down in Panama is not the best place for your grandkids to be when you’re living in Wisconsin, I assume? (laughter)

Lewison: Yeah

DePue: That’s not what he thought he was signing up for maybe.

Ruth: It was lovely. It was beautiful. Palm trees.

DePue: But in general, your parents were supportive of his career?

Ruth: Oh, yeah, they liked him. (laughter) I don’t know that they were so supportive of taking me all over. I mean, my dad thought it was just terrible that I was taking those little kids way off into another world.

Lewison: Oh, yeah. There were locust, and they’d bang against the screens when it was locust season, and they’d be that long.

DePue: Uh, huh. These are no small locusts.

Lewison: No

DePue: I think you said about six inches.

Lewison: Yeah. We had one formaldehyded and we put him in a box and sent it up to Grandpa. He wrote back and says, ”My God, if the grasshoppers are that big, how big are the other half?” (laughter)

DePue: Yeah, the things that are eating the grasshoppers.

Ruth: This one day—Bill was small enough he had to take a nap every day—of course we had these houses that, like I said, there were no windows. But underneath the carport there was the first floor and then there was a second floor, so that second floor was pretty high up. It was all stucco or cement or whatever it was, stucco? So I took a nap. I woke up and I thought. What **is this**? If I’m going to die, I’m

going to see what's killing me. It was this plane, and it was **just barely** not touching the house. All of a sudden I thought of Billy sleeping upstairs. I went upstairs, and the kid's mouth was wide open, screaming as loud as he could. I couldn't hear a thing he was doing.

DePue: What post was this in Panama?

Lewison: Fort Gulick is where she lived, and I served in Fort Davis, and then the latter part the special forces had moved into Ft. Gulick, so there was a lot of helicopters, a lot of jumping—parachutes. The kids all got used to this and got to see it.

DePue: Yeah. Which side of the ocean was this on?

Lewison: Atlantic side.

Ruth: But we were at Gulick too.

Lewison: That's where we lived. We started off on the Pacific side. That was interesting. It was fifty miles across there, and all the guys that lived over there, we had to catch a train. You'd to go across the Isthmus, go to work, and when you're done work, catch a train and go back to the Pacific side. Then eventually we went by car, and then eventually got quarters. So that was a godsend: missed that 100 mile trip every day.

DePue: That would get old after awhile.

Ruth: Well one time, they had the red tide and you know it's poisonous.

DePue: Oh, the red tide as in...

Ruth: It's algae in the water. Anyway, I said okay we've go to take these kids across the Isthmus so they can put their feet in the Atlantic and Pacific on the same day, so they can always remember that this is what they did. When we got to the Pacific side, the red tide was in, and it was poisonous. So they got to dip their big toe in the water. But I wanted them to be able to swim in each ocean on the same day. They could always say they had been to both oceans.

DePue: Well, they got close to swimming in both oceans.

Lewison: Uh, huh.

DePue: I have been down to Panama. It's pretty down there.

Ruth: Beautiful, just beautiful.

DePue: So what happens after Panama then?

Lewison: I was assigned back to Fort Leonard Wood.

DePue: And another infantry kind of posting and training?

Lewison: Yeah, basic training. I was First Sergeant. By that time I'm made E8. I made E8 in Panama.

DePue: So you're a long time as a first sergeant: first as an E7 and then as an E8.

Lewison: Yeah, and then, let's see, we were there until '65. I volunteered for Viet Nam which made her very unhappy.

Ruth: I got to stay there.

Lewison: She got to stay –which was a good deal.

DePue: I'm going to talk with both of you here just for a couple of minutes about that decision to go to Vietnam, then we'll switch back to your experiences over there. You said you volunteered.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: You volunteered for MAC V. [Military Assistance Command – Vietnam]

Lewison: Yeah, that's all they had at that time. There was no full, large American units there.

DePue: In fact, after you go there was the first time that they started doing that.

Lewison: The Navy was really running the logistics of the MAC V at that time.

DePue: Okay. So what factored into your decision, Gay, to decide to volunteer for Vietnam?

Lewison: Well, I was a career soldier. Taxpayers had been supporting me for a long time. It was a hot spot in the world at that time, and I thought it was the place to be. Plus, there was also an alternate drive of possibly making E9.

DePue: So E9 was the rank that existed by then?

Lewison: By then, yes.

DePue: Okay, E9 being Sergeant Major.

Lewison: Yes.

DePue: Okay. Ruth, apparently you might have had a little different opinion about that?

Ruth: I don't think that I argued with him too much, did I?

Lewison: No, but you were unhappy.

Ruth: Yeah.

DePue: But at that point and time, it hasn't caught the country's attention, like it did a couple of years later.

Lewison: No. If we go back to Panama: starting in 1961 they were asking for volunteers.

DePue: That early. Okay.

Lewison: You have to remember the Special Forces and the usage of them. This was President Kennedy's pet project.

DePue: So that didn't even really get started until '61, '62.

Lewison: Yeah, and uh....

DePue: So this is the first experiment with the Special Forces?

Lewison: Yes. It was all his baby.

DePue: But you weren't assigned to the Special Forces when you went over.

Lewison: No, I was with MAC V.

DePue: Okay. Tell us a little about MAC V.

Lewison: MAC V was headquartered in Saigon. The country of Vietnam was divided into four corps. It started with the north: it was One, Two, Three and Four, the Fourth Corps being Donna Delta. I was assigned to the Second Corps with headquarters in Pleiku.

DePue: Now, just to back up a little bit. MAC V is the Military Assistance Command - Vietnam.

Lewison: Right.

DePue: So this is a huge number of advisors.

Lewison: Advisors. We're an advisory ef, and the Navy was our logistic supporter at that time.

DePue: Okay. So you're in which Corpse again, Second Corps?

Lewison: Second Corps, Pleiku. From there I was assigned to SENE A initially; that was my first assignment.

DePue: What was that assignment again?

Lewison: SENEA as a SENior Enlisted Advisor.

DePue: Yeah, SENEA.

Lewison: Quanduc du Province.

DePue: Okay, so that's a Vietnamese name of a town?

Lewison: Capitol of that province.

DePue: Okay. My mind's going in a million different directions here. What kind of training did you get before you went over?

Lewison: I went to Fort Bragg to the Military Assistance Training Command. You received all of the good items that you should know as an Advisor. You got experiences of what can happen from people who had already been over there, and you also started to Vietnamese language course at Fort Bragg. This school, I think, was eight weeks, if I remember right.

DePue: They're cramming a lot in in eight weeks then.

Lewison: Yeah. A couple hours of language first thing in the morning, and then the rest was all tactical type stuff, administrative type training. A lot of "how to" and a lot of "how not to do as the French did".

DePue: Okay, and did you know at that whether you'd be working with the Vietnamese or the Montagnards [people from the highlands – from the French word for mountain] or.....

Lewison: We had no idea what our assignment would be until we go into Vietnam.

DePue: Okay. How proficient did you feel you were at the end of this eight weeks with the Vietnamese language?

Lewison: Passable, because we started out in Fort Bragg with the normal language, like fork and spoon, house, bed water and all this stuff. This continued on for eight weeks with The Presidio in Monterrey for the language school.

DePue: Oh, after you left Bragg.

Lewison: Yeah. After I left Bragg I went to language school at The Presidio. We were a couple of weeks along, and all of a sudden they said, "Your agenda has changed; we've got to teach you all combat terms". So that kind of messed things up, I think, for all of us.

DePue: You're talking about the Vietnamese terms for all of these things in combat.

Lewison: Yeah, the combat terms and all that. So all I can say is, I was passable. I passed the course, as far as the reading and writing and talking. We had Vietnamese instructors. Most of them were ladies. Of course, they used the numbers the way

I like to interpret them—here in America since that movie *Number 10 is the Best...*

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: Well, over there number ten is **bad**. Number one is good. (laughter) The lady instructor, whatever her name was, she used to say, “Sergeant Lewison, you write beautifully in Vietnamese but you speak number ten.” (laughter)

DePue: Well, I was going to ask if they tried to teach you how to write it as well...

Lewison: Oh, yeah.

DePue: ... because this is a completely different—it’s not even an alphabet. Was it Chinese characters?

Lewison: No, it’s a derivative of Latin, but it’s tonal.

DePue: The language is tonal, but was the written language something the French tried to give them?

Lewison: I don’t know where this Latin came in, but it did.

Ruth: I’d have it good then, because I have an ear for it.

Lewison: For example, ma level meant one thing. Ma (different tonal value) meant another. This is the hard part.

DePue: Yeah. I’ve listened to enough Vietnamese to know it’s not a pretty language to listen to sometimes, at least I don’t think so.

Ruth: It’s not guttural.

Lewison: Well, I guess that was my impression that it was.

Ruth: You think so?

DePue: They’ve got that clucking sound, too, don’t they?

Lewison: Yeah, sometimes. You could tell the difference between North and South, too. The North was more zzzzing, where the South wasn’t.

DePue: Okay. Let’s get back to MAC V then. Tell me a little more about once you get to Vietnam how MAC V is organized and what it actually looks like on the ground, once you get to ground level.

Lewison: Well, once we got to Saigon, we received another orientation. What they did was the orientation of the corps, starting with number one at the north and working it’s way down—what was happening in each corps. For example, they ended up the

Fourth Corps, and now you're talking about guys fighting out of the boats and the whole works.

DePue: This would have been early in '65 when you got there?

Lewison: September.

DePue: September, '65.

Lewison: Yeah, and then we got our assignment. It was to the Second Corps, Pleiku, and I still didn't know where I was going to wind up. Once you got to the corps tactical area, they assigned you to a division tactical area, which I wound up in Quanduc with the 23rd ARVN [Army of Viet Nam] with headquarters being located in Ban Me Thuot.

DePue: Again, I think it bears repeating that these are Vietnamese units that you're being aligned with here.

Lewison: Yes.

DePue: South Vietnamese units, ARVN units.

Lewison: Well, it's not ARVN. The ARVN Division is there, but where I wound up there was no regular ARVN army.

DePue: Okay. So is this kind of the equivalent of militias where you were assigned?

Lewison: Partially. I'd say National Guard and militia, because it was broken down at the provincial level to regional force and popular force. Now the regional force was the province chiefs, troops, say like the Guard. They were in uniform; they had equipment, if you could call it equipment: M1 rifles and M1 carbines. The armored vehicle they had was an old French armored car—it was the only armored vehicle we had in the province—with a 50 caliber machine gun on it. The popular force was the little fellows in the village which I really loved and really give them credit. They're the ones in the little black pajamas who carried a shotgun. When the Vietcong wanted to come in and take their rice, steal their harvest and all that, they were the first defenders.

DePue: Now these groups that you're talking about, they're not all ethnically Vietnamese, are they?

Lewison: No. I wound up in the highlands which was Montagnard.

DePue: Now, were both of these forces you talked about before, both the popular force and what was the other? ...

Lewison: Regional

DePue: ...the regional force. Were the regional Vietnamese ethnically and the popular force Montagnard?

Lewison: No. Really they were by the area that they were in. The officers were Vietnamese. The province chief was Vietnamese. The officers within the regional force, in most cases, were Vietnamese.

DePue: Okay. You're E8 by this time, hoping to get promoted pretty soon. What specifically did you do?

Lewison: Well, I was a senior advisor at SENEA, for example. I was in charge of all enlisted people, just like it would be as a first sergeant in the unit. But then in the second mission it was, whenever there was an operation to go out and assist any of the units or anything, villages, you go with them. Major Pucinski was my commander. It would be him and me, and of course Hashi was his driver. We'd have another American radio operator and probably take a couple of our security guys with us.

DePue: Security guys were Vietnamese?

Lewison: No, they were American, for the compound. And so usually, at the most, whenever we went on an operation to help out a village or protect the rice harvest, or whatever, there were four or five Americans with the unit.

DePue: And the unit was a battalion? company?

Lewison: No, probably just a company out of Quanduc.

DePue: When you went out on these missions, were you walking or were you flying in a helicopter?

Lewison: Most of the time you're walking. A few times we rode. The Montagnards. To explain the difference between the Montagnard and Vietnamese—the Montagnard is somewhat like the American Indian was back in the 1800s and 1900s. They had their own way of way of doing business, and the Vietnamese had their own way of doing business.

DePue: Different language?

Lewison: Different language. Instead of getting Vietnamese, we should have gotten French.

DePue: The Montagnards spoke French?

Lewison: Some of them did – a lot of them. Of course, the French had been there a long, long time.

DePue: Now the Montagnards and the Vietnamese weren't exactly kissin' cousins, were they?

Lewison: No, they were not.

DePue: What was the reason for that animosity?

Lewison: I guess this goes **way** back. I know that the Vietnamese did not treat them very well, **never**, except our province chief. Colonel Hong was a great man.

DePue: So as far as the Montagnards are concerned, they didn't care if it was North or South Vietnamese, they didn't like either one?

Lewison: Really.

DePue: Okay. You know, you always think of the Vietcong as this insurgency in South Vietnam; T these are Vietnamese in the South. But there weren't any insurgents among the Montagnards. They were overwhelmingly in favor of what the Americans were trying to do?

Lewison: I don't know. They never gave us any kind of breakdown of what the population was of the Vietcong. You kind of assumed that they were maybe Vietnamese because their influence was coming from the north.

DePue: Was it...

Lewison: They had regiments and battalions, too.

DePue: They, being the Vietcong?

Lewison: Vietcong. For example, we had a Bu Prang. We didn't have district headquarters because there really was no security. They couldn't provide security in their own district towns like Kinduc. Bu Prang we did and a couple of other places. So the organization mostly was a district headquarters and then you had district towns. We had a regional force company in Bu Prang. A famous Vietcong regiment was the 101st, a big, big reputation. They hit Bu Prang. When we were on another mission to try to save a village, all we could do was call 'Puff the Magic Dragon' for them. You know what puff was.

DePue: Well I know what puff, yes I know all about that and I suspect somebody who might be listening or reading this later on might say 'Puff the Magic Dragon?'

Lewison: It's a C-47 with a mini-gun on it. It's one of those mini-guns that shoots many, many, many rounds.

DePue: It looks like a giant Gatling gun.

Lewison: A Gatling gun, and when it shoots at night, it's like a ray gun.

DePue: Yeah, it's putting out hundreds...

Lewison: Oh, hundreds of rounds per minute.

DePue: Yeah, probably thousands of rounds a minute.

Lewison: Thousands of rounds. So all we could do at night was send 'Puff', and then the next day we went over.. By then the battle was over, but this company had held against the regiment. The Vietnamese lieutenant had been killed almost immediately so it was a Montagnard platoon sergeant who was running the show.

DePue: So this was a popular...

Lewison: Regional

DePue: A regional force?

Lewison: Yeah. We went in there, everything was calm. What saved them was, really—'Puff' helped—but the mine fields around that fortification were still there from the French.

DePue: Oh.

Lewison: In fact, we had a reporter step on one a couple of days later, out there wandering where he wasn't supposed to be; lost a heel or something. But, the major tried to get a battlefield commission for this Montagnard master sergeant and couldn't get it.

DePue: The major, an American major?

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: So did you have a greater respect for the Montagnards as fighters than you did for the Vietnamese?

Lewison: I personally did.

DePue: Was that a common belief among the Americans?

Lewison: Well, possibly.

DePue: Maybe I should ask why.

Lewison: Because they fought. Even special forces—when you're talking about the big things that happened with special forces—in the highlands, this was generally Montagnard in most areas.

DePue: So there wasn't a question about their motivation?

Lewison: No. I also admired them. The Vietcong—if you're going to be mayor, your life expectancy shortened up considerably because this was an agenda for the Vietcong—you get appointed mayor, why, they're going to try to kill you as

quick as possible. This happened quite often, and you know there was always another one to step up and say 'I'll be mayor'.

DePue: In the Montagnard villages at least?

Lewison: Yes. I can't speak much about the Vietnamese, you know, like Fourth Corps was all Vietnamese so I can't talk about the special forces. I can only talk about our area, and I admired for them for it. I just got to thinking, What about my hometown? If the mayor of Iola, Wisconsin got shot, and another guy volunteered and got shot, and another guy volunteered and got shot, how many more volunteers are we going to have?

DePue: Yeah. Well, and it has applications as to what's going on today in the world, too, unfortunately.

Lewison: Yeah. So I always admired them. These men and women were about four foot six to four foot eight: small people.

DePue: And probably...

Lewison: Big heart.

DePue: Very wiry.

Lewison: Here in the states, I know in Wisconsin, they have a bad reputation because they're unruly. Talking with old airborne buddies, when the Vietnamese war ended, I think there were about 4,000 Montagnards went across Cambodia to try to get to the United States.

DePue: Make their way to Thailand and then to the United States?

Lewison: Yeah. This was one, Lon Nol [ruthless Cambodian leader during reign of Khmer Rouge] had the big killing fields. Out of 4,000 I think the statistics at Fort Bragg were 400 that made it.

DePue: And they probably were persecuted. The ones who stayed behind were pretty heavily persecuted, I would guess.

Lewison: Probably. It was kind of hard to say this because the Vietcong—by the time we got there in 1961—had pretty well eliminated all your professional people: doctors, lawyers, leaders, people in leadership positions. The Vietcong had pretty well shot them up pretty good. This was before '65. So what they would have left would be just what was there. I often thought—we had one village that was predominately Catholic. They had originally had their village up by Hanoi, and they did not want to be Communists.

DePue: So they were part of that migration in 1954 south.

Lewison: They went south and created a beautiful... It would be a picture post card, because when you came over the hill and came in—we had to go out there several times to get the Vietcong out of there—you'd come over a little hill and you'd look and see this river going through, and there was a village on each side and then rice paddies. It was really pretty. All of them had their little fences around their house and a little gate with a cross on it. I often thought about what happened to those people. You know they escaped Communism once, and now what are they going to do?

DePue: Now when you were talking before about the Vietcong had eliminated all the professional class, you're not talking about for the entire country; you're talking about for that region of Vietnam you were operating in.

Lewison: Yes, but they also did pretty well all over.

DePue: I would think maybe the exception would be in Saigon and some of the other larger cities.

Lewison: Yes, where they had security.

DePue: Okay. You've kind of described it a little bit, but what was the typical operation for you then?

Lewison: Well, it would be going with whatever—the province chief, you know, and the senior advisor would sit down and discuss how many troops you should go with and where—we would just go there and see what was there. You'd send your scouts in, and if a fire fight developed, it developed.

DePue: So let's make sure I've got this right. The province chief, obviously, is Vietnamese, and the senior advisor would be the American. The two of them together, but primarily this is a political decision. It's a decision made by the Vietnamese, necessarily.

Lewison: Right.

DePue: You're with Vietnamese troops so it's essentially a Vietnamese operation.

Lewison: Essentially all of the control that we would have: if you would disagree too much, you could withhold air strike or artillery.

DePue: So the air strike and the artillery were where the Americans came into it?

Lewison: Generally.

DePue: So both of those, even the artillery, was American?

Lewison: Yeah. They had their own Vietnamese Air Force. They could still do it, but if they wanted the good stuff, it was still American.

DePue: Okay. I suspect that all the times they wanted the good stuff.

Lewison: Oh, yeah.

DePue: How about NVA [North Vietnamese Army] units?

Lewison: Okay, this...

DePue: 1966 maybe?

Lewison: Yeah. In fact our province was right on the infiltration route.

DePue: How far were you from—I don't know how to pronounce this—Il Drang Valley?

Lewison: No, I think that was further north.

DePue: Okay, that was the first big engagement, I believe, with the 101st.

Lewison: 101st American?

DePue: Yeah, 101st Airborne Division?

Lewison: Yeah, that would have been north. I can remember reading, up at the little air strip at SENEA the 25th Division coming in. I think this was like February, or whatever.

DePue: The 25th...

Lewison: Infantry Division from....

DePue: The United States

Lewison: And, uh (pause, chimes) they swept from where we were north to Ban Me Thuot, and then they went to their own area.

DePue: Where were you at this time, because I was thinking you—you're not up close to Pleiku—you're south...

Lewison: South of Pleiku.

DePue: South of Ban Me Thuot?

Lewison: Yeah, south of Ban Me Thuot.

DePue: So that is further south. It's the southern part of the central highlands.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Okay, go ahead.

Lewison: And, the 25th came in, and really at that time I thought it was probably not a good idea.

DePue: It's not a good idea.

Lewison: Bring American troops in.

DePue: Why did you think that?

Lewison: Well, our mission was there to help them help themselves. I didn't think they were helping themselves.

DePue: The Vietnamese weren't helping themselves?

Lewison: No, I think they were just doing a conservation of strength.

DePue: Waiting until the fight got more serious?

Lewison: Wait until they eventually could win, I guess. I don't know what they were doing. It's hard to realize, you know, the whole picture when you're sitting in a small, little place yourself. My first reaction when I got to SENEA was What the hell have they been doing the last four years?

DePue: Could you spell SENEA, or tell me where from Ban Me Thuot it is.

Lewison: Okay. Ban Me Thuot, we're probably...

DePue: Right here is Ban Me Thuot.

Lewison: Yeah, we're probably down in here someplace. We're close to the Cambodian border.

DePue: Okay. So practically—just by looking at the map here—north, northeast of Saigon very close of the border between Cambodia and Vietnam.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: But it's at the tail end of the central highlands.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Okay. When I mean tail end, I mean....

Lewison: South end.

DePue: You go further south and you're into the delta region.

Lewison: You'd be in the Third and Fourth Corps.

DePue: Okay. So you didn't feel good about the decision to bring main American forces in there to fight this.

Lewison: No. You talked about NVA a minute ago. We had a unit that was out west of Kinduk(?). This is, again an original unit. They ambushed the North Vietnamese outfit. Of course, then you find out they don't like to be ambushed either.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: But anyway, we had to get called out there as a result of this and got into a hell of a fire fight—us with our RFPF and the biggest, heavy weapon we have with us is 60 mortar—and we're tangling with a North Vietnamese regular unit. It gets pretty bad, and there's not much publicity about this because Plei Me was going out the same time with the Special Forces and they got most of the publicity.

DePue: Plei Me?

Lewison: Plei Me.

DePue: Okay. I'm not familiar with that one.

Lewison: We lost the province chief. Like I said, he was Vietnamese, but all the people in that province loved that guy. He treated those people just like they were his little kids. He got killed, and things really got out of hand.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: That was like God getting killed.

DePue: Again, this is the North Vietnamese unit you're fighting at that time.

Lewison: Yeah, the Air Force bailed us out of that one.

DePue: Okay. And the natives, the locals, really loved and respected this guy. So did they go after the Vietcong and the NVA with a vengeance?

Lewison: No, because that's, all again, military decisions, you know.

DePue: Uh, huh. Well, I guess the thing that keeps troubling me here—and I imagine this has troubled you as well—is why did you have this different level of commitment between the NVA and the Vietcong, and the South Vietnamese?

Lewison: I don't know. I don't know.

DePue: Okay. You saw...

Lewison: It just seemed like the Vietnamese were overly cautious. This was kind of reinforced later after I was back in the states. When I was finally assigned to Ban

Me Thuot as Sergeant Major of the group, they had a district advisor group right in the city and got to know the master sergeant there pretty well. We were down in AAFES. [Army and Air Force Exchange Service]

DePue: The PX [Post Exchange, where troops could make purchases]

Lewison: We were down at the dispensary at the AAFES in St. Louis. For a while when you're inactive you had to pick up your medicine there instead of going to Scott or

DePue: So this is years later?

Lewison: Yeah, and I think Ruth was with me that day. I saw this captain sitting at the table and I thought, Well, I recognize that guy. I got closer, and it was the Master Sergeant from Lan Doc(?); he had been a reserve officer and got called back later. He wound up as an officer. They gave him his commission back, and they had a ranger battalion. When Tet [a major offensive by the North Vietnamese in early 1968] came, he was in Dalat. He said they withstood everything the North Vietnamese could give them, and when it was over he was waiting for the word to counterattack. He said this was happening all over Vietnam.

DePue: Now he was advising at that time?

Lewison: At that time it was a South Vietnamese ranger battalion.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: And all he waited for was the word to counter- attack. They never got it.

DePue: So a lack of will at a higher level

Lewison: What he was saying is being in Vietnam at that time, the North shot their wad on Tet.

DePue: I always heard that the Vietcong shot their wad at Tet.

Lewison: Before that. Well, it was while the North Vietnamese would back them up.

DePue: After Tet it increasingly became more and more a North Vietnamese army show.

Lewison: But, according to him, if they had counter attacked then, the story probably could have been different.

DePue: Uh, huh. Well, that almost suggests the lack of political will in the senior levels of the South Vietnamese government.

Lewison: I think so.

DePue: Yeah, okay. So you come back to the United States middle of '66, September, '66?

Lewison: December, '66.

DePue: What was it like returning home? By this time the American public is starting to pay attention to what's going on in Vietnam.

Lewison: Well, by the time I came home, there was already protesting and all of this other stuff going on. It was really uneventful. I landed in California, got an airplane, and already had my assignment

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: The orders Go home—Ruth was still at Fort Leonard Wood—and assigned to Fort Leonard Wood with future assignment to Springfield, Illinois.

DePue: To head up to Springfield to work with the Illinois Army National Guard.

Lewison: Right, as the senior enlisted advisor.

DePue: So that's kind of ironic. You go from advising Montagnards to advising Illinois National Guardsmen.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: A couple more questions about your Vietnam experience. What did you think about the way some of the Americans you saw—the people you were with—treated the Vietnamese people?

Lewison: Well, the guys we had—I can only speak of the guys we had in SENEA and Ban Me Thuot—it was fine.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: Because most of them, other than your security forces, had been through the familiarization course and you picked up a lot of the customs of the country. We still have a problem with this, I think, all over. When American troops go to a foreign country, they don't get a lot of what are the customs of that country. This is where a lot of the hard feelings come in. I can give you a couple of examples in Vietnam.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: You do not want to sit like this and face the Vietnamese.

DePue: With your legs crossed.

Lewison: No.

DePue: That would be disrespectful?

Lewison: Disrespectful. And the second thing is pat them on the shoulder.

DePue: You don't want to do that.

Lewison: Don't want to do that. We had a colonel from Kansas. Now there are no more guys in the whole world, I think, that always pat people on the shoulder and that's guys from Kansas. (laughter)

DePue: I didn't know that.

Lewison: You know you don't get this. I know, for example, there's probably a little reason, too, because it all goes so fast. The American troops don't get on a troop ship anymore where you have a couple of weeks to get there and all this stuff. You did get—like when I went to Okinawa—you got classes on Okinawa and the people and all that stuff.

DePue: Uh, huh. While you're on ship?

Lewison: While you're on ship, yeah. I know when we went to Vietnam—other than us guys that had been to familiarization—and there was a mixture of people on the airplane, we're just flying. We're stopping in Hawaii, we're stopping in the Philippines, and the next thing you know we're in Saigon.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: There ain't no classes or nothing. It's just mostly sleeping.

DePue: Well, the same thing going back. So you don't have that process of decompressing on the way back home.

Lewison: No.

DePue: Suddenly you're in the United States, and it's a completely world, I would think.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: What was your feeling about the protests that you came home to?

Lewison: Well, kind of disgusted, because they didn't know what the hell was really going on, and blaming GIs for being kid killers and all that stuff.

DePue: Even in late '66 that was already out there.

Lewison: Oh, yeah. It was kind of...

DePue: Okay. So again, now you come back from Vietnam, and your next assignment is with the Illinois National Guard. Did you ask for that assignment?

Lewison: I asked for a—they put it on your green sheet—civilian component duty. That's what they call it.

DePue: Now what was in your mind at this time? This is getting close to 17 years in the military.

Lewison: Yeah, starting to think about retirement, maybe being able to find a good place, maybe find a job and get out instead of staying.

DePue: So in your mind I'm going to find a place that I went to end up in, and so you're looking at the Midwest.

Lewison: Yes, and my original orders were Cleveland. (laughs) I wasn't happy with Cleveland. I talked to a personnel guy in the Pentagon and he said, "The Sergeant Major in Springfield, Illinois is leaving. I can set you up an appointment with the senior army advisor and see what goes on from there." So Ruth and I got in the car and left Fort Leonard Wood and came up and saw Colonel Parzioli(?) and had an interview with him.

DePue: See who?

Lewison: His name was Parzioli.

DePue: Parzioli?.

Lewison: Yeah.

Ruth: Super guy.

DePue: Now what was his rank?

Lewison: Colonel.

DePue: Okay, and he was with the Illinois National Guard?

Lewison: He was a senior army advisor.

DePue: Okay. So he was an active duty officer.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Why at that time—seventeen years in, you have three years to retirement—but you certainly could stick around after that time if you wanted to. What had made you decide that—at least think that—you wanted to retire after twenty?

Lewison: I think I made that decision back when I first reenlisted. I want to give this trip—seventeen years and that's it.

DePue: So that would have been what, 1954 or somewhere around there?

Lewison: It would have been 1952, I presume.

DePue: So you're a man who makes his mind up and sticks with it.

Lewison: Yeah. (laughter)

Ruth: All the kids except Gil were born in the military.

Lewison: Yeah. Number two: a lot of guys stayed for twenty-six and thirty, and it seemed like them last years brought a lot of pressure on them.

DePue: Well, did the sense that if you stayed in longer than twenty, that you'd probably end up in Vietnam? Did that factor into it at all?

Lewison: No.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: No. That used to be a threat, you know, when I came back from Korea and was assigned to Fort Riley. Of course back then, your assignments didn't necessarily come out of DA, [Department of the Army] they came right out of the post. Your files and everything stayed right on the post that you were assigned. It was always a threat, Well, if you don't do your job right, you're going back to Korea. I said, "So what, I've been there once." (laughter)

DePue: So you were calling their bluff on that one.

Lewison: No, that never—I think my future was more of a concern.

DePue: What were your specific duties then, when you were with the Illinois Guard?

Lewison: Basically, it was the senior enlisted man for all the enlisted people that were assigned to Illinois, because we had advisors all over the state. My job specifically was myself and my admin NCO taking care of, which was HHD, [Headquarters & Headquarters Detachment] and now is STARC...DePue: STARC is State Area Command.

Lewison: Yeah, ...and the band. (clock chiming in background)

DePue: So did you have leadership responsibilities for those two?

Lewison: No, No. You're just there to help them.

DePue: Okay. Did you have any leadership or supervisory responsibilities for the rest of the NCOs who were advisors around the state?

Lewison: Oh, yeah. It's like having a regular army unit.

DePue: But you didn't see them very often.

Lewison: I didn't see them very often. Used to make tours around the state. In fact, there were some armories I **missed**. (laughter)

DePue: Now, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions and don't worry that I spent a big chunk of my life in the National Guard. What was your impression of the National Guard at that time?

Lewison: Well, it was kind of a learning experience for me, too, because I really had never had any contact with any reserve or guard units.

DePue: And the reason for that is, if I can digress here, is because the politicians in the 1960's made the decision not to deploy the guard and reserve to Vietnam.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Did that make sense to you?

Lewison: No. because I can remember in Korea—I did have contact with the National Guard—with one officer. We were on Del??Bell?? Mountain and the captain came up—he was an FO [forward observer] for an artillery unit from, I think it was Arkansas or Kentucky or something—and he was going to do a fire mission for his unit and he was good. So everything was favorable. (laughter) He did a good job.

DePue: But then you got to the Illinois National Guard. Did the opinion stay favorable then?

Lewison: Yes. The units that I visited and talked to, the full-time employees, yeah, they're all trying to do their jobs—some better than others—but there was not anybody sitting back with their heels on top of the desk and saying, Okay, I've got a job.

DePue: S o this is from 1966 until 1969?

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Did you get the sense toward the end of '69 that there's a lot of kids in here who are just trying to avoid the draft?

Lewison: Well, that's probably the thoughts of a lot of people, but the option was there. You know, as long as the option is there a kid has his choice. It's like my son, Joe. He was coming up for draft. What do you want to do, get drafted, or do you want to enlist or what do you want to do?

DePue: Yeah. I mean everybody had to make that decision.

Lewison: Yeah, and he said, "Well if I'm going to go in, I might as well be able to control my own destiny a little bit. The only way I can do that is to enlist." He got into the helicopters and was reasonably happy for three years, until he got back to the

states. He was happy in Vietnam and very unhappy with Fort Campbell so that's why he got out.

DePue: That's interesting.

Ruth: We had a daughter that was in too.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Being in helicopters in Vietnam probably the kind of thing that makes a mother nervous.

Lewison: Well, he was an armorer so he had to go wherever they went.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: So he probably saw more of Vietnam than I did. (laughter)

Ruth: You have to believe in what you taught these kids, so that when they go off and do what they want to do, that they'll do it right.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: It was hard when Ruth and I saw Joe off in St. Louis, and it was hard to see him go. She was pretty well busted up so I asked her when I went home and said, "Did you get busted up like that when I left?". She said, "No, because you knew how to take care of yourself." (laughter) I thought, Lady, if you only knew.

Ruth: Well, the other went in too. (laughter)

DePue: Well, you know when you're only eighteen or nineteen or twenty you kind of think you're invincible anyway.

Lewison: Yeah, I know. I know that feeling.

DePue: Yeah. Even with some of the stuff that you saw. Okay, so your experience with the National Guard was pretty positive.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: And what happened when you got to the end of your career and you were ready to retire?

Lewison: General Patton [George S. Patton, IV, son of the famous WWII general] was the Adjutant General and

DePue: I'm trying to remember his first name. Is it John?

Lewison: No, what the heck was it? I don't remember either.

DePue: I can find that out.

Lewison: But when I first became Sergeant Major, Colonel Patton was a G3.

DePue: The operations officer for the guard.

Lewison: Yeah. The Fifth Army had their little exercises for the guard, reserves and active and all that stuff. All these packets and stuff would come into the advisor group and then they'd have to distribute them to the guard so they could find out what they had to do as far as their part of the operation. I had a lot of contact with Colonel Patton, then, and he eventually became the Adjutant General. So we were just talking one day, and he says, "What are you going to do? Are you going to retire or what?" I said; "Well, if I could find a good job, I think I'd retire; otherwise I'm going to re-enlist." He said, "Why don't you come over to the Guard?" So the first opening was at the OCS.

DePue: The Officer Candidate School?

Lewison: Yeah. I took care of all the supply. An old retired sergeant had just retired from that job, so they needed another guy, and I was logical, I guess. So I stayed there for a year. Colonel Erdman was the commandant then.

DePue: I know Colonel Erdman.

Lewison: Yeah. A very good man to work for. He made sure I got raises when it was due.

DePue: I know his son, Dave, better, but ...

Lewison: I guess it was a little over a year, might have been, Colonel Glass came into the office one day and said, "General Patton would like to have you move downtown."

DePue: This was when the Armory was downtown, the headquarters. Right across from the State Capitol.

Lewison: Yeah. I said, "Doing what?". He said, "Well, we need a person in the military personnel section, and I want you to come." So the old Army thing, you know: (laughs) the General says he wants to do something, you'd better do it. (laughs)

DePue: Well, not only that but you had the training as a first sergeant and how to take care of admin.

Lewison: Then I wound up as the chief of the personnel actions branch.

DePue: Okay, great. Something occurred to me while I was listening to you talk. You're with the Illinois National Guard in 1968. In August of 1968, and obviously, I'm referring to what's going on in Chicago with the Democratic [National] Convention. Were you involved in that at all?

Lewison: Yes, not going up there, but we set up the CP [Command Post] with our people. All the advisors at each of the armories would report in to us on what's going on.

DePue: So feeding intel on what's happening in the streets?

Lewison: Yeah, like trying to burn down the armory or something.

DePue: Well, what were your thoughts during that time?

Lewison: Well, you know really it's kind of strange. You don't expect things like that to happen in the United States. Then you didn't want what happened in Detroit years before—this goes back to General Throckmorton who I served under in Vietnam also—he treated Detroit like a combat zone. So you didn't want it to go that way. The only thing I have about '68 is, we would get reports and were thoroughly disgusted because the news media was not fully reporting what they should

DePue: You thought they were giving a distorted picture of what was happening?

Lewison: Yes, very much so. I think all they were doing was showing the retaliation of the police.

DePue: None of the things that were trying to instigate the retaliation in the first place?

Lewison: No, they were not showing the bags of human waste and stuff that were dropped on them and other things going on that the media didn't.... It's similar as Iraq. They don't show none of the good stuff either.

DePue: Yeah. Well, Ruth, your thoughts about Gay's retirement in '69?

Ruth: Well, what do you want to know?

DePue: Well, you were looking forward to moving on to civilian life and settling down, finally, in one place?

Ruth: Yes, I guess. I mean, if he's going to retire that's his choice, you know. Yeah, because by then the kids are pretty well grown up.

Lewison: Yeah, she was game to go either way.

DePue: Okay. How long did you end up working for the National Guard?

Lewison: Twenty-two years.

DePue: And were you a GS employee or a civilian?

Lewison: State employee.

DePue: So you retired from that in what year?

Lewison: Ninety-one, end of '91.

DePue: Did you stay in touch with some of your Army buddies after you retired?

Lewison: Yeah, a few. Most of them have died. I learned something that World War II guys told us when we first went into combat. Don't get too close to anybody, because you're going to lose them. So, most of my age group are pretty much this way. There are certain people I've kept contact with through Christmas cards and so on and had really old home week in Vietnam. I met more old friends in Vietnam than I did anyplace else in the world because they all, I guess, felt like I did: got to go where the action is.

DePue: Yeah.

Lewison: You could be...had to go down to Saigon for the E9 boards, and I could be on a bus or something and all of a sudden I'd hear, "Hey Lewison, what are you doing?" (laughter)

DePue: Guys you hadn't even thought about for ten years.

Lewison: Yeah. I met a lot of guys. In fact we still get a Christmas card from old neighbors at Fort Leonard Wood; they're up in Racine, Wisconsin.

DePue: So, are you a member of the VFW or Amvets?

Lewison: Yeah, I'm a member of the VFW and a poor member.

DePue: So, you don't go to too many of their activities?

Lewison: No.

DePue: Which post in town?

Lewison: The one on Old Jack, 755. [Old Jacksonville Road]

DePue: Okay, 755? How about reunions? Do you attend any unit reunions?

Lewison: No, because the reunion that I would want to really attend, the 27th Infantry, is always in Hawaii so that's not been an option, really. The 29th Infantry is now in Fort Benning. I guess I could have gone to a few of those.

DePue: So the 29th did have reunions?

Lewison: Yeah. I belong to both associations, the 27th and 29th.

DePue: I would think the 29th especially, would be a very bittersweet kind of an experience.

Lewison: Yeah. I look at some of the pictures and some of the names, and there's only a couple I even recognize.

DePue: Yeah. Kind of finishing up here. What advice would you have for today's generation about military experience or about world situation perhaps?

Lewison: Well, I'm not sure. (pause) A young fellow going in, for example, if he desires to go, make sure he tries to get what he wants and give it your best.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: And this, I think, is what the Army and the Guard is trying to do.

DePue: I don't want to words in your mouth, but you went into Korea and I suspect you believe that the Army really wasn't ready for that.

Lewison: Oh, yeah. Well, we thought we were. We were 18. We're gung ho, and we think we've got everything, but we really didn't.

DePue: Do you see any parallels in Vietnam? Was the Army much better prepared going to Vietnam?

Lewison: I can't speak for the combat units. I think ... You know this is just personal opinion, too, that you cannot win a guerilla warfare fighting conventional army style.

DePue: Which we tried to do in Vietnam.

Lewison: Yeah. I think we would have been better off being in, like ranger units and just flood all over the area and have the artillery and air support, which is what you need, and helicopter backup to get you out if you're in trouble.

DePue: Do you think we're having the same kind of mistakes in Iraq?

Lewison: I feel sorry for the guys over there. It's a tough situation when you've got people who're willing to blow themselves up to cause other people problems. We had a little bit of that in Vietnam. When you went to Saigon and slept in a hotel, you didn't know if the thing was going to be standing in the morning or not. Those people were **different**. You know, they'd drive a van or something full of TNT into the lobby and then run like heck. (laughter)

DePue: They weren't willing to stick around for the aftermath.

Lewison: No, they didn't want to see the aftermath. I think the training that the Army is giving today, just by observation, is probably a lot better than we had. The old combat lesson is, you sit and watch some of this stuff on TV and you say, Where are the older NCOs? For example, driving under a bridge with your hatches open

with an armored vehicle. Why do you do that? An old sarge would say, "Close your hatch." (chimes in background)

DePue: Civilians watching that don't think even twice about it and you can't **not** think about it.

Lewison: And all this stuff about the helmet. You see them all when they're strapped in.

DePue: Uh, huh.

Lewison: The first thing the WWII guys told us was, Don't ever hook up to that chin strap.

DePue: Because?

Lewison: Concussion.

DePue: It would blow right off.

Lewison: Yeah. If you had a strap on, your neck gone too. You know you saw a lot of this in Vietnam toward the end, too. Where are the old sergeants? Or what happened to Lt. Cali. Where was the old sergeant?

DePue: To take care and make sure none of that crap didn't happen.

Lewison: Didn't happen.

DePue: Well, where were all the old sergeants in 1950, though? Old is a different perspective when your 18 years old, isn't it?

Lewison: Yeah, yeah. (laughter) It's the same thing with commanders. You know this is a big change in the Army and was happening before I left. A unit commander was called the Old Man, and he was a captain, usually, and he usually had about 15 years' service. So if you goofed up and you went before the captain, he's heard every story in the book. (laughter)

DePue: A few times over.

Lewison: Yeah. Then when I left you were having captains at what?—6, 7, 8 years' service?

DePue: Uh, huh.

Lewison: Lot of difference.

DePue: And a lot of those, by '68 and '69 in Vietnam, maybe you had a couple, three years under your belt, and you suddenly were a company commander.

Lewison: Yeah. I'm not saying they weren't qualified. They just lacked experience. I want to back up to Panama, too. When they organized that battle group, about 98

percent of the officers were West Pointers. Most of them were from the class – what the heck class was it?, '56 or whatever. Anyway they all made captain at the same time. I never appreciated anything more, after you get to know them, of being precise and direct and getting the job done.

DePue: Professional?

Lewison: Professional. **Really** professional. Another thing: if this ever goes public, I want to commend the medics that I served with in combat. Great people.

DePue: Often the ones who had to put their lives on the line the most, didn't they?

Lewison: Yes. In Korea our medic fought as a rifleman until he was needed. The simple reason? In Hadong, all of our medics had the Red Cross on their helmets, as per the Geneva Convention. They all became targets.

DePue: Hmm. And probably didn't survive because of it.

Lewison: No.

DePue: Well, there are a couple of standard questions I want to finish with, and I've asked one or two of them already. This one is going to seem really kind of trite I think, but how did this experience—20 years but especially initially that first couple of years—how did that change you and change your perspective on life?

Lewison: I think the biggest thing is, you think you're pretty good until you get into a military unit. There's always somebody better. Or if you think you've got it bad, there's always somebody that had it worse.

DePue: Well, I would think based on the things you've seen in your life—especially those 20 years in active duty—you appreciate what we have here?

Lewison: Oh, yes. As they used to say in Vietnam, this is the land of the big PX. [post exchange]

DePue: Yeah, but in a very affectionate way.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Okay.

Lewison: It's where everything is.

DePue: Any final comments for us?

Lewison: No. I hope I've done a sensible job anyway.

DePue: You've done a wonderful job, and it's a pleasure to listen to the stories and hear you share them with us. It's a privilege to be able to do that. And, you, too, Ruth. I appreciate that.

Lewison: Yeah, I have a saying, that Ruth was the best soldier.

DePue: Probably not the only career soldier who feels that way.

Lewison: Yeah.

DePue: Because you're off all over the world and pulling 18 hour days sometimes and she's making it work at home.

Lewison: Even in Panama. We had a couple of night trainings a week. Training, jungle training, officer general warfare school. There were a lot of family separations, even down there.

DePue: Yeah.

Ruth: Like the kids would say, "Where's Dad?", and I'd say, "We're lost." (laughter)

DePue: Well, we'll finish with that. Thank you very much Gay. It's been a pleasure.
(end of interview)