Interview with James Perry

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, February 4, 2009. My name is Mark DePue; I'm a volunteer with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here in the home of Jim Perry, Jr. talking to Colonel Jim Perry, Sr. Is that the rank you retired with, Jim?

Perry: Lieutenant colonel.

DePue: Lieutenant colonel. Well, we refer to lieutenant colonels as colonels.

Perry: Yeah, that's right. Yes, I understand.

DePue: It's quite a pleasure and an honor for me to talk to you today. As you know, I've been wanting to interview you for just the longest time about your experiences in World War II, but especially about that first year in Korea when you were assigned to the 2nd Division. But we always start with some background information to learn a little bit more about who you are. So tell me when and where you were born.

Perry: I was born in Louisville, Illinois, 1921, May 29.

DePue: Your father was a World War I veteran, was he not?

Perry: Yes, he was. He was in the Marine Corps.

DePue: Tell me a little bit about your father—his name, to start with.

Perry: His name was Raleigh—R-a-l-e-i-g-h—James Perry. He was my father. And he was a disciplinarian but very kind individual and wanted his son to grow up to be a right type of person in this world.

DePue: Do you know much about his World War I experience, where he served?

Perry: All I know is in World War I he was gassed, mustard gas, and he got, as a result of that, tuberculosis. Later on, he had to go to Chicago, to Hines Hospital, to be treated and cured of tuberculosis. That was caused by the mustard gas.

DePue: And you say you came along in 1921, so—

Perry: '21.

DePue: —shortly after the war.

Perry: Yes.

DePue: What did he do for a living?

Perry: He was a railroad clerk on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. That railroad ran from St. Louis to Washington, DC. He was responsible for calling people to work. He also was responsible for helping to make up the dispositions of the freight for the cars on the tracks, and in other words, organizing the train movement.

DePue: Where is Louisville?

Perry: Louisville (pronounced "Loo-is-ville") is about—

DePue: Louisville, okay.

Perry: Halfway between St. Louis, Missouri and Vincennes, Indiana, on Route 50.

DePue: Did you grow up in Louisville?

Perry: No, I didn't. I grew up in Flora, Illinois—F-l-o-r-a, Illinois.

DePue: And is that close? Where is Flora, then?

Perry: Seven miles south of Louisville, still halfway between St. Louis and Vincennes, Indiana.

DePue: Well, being born in 1921 meant that you grew up in those tough years of the Depression.

Perry: Yes.

DePue: Was your father able to keep his job during the Depression?

Perry: He was, and not only that, he always made sure that we had the food on the table. My mother was a good cook, so she provided that facility for him. We always had plenty to eat. It might have been cornbread and beans and onions, but otherwise, it was a good meal.

DePue: Did your mother work?

Perry: No, my mother took care of the children at home.

DePue: Do you have any memories of growing up in the Depression?

Perry: Yes, I do. I remember there was certain things that we couldn't have because we didn't have the money to purchase it, but we adjusted to the requirement, and that was it.

DePue: Now, your father had a job through the entire Depression. Did he get his pay reduced?

Perry: In those days, they did not reduce the pay. They just didn't give him any promotions or any lateral transfers or anything like that.

DePue: So he was happy to have a job, but it didn't mean you were going to be living in luxury, huh?

Perry: That is correct.

DePue: Did he have a car?

Perry: Did he have a car? He had a car, yes. It was a Model A [Ford] car at that time. And he would make calls in his car, using his transportation, to call a clerk—not the clerk, but the— (cell phone rings)

DePue: Just a second. I'm going to turn this thing off here.

Perry: Go ahead and answer it.

DePue: No, we can go ahead and keep going here, because I was supposed to do that before I started here. Your father lived close to the railroad. Did you have hobos or bums that showed up at the house occasionally?

Perry: No. It was pretty well policed by the local chief of police, and they always checked the incoming and outgoing trains, making sure there was no bums left in the area.

DePue: Okay, that's interesting. Did you have a good childhood, looking back on it?

Perry: Yes, I had a good childhood. I had a good childhood. I got a good education, and also, I was energetic enough to have a job while I was in high school, at the local grocery store. That was the Kroger grocery store. We had an IGA store, and we had also an A&P store.

DePue: And Kroger was one of them that you—

Perry: Kroger was the one that I worked for.

DePue: When you were in high school, what were your thoughts about your future?

Perry: My future was that I wanted to either be a doctor or a teacher. Later on in my life, when I went into the military they gave me the information that I wanted, and I stayed in the military, because I can instruct, I can teach, and I can see the results of it, as far as an individual is concerned.

DePue: You graduated from high school in 1939; is that correct?

Perry: That is correct.

DePue: During those high-school years, were you paying attention at all to the news and listening to what was going on in Europe, especially?

Perry: Naturally, I did. Maybe a lot of them didn't, but I did, yes.

DePue: Do you have any reflections or thoughts about your feelings then about what you were hearing on the news?

Perry: Oh, at that time, when you figure that it was across the ocean, that it would never get to us in the U.S., but then things changed later on, where we got involved in the battles.

DePue: What did you do immediately after graduation?

Perry: After graduation, I was put on the list of volunteers for the Army because the Army was declared...

DePue: Well, I know they instituted the draft in 1940.

Perry: That's what I wanted to say, the draft. In '40, the draft went into effect, and I registered—we had to register for the draft. At that time, when I got out of high school, immediately after, I continued working for the grocery store. Then the draft took effect, and I was drafted in and given a number. And to

this day, I still remember my original number that I was given for the draft. I was called by our good neighbors and fellow citizens to go into the service.

DePue: What happened to your plans to teach and to be a doctor that would require you to go to college? You didn't have the money to go to college?

Perry: At that time, I didn't have enough money saved up to go to college, but I was working on it. I had a brother at that time, which was younger than me, and we were given the job of kind of supporting the family, with buying our own clothes and things like that. So it was a share and share alike deal.

DePue: From what you told me, it sounds like you were in the Army before Pearl Harbor happened.

Perry: I was in the Army just about the same time Pearl Harbor happened.

DePue: Tell me your thoughts about Pearl Harbor. What happened that day?

Perry: Well, that day I remember very distinctly. It was on a Sunday. After work, the younger men always gathered around uptown—when I say "uptown," around the drugstore. That was the local community meeting place. We heard this on the radio, that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. But we thought it was just a show. In other words, we thought it was a serial running, something like that. All at once, we woke up and found out that it was real, that the Japanese had bombed us at Pearl Harbor and eradicated most of our naval fleet. And that was it.

DePue: Did it occur to you that this would have major implications for your own life?

Perry: Not at that time, but I figured later on, after I got in the military, I liked the military, and I liked the way that it regimented my living and the things that I saw. I could teach, instruct, and do the different jobs that I wanted to do. So it led me down the field of military.

DePue: Where did you go for your basic training?

Perry: We went to Chicago for our induction. We passed our exams. You were given the option of going back home and waiting for thirty days or going directly on into the service. I elected to go ahead. The first night I stayed was at Camp Grant, Illinois, near Chicago. And then after that, my next one was Fort Anderson, Alabama. Camp Anderson, Alabama.

DePue: Did you have any choice in terms of what branch of service you went into?

Perry: At that time, you had already been inducted into the Army. The initial notification that you was elected by your fellow citizens to go into the service, there wasn't much of a selection unless you volunteered for that earlier than the induction papers given to you. That's the way it was at that time.

DePue: Did you have any voice in what part of the Army you ended up in? I know you ended up in the infantry. Was that your choice?

Perry: My choice was to take what they gave me, and that was it.

DePue: You were okay with that?

Perry: Yes.

DePue: What were your parents' reactions to your going into the Army? Now, your dad, a World War I veteran, gassed during World War I, I would think he has a much better understanding of what you're going into than you did at the time.

Perry: He did, but he didn't try to influence me. I was on my own, and I made my own decisions at that time.

DePue: Did you hear anything from your mother?

Perry: My mother, of course, as a mother, is always concerned, that, Oh, I can't take my dear son from her and put him into the Army. That was it. Later on, she finally decided that that's where I should have been, and that's it. But that's always the initial, I think.

DePue: I know that you really didn't make it to Europe until late 1944. So we've got from December of 1941 to 1944. What were you doing during all that time?

Perry: During that time? During that time, I was going on maneuvers with division. I was assigned to troops, regular Army troops.

DePue: What was the first unit you were assigned to, then?

Perry: The first unit I was assigned to was a training center. We'd go to training centers, and there, you went in and took your basic training, took your induction training and your training for combat. And then, if you were selected, you were given jobs with training units and sent from one camp to the other to train troops for World War II. And that was it.

DePue: Were you selected somewhere in this process to—

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: Did you decide you wanted to be an officer?

Perry: No, that would have been a little bit earlier. I was given the opportunity to show my leadership skills and all, and my noncommissioned officers selected me to go to the OCS. I went to pre-OCS, and I went to OCS, which is Officers' Training Corps.

DePue: Officer Candidate School.

Perry: Candidate School.

DePue: Was that down at Fort Benning, Georgia?

Perry: That was at Fort Benning, Georgia.

DePue: When were you going through that training?

Perry: That was...in the forties. I can't be specific—it's been some time—without looking at papers.

DePue: I know eventually you ended up with the—correct me if I'm wrong here—but the 386th Infantry Regiment, which was part of the 96th Division.

Perry: 97th Division.

DePue: Excuse me, 97th Division. You're right. What was the nature of the training and the activities once you had joined that regiment?

Perry: There, we learned to know our men, and went through maneuvers, then got ready to go to combat. We trained on the West Coast for amphibious landing and then turned around and shipped all the way across the United States and went to Europe.

DePue: Was it Camp San Luis Obispo in California where you did the amphibious training?

Perry: San Luis Obispo—San Diego. Yeah, that's right. I had been stationed there, right.

DePue: And I know you also got an experience at the Louisiana Maneuvers, but that might be a little bit—

Perry: Well that was earlier.

DePue: Was that *the* Louisiana Maneuvers?

Perry: Yes.

DePue: The one that the whole Army kind of cut their teeth on?

Perry: Yeah, right. Uh-huh.

DePue: Any recollections or special memories from that timeframe?

Perry: Only thing that I remember out of that was—we got good training, but I remember I got my first introduction to the wild pig, hog. Come face-to-face with the razorback. I remember that.

DePue: Did you let the razorback win that particular argument?

Perry: Yes, naturally. He would have been down my throat. I was on my belly, looking at him face-to-face, and I let him have the area.

DePue: I'm curious about what your thoughts are in terms of the quality of the training you received, because you were in the United States from 1941, early 1942, all the way up to 1944. That seems like a long time.

Perry: No, that's the way it was. I looked at it this way: I looked at is as requirement, because I was training people that could do the job, and I was doing something useful with my Army life.

DePue: What was the nature of the training? Was it primarily individual skills?

Perry: No, it was tactical maneuvers. Normal leadership in the squad, platoon, company, maneuvers.

DePue: And what you did at the Louisiana Maneuvers was company-level maneuvers?

Perry: Yeah. Right, right.

DePue: Did you ever get much exposure, experience, of what was happening at the next-higher levels, at the battalion or the regimental level?

Perry: Yes, but when you got into combat, it was a little bit different because at that level, the big thing it lacked was the intelligence information on what was happening near you. They gave you the big picture, but a lot of things was not clear, and they left it up to the individual, where reconnaissance comes in, and getting your own information. I think a lot could be done in the intelligence field, and we still lack that today. We still lack timely dissemination.

DePue: I definitely don't want to put words in your mouth. Did you feel that you were well-trained at the platoon and company level, you and your troops?

Perry: Yes.

DePue: Did you think that, getting at the higher level, that the unit was well-trained at battalion maneuver or regimental?

Perry: Well, you went through tests. The Army ground forces at that time was TRADOC—I believe that was the name of it, TRADOC.[1]

DePue: Well, TRADOC came along in the seventies.

Perry: After, after, yeah. What was it, the United States Forces?

DePue: Yeah, I'm not sure what the organization was.

Perry: Well, anyway, it was similar to TRADOC, and they gave you tests that you went through to see that you were qualified for certain types of training and maneuvering.

DePue: Were these written tests?

Perry: I'm saying it would have been on-the-field tests, maneuvering tests, and they graded you according to your skills and whether or not you were able to go to combat. Normally, the units passed, and if they didn't pass, they went through them again until they did pass. They needed the troops.

DePue: You were in the 386th Regiment, the 97th Division. I know that many divisions, many units, had the experience of being organized, having some of their senior people stripped out of the unit and then getting new troops. Did your unit go through any of that?

Perry: No, we did not. We didn't. If it was, it was on an individual basis, and it wasn't noticeable. I've heard of other units where they stripped, took cadres, out of them and sent them to other units to augment whatever they had there, but we didn't.

DePue: When did the 386th get sent to Europe, then?

Perry: What does it tell you?

DePue: (laughs) I'm sorry to put you on the spot here. I've got March of '45, sent to France, Camp Lucky Strike.

Perry: That's right. We were sent in then.

DePue: Anything that sticks in your brain about arriving in France?

Perry: No, nothing, other than that we knew we were in France. We were put on the forty and eight cars and shipped down the railroad track.

DePue: Well, a forty and eight might take some explanation to somebody who's never had the luxury of being on one.

[1] TRADOC, the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, recruits, trains and educates the Army's soldiers and develops leaders.

Perry: Well, a forty and eight, it took forty people, or soldiers, you'd put in there, or eight pieces of livestock or whatever it might have been; you had straw on the floor. It's a little German train car, and that was it. You were crammed into one car, and they called it a forty and eight; you got a certificate if you rode on it.

DePue: Oh, really?

Perry: Yeah. I don't know where mine is, but...

DePue: It would be nobody's definition of luxury, would it?

Perry: No, no.

DePue: And I also notice that the unit passed through or moved through Aachen, Germany.

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: Do you remember that?

Perry: No, not much.

DePue: Because Aachen, by the time you guys would have gotten there, had been fought over severely, would have been nothing but devastation.

Perry: Well, yeah. We moved up through there. It was bombed out and everything like that.

DePue: Then was it April 9 of 1945, when your unit crossed the Sieg River?

Perry: Yeah, that's just a river down there.

DePue: Had you seen any action before that time?

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: When was the first combat experience? The spring of 1945?

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: Can you tell us a little bit...?

Perry: I didn't get any scratches or anything like that, and I didn't get any recognition for it or anything like that.

DePue: Do you recall any of the specifics of that first combat experience?

Perry: No.

DePue: Were you a platoon leader at the time?

Perry: I was a platoon leader at that time, yes.

DePue: What was the company and the platoon that you had?

Perry: I was in Company I, and I had the weapons platoon.

DePue: The weapons platoon had what weapons?

Perry: Had mortars and machine guns.

DePue: Were those 82 or 60 millimeter?

Perry: No, it was 60 millimeter.

DePue: What were the machine guns?

Perry: The machine guns were .30 caliber at that time.

DePue: Water cooled?

Perry: Yeah, water cooled. We had one heavy machine gun, and the others were not water cooled, because you had a heavy machine gun company that took care of the water-cooled. That was normally your D company, H company, things like that.

DePue: You're getting into combat, though, at the very tail end of what's going on in Germany at the time. Tell me about what your impressions of the German soldiers that you were encountering.

Perry: The German soldier was still a tenacious soldier. Tenacious. He still fought, but they still believed in their cause for fighting. But they did give up in certain areas in large quantities. Yes.

DePue: Did you personally help take some prisoners, then? Your unit?

Perry: We had some prisoners that we had put in the compounds, and we guarded the compounds, things like that. Yeah.

DePue: But you otherwise were impressed by their soldiers?

Perry: I was impressed by their soldiers, yeah. Later on, you could see the deterioration of the quality and all. But they had reasons to be fighting, just like we did.

DePue: Did you understand why they were still so devoted to their cause?

Perry: Well, they were patriotic, like most Americans should be today. But we don't have that patriotism today like we did back in World War II. We need it.

DePue: I wonder if you can tell me about when the unit—this is on the nineteenth of April, I believe—when the unit finds the Flossenburg concentration camp.

Perry: Well, that concentration camp was just a normal concentration camp.

DePue: It wasn't a death camp.

Perry: Yeah, they had people they had put to death there, but it wasn't one of those like Auschwitz, some of the others, no.

DePue: Or Buchenwald.

Perry: No, no.

DePue: Where was the Flossenburg concentration camp on the map of Germany? Is that in Bavaria or in southern Germany somewhere?

Perry: It would be in Bavaria.

DePue: Do you have any recollections at all, your feelings when you discovered that?

Perry: No. It's been so long, if I did have at that time, they've been erased. I just didn't have anything.

DePue: From the timeline that you had given me, the 97th Division got the alert that they were going to be shipped out to Japan.

Perry: That is correct. That is correct. Then at that time, I got a transfer to the 29th Infantry Regiment, I believe—29th Infantry Regiment. Our job was to guard the American Consulate in Frankfurt, Germany. I was in charge of the platoon that happened to be at the American Consulate in Frankfurt, Germany. It was on Mainz Street, I believe.

DePue: Why did you get transferred to the 29th?

Perry: Why? Because, instead of shipping all the people back, they were taking replacements. They were taking replacements and putting them into units that needed replacements in the Europe theatre at that time, so they wouldn't have to ship them over and then have to have a double-back of the personnel for that unit. It was a replacement status.

DePue: Do you have any idea why your name came up as being one that would stay in Germany?

Perry: Yeah, because I was a good soldier, one that's recommended. I had nothing on my record, and I had always done the jobs I was supposed to have done. That's the reason.

DePue: And you were happy, then, with the move?

Perry: I was happy with the assignment. At that time, maybe I didn't understand it fully. But later on, after I was transferred to the 29th Infantry Regiment, well, then I understood what their mission was and all. Then later on, the 29th was moved to Bremerhaven, Germany, and in Bremerhaven, Germany, at that time, I was assigned to the American Consulate as the only military officer there, as a young captain. I was the only military, representing the State Department and the Army.

DePue: Now, I think that Frankfurt is—is that in the Bavaria area still?

Perry: Yes.

DePue: I know Bremerhaven is right on the coast of the Baltic.

Perry: It's up on the north coast, yeah. They were spread out all over at that time. At that time, I left the 29th to become the American Consulate Representative – Military. I met the ambassadors and people like that in the higher echelons, General Clay and those people. And I think at that time, was USFET?

DePue: USURA, or SHAEF headquarters?

Perry: It was SHAEF at that time.

DePue: You were obviously in Germany, then, when war in Europe ended. Can you tell me a little bit about what the emotions were in that time?

Perry: Oh, the emotion was about the same as it was in the United States. Everyone was happy. You kind of let loose a little celebration, but you still had a job to do, so you didn't celebrate like you normally would.

DePue: Yeah, you still had focus on what you needed to be doing.

Perry: That's right, what you had to be doing.

DePue: Were you in the Bremerhaven area when you got the news about the dropping of the atomic bomb? Do you remember your reaction to hearing that news?

Perry: Vaguely, I remember it, but I didn't realize the repercussions it would have on the outcome of the war. I knew that naturally, if they could take care of not having to go in to invade Japan, that it would save a lot of lives, and that's what I remember.

DePue: So from your perspective, even in the occupation army in Europe—

Perry: It was still good. It was good. It was a necessity.

DePue: Tell me about what it was like in Germany: your observations of the German people, the German economy.

Perry: Well, the German economy: there was initially that repercussion between two individuals; one had been the enemy, and one had been the friendly forces, United States. That was overcome by intermingling with the military government and the U.S. government. The military was under the State Department rule, really, at that time, but that was about it.

DePue: Well, I know that Eisenhower put out non-fraternization orders.

Perry: That is correct. Those orders were out. But there was still fraternization between personnel, indirectly. It wasn't direct. But fraternization: you'd look at it where you can't do this and you can't do that. It was there, but there was still, I guess you'd call fudging, on the situation.

DePue: What was your opinion on the wisdom or lack of wisdom of that particular order?

Perry: The lack of wisdom of that order was not for my questioning. But I can see when you have two people falling together, there's bound to be some interaction. Now, this is picking my mind back here.

DePue: I understand. That's sixty years ago now.

Perry: Yeah, right.

DePue: That's a long time ago. Was there anything that impressed you about the German people? Were they totally destitute, or getting back?

Perry: No, they were totally destitute, and with the help of the United States, they came back on their feet. We had to support them. They had to have food. They had to have sustaining products that would help them as far as the economy was concerned.

DePue: Did you enjoy your time while you were working in the occupation army?

Perry: Yes, I enjoyed it because I had a mission, and I accomplished my mission. It was training, and it was something that I would always remember. I know it's sixty years later, but I try to focus on the highlights.

DePue: Well, one of the things that occurred while you were over there is, I know that you met your future wife there.

Perry: That is correct.

DePue: Tell us about that.

Perry: When I was assigned to the American Consulate as a military representative of the Army, she was a secretary for the Consul General. She was born in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. As a young lieutenant and the opposite sex, we fell in love over there. After that, I stayed long enough that my son was born in Germany.

DePue: And that's—

Perry: Nineteen forty-six.

DePue: That's Jim, Jr.

Perry: Jim, Jr. That's correct.

DePue: What is your wife's name?

Perry: Marie.

DePue: Marie—what was her maiden name?

Perry: Wagner. She was born in the United States. She was an American citizen.

DePue: I'm thinking, Jim, that there had to be an awful lot more young American men than American women over there, so I would think you had quite a bit of competition to woo her.

Perry: Well, there was, but under the circumstances, I guess she chose me, and I chose her. That's the way life is, I guess. Sometimes you wonder why you did certain things, but that's it?

DePue: What were your parents' reactions to hearing that you'd gotten married overseas?

Perry: Well, they were kind of perturbed because I had a fiancée back in the U.S., and they had expected me to marry her. My brother had married her sister, so they figured that I would probably marry her, but I didn't. I changed their mind, and that was it. And later on, they joined the crowd.

DePue: Were you corresponding with this girl back in the States the whole time?

Perry: No, and that's probably what gave an indication that I had cut it off. No, I had once or twice sent letters, yeah. I was corresponding.

DePue: You weren't a recipient of—

Perry: I wasn't a recipient of return letters, things like that.

DePue: So you weren't getting letters, included you did not get a Dear John letter in this?

Perry: I was the one that really gave the Dear John notice. Wasn't her. I did. That was it.

DePue: When did you come back to the United States?

Perry: Gee whiz. I guess in '47. Jim was born over there in '46, so it must have been about '47.

DePue: What were your intentions at that time?

Perry: I was staying in the Army.

DePue: You already had six years in the Army by that time, didn't you?

Perry: That's right. I had decided I was staying in the Army.

DePue: Why?

Perry: Why? Because it gave me what I wanted as far as teaching and instructing and things like that, and it gave me a disciplinary type of life that I liked, and that's it.

DePue: Now, you mentioned your mother was concerned before. Had she reconciled herself to her son being in the Army?

Perry: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, she did. Right. Yeah. In fact, she was proud of me after I went through it.

DePue: Did you come back as a captain?

Perry: I came back as a captain.

DePue: And I believe you went to Fort Lewis, Washington, is that right?

Perry: I had initially been told through the State Department channels that I was going to be in the Army, but I'd be transferred to the Union of South Africa, in the State Department there. I had resolved that I was going there. But in the meantime, the 2nd U.S. Army Division was under strength, and they decided they needed troops to go into these Army units to be brought up to strength. As a result, coming back from Europe, they didn't want to ship me to Japan or anything like that. They assigned me to the 2nd Infantry Division at Fort Lewis, Washington. That stopped my transfer or my going to South Africa.

DePue: Did you want to go to the South Africa post?

Perry: I would have gone, because it was with the State Department, and it would have been a political-type job, which would have been alright.

DePue: Obviously your time in the Germany occupation army, you were a staff officer, and I would imagine you were in a position to watch some pretty fascinating things going on.

Perry: Oh, yes, I had. I don't know what to tell you on that. But anyway, I noticed a change in politics. At that time, it was Ambassador Murphy and the people like that. General Clay was in charge, and then later on, of course, he became reassigned.

DePue: Now, he was considered to be a great…

Perry: Lucius Clay.

DePue: … a great occupation commander.

Perry: Yeah. Yeah, right, he was. Yeah.

DePue: But none of that sounds like it's very good infantry training for a lieutenant or a captain.

Perry: Well, I kept my fingers into it. I was still responsible to go to school and things like that. They have schools where the staff officers had to go, and things like that, so you kept up on the techniques. And of course, the warfare, the things there, we were still learning. So we would get results from what we had learned, if you could say that, because we're still dumb today and haven't learned much.

DePue: We still end up learning the same lessons over and over again.

Perry: The same lessons over and over.

DePue: Tell me about the condition of the 2nd Infantry Division when you arrived there. I'm especially interested about the organization, because I've always heard about how these units were cadred.[2]

Perry: Well, these units were organized under—not brigades like they do today—they had regiments. You had three regiments, and then you had your support troops, quartermaster, things like that, engineers. But yeah, they always kept a cadre. We were training units at that time, really; we were used as training. They'd get together every once in a while, and they would call for a certain replacement at a certain location; they'd pull out a cadre for that information, to fill their spot, whatever they were, and things like that. They did use cadres.

[2] A cadre is a special unit, especially of trained personnel able to assume control and train others.

DePue: I've read—maybe it wasn't this unit, but some of the ones in Japan—but my understanding was that if you had three battalions in a regiment, that only two of the three would actually exist in reality; the third would exist only in paper. Then the same thing was true at the company level to a certain extent. Was that not the experience of the 2nd ID [Infantry Division] when you were there?

Perry: We were filling up. It had been that. I think they had probably realized their shortfall and was starting to fill up with the troop space. Yeah.

DePue: Tell me about your specific assignment in the 2nd, when you first got there.

Perry: When I first got there I was given Company A of the 9th Infantry Regiment. There we took over the peacetime duties of a normal training regiment, and that's about it.

DePue: Company A: would that mean that you were in the 1st Battalion of the 9th?

Perry: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. How was that organized between the various companies?

Perry: You had three companies: A, B, and C. D Company was the heavy weapons company.

DePue: How about the 2nd Battalion?

Perry: 2nd battalion?

DePue: Mm-hmm.

Perry: 2nd Battalion was E, F, G, and H. H Company was the heavy weapons. Later on I had E Company. Not only that, at that time you had IG [Inspector General] inspections, things like that. They moved me around to different places because I had had superior ratings, and they wanted to bring up the units in their training and their soldiering, I guess.

DePue: Was there a 3rd Battalion?

Perry: 3rd Battalion, yes. In there, we had a 3rd Battalion, and it was I, K, L, and N. In the 9th Infantry Regiment it happened to be all black.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: It happened to be all black. Later on, of course, you got the notice from Truman about integration, and you started seeing white officers being put in charge of the black units. Then later on, you started seeing white soldiers, put into the black units, and you saw the integration taking place.

DePue: And you were seeing this—

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: —kind of unfold in Washington.

Perry: No, I saw that—yeah, in the state of Washington, Fort Lewis. Yes, right.

DePue: Well, I wasn't aware of that. As I recall, 1948 was the year that he ordered the integration.

Perry: Well, that was taking place.

DePue: So it was a very gradual process, from what—

Perry: Yes. Yeah. Oh, yes. Went on into Korea, even.

DePue: Now, put you on the spot here. You don't have to answer all of these questions, but—

Perry: I know that.

DePue: But when you're there and you first hear about the order to integrate, what were your thoughts?

Perry: I just took it as an order. I had no problems.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: I had worked with black soldiers, and I knew all you had to do was show them the leadership, and you had to be a friend of theirs—not a friend, but a leader of the men—and that was it, and it would be integrated. Now a lot of—

DePue: Was there some grumbling among the ranks?

Perry: A lot of it, a lot of them—there was a lot of diehards that didn't want to live up to it, yes. There was still that animosity between the black and the whites.

DePue: Of the blacks that were incorporated into what formerly were white units, how did they respond to it, do you think?

Perry: I don't know their feelings. I know that they were good soldiers, and they did what they were supposed to do. Of course, as in all Army units, you had mess-ups, and we call those as the ones that didn't want to follow orders. But that happened. But that would have happened anyplace. But as far as integration is concerned, I think you've seen it go on, and I think you've seen it working, and I think you've seen the pros and cons, and that's it. I can't get into it any more than that.

DePue: Okay. I know why you were assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division. Their home station was Fort Lewis, Washington. The unit also saw some combat training at Yakima, Washington—I think it's Washington.

Perry: That was the type training for nuclear. That was at Yakima, and that was at Hanford. [a key nuclear weapons manufacturing facility] We would go on alerts to deploy as a defense for the atomic locations in the state of Washington, and it happened to be that Hanford was where the plant was. Hanford—H-a-n-f-o-r-d.

DePue: That was a nuclear plant?

Perry: That's a nuclear site, that's right.

DePue: So what the unit was expected to do was to protect the plant.

Perry: Deploy and protect against any assaults. Yeah.

DePue: Okay. And I also think you had some training down in San Diego.

Perry: San Diego was the amphibious training. That's where I was kind of laughing. We took amphibious training on the West Coast—that that was for training in Hawaii—and there we got to wear the aloha shirts. We couldn't deploy our troops on account of the old pineapple fields. But we took amphibious training.

DePue: Well, the piece of paper you gave me, they called it Miki, M-i-k-i.

Perry: Miki. Operation Miki. Where'd that come from?

DePue: Well, that was on the piece of paper that you gave me.

Perry: That's right, that was Operation Miki.

DePue: Did you actually do an amphibious landing in training?

Perry: Oh, yes, in training, yeah. You went through it all. Right up to the time of deployment. You had to do the deployment on a map. The referees were there; you had to show them your deployment on the map. You couldn't get out in the fields and deploy your troops, but we led the troops through the pineapple fields without crushing them. That was about it.

DePue: Was it more challenging or less challenging than you thought, to actually do one of those amphibious landings?

Perry: Well, we had trained for it, but to go through the actual operation and be graded on it was good. It was testing your skills of military power and things like that.

DePue: Well, I would think that doing an amphibious landing—so much of the training that I've personally experienced—

Perry: This was real.

DePue: Yeah—that the training that you get oftentimes is at the squad level or the platoon level or maybe the company level, but when you're going through an amphibious landing drill—

Perry: We did it at company and battalion and all. The Navy trained you, and the Marines trained you, for amphibious landing. You had to go through all the boat drill and everything like that. It was good knowledge.

DePue: Okay, so that was something good to have under your belt?

Perry: It was beneficial, yeah.

DePue: Many of my questions—I guess I should explain my own personal curiosity, or maybe even a bias on this—is that—

Perry: That it ties into something else that someone's given you?

DePue: —that down the road, you're going to be thrown into some incredibly tough experiences in Korea, and maybe if the training was good at the lower level—

Perry: Oh, yeah, I understand.

DePue: —and was not as good at the higher level, that causes some real—

Perry: No, the training was good.

DePue: Okay, okay.

Perry: The training at all levels.

DePue: Okay. Tell me about your family life, then, while you were in Washington State. Did you have any more children?

Perry: Well, after we came back, I had—let's see, they were at—

DePue: I think you have two other daughters, right?

Perry: Yeah, but they weren't born till Madison, Wisconsin.

DePue: Okay, so after Korea.

Perry: After Korea.

DePue: Okay. So Jim's quite a bit older than the two sisters, then.

Perry: I'd say by six years.

DePue: Okay. June of 19—

Perry: Jim was born in '46, and then they're—see, six years, that's '51 or '52 or fifty—after I came back from Korea.

DePue: Okay. Did your wife enjoy living in Washington State?

Perry: As far as I was concerned, yeah. We could correspond in letter and all.

DePue: On June 25 of 1950, I would assume you're still in the 2nd ID at Fort Lewis, Washington.

Perry: Yeah, right.

DePue: Do you remember hearing the news about the North Koreans invading South Korea?

Perry: Yes, I do, but I don't know that much. I don't remember much more.

DePue: Okay, so at that point—

Perry: All I know is that we had been told by General Mark Clark, 5th Army Commander at that time, that you wouldn't be going anyplace because you're a training unit. And six weeks later we were alerted to go to Korea.

DePue: So it didn't take long at all to make that—

Perry: It didn't take long, that's right.

DePue: And six weeks later...

Perry: We were a cadre-type unit, really, like you said, and we had to get fillers-in. They took anyone that had fired a rifle, I think. When we went to Korea, we had to qualify people with their weapon or familiarize them with their weapon off the fantails of the ship. And that was what we went to Korea with.

DePue: What percentage of the unit did you receive? When you sailed from Washington, what percentage would have been new fillers for you?

Perry: I'd say it could have been up to 50 percent.

DePue: Fifty percent?

Perry: In certain type of units, yeah.

DePue: Were you in the infantry company commanders?

Perry: Infantry company. The infantry companies: I would say we were about 75 percent fill, 25 percent—

DePue: So you only got about 20 percent...

Perry: That's right, 25.

DePue: Can you tell me where your unit was at that time in terms of integration of black troops? Had that pretty well been completed?

Perry: It was still going on.

DePue: You were a Company Commander for which company at the time you shipped?

Perry: That was, if I remember, E Company or A Company, one or the other. What did I tell you there?

DePue: Well, you said Company A to begin with, and then—

Perry: A.

DePue: —you were later assigned to E Company.

Perry: E Company, right.

DePue: Okay. Well, a Company Commander of a unit that's been well-trained, from what you explained, then going into combat for the first time: any thoughts about that?

Perry: Well, yeah, I was wondering if all that you'd done was going to pay off. And the enemy, they just thought they were going to push them back across the road overnight, and it didn't happen that way.

DePue: It sounds like you shipped out towards the end of July or early August, does that sound right?

Perry: Yeah, right.

DePue: Were you hearing much about the fate of the American army over in Korea when you shipped out?

Perry: Oh, yeah. Naturally. The 24th Division, or 25th Division, those were the people that were getting clobbered. They didn't push them back across the river like they thought they were going to.

DePue: Yeah, they got pushed into the corner in the Pusan Perimeter.

Perry: That's right, Pusan Perimeter. Right.

DePue: Well, was it tough to keep morale up among your men when they were hearing that kind of stuff?

Perry: No, actually. I don't think so. You can hear people saying that it's hard on morale, but I think that was overplayed. I don't think so. That was up to the unit commander to offset that.

DePue: Did you guys go overseas on Liberty ships?

Perry: Yeah. I don't remember what the name of my ship was or anything like that.

DePue: Nothing particularly memorable about the trip?

Perry: Nothing, no. All I know is that we had a lot of sick people, vomiting and this, that, and the other, and that's it. That's all.

DePue: Well, I think your son told me that you also were sick at the time.

Perry: I got a little bit sick, yeah.

DePue: Well, he explained it as double pneumonia, is that right?

Perry: No, this was before. You're getting the cart before the horse.

DePue: Okay, I'm sorry.

Perry: I had double pneumonia and went into orchitis—went down on in the lymph—not in the—in the testicles. And that was it. But that had nothing to do with that, because I came back and had two daughters after that.

DePue: Okay, so I was getting way ahead of the story here.

Perry: That's all right. No problem.

DePue: Did the 2nd Division land in Japan, or did they go straight to Korea?

Perry: No, we went straight into Pusan.

DePue: Tell me what your memories are of landing at Pusan. What was the thing that struck you the most?

Perry: Just a normal "here it was." It was like you were offloading a ship anymore, like we'd planned on at the time. That's it. We didn't think we'd go to the front line this fast, and we were right into the battle, and that's it.

DePue: Okay. Now, we've got a map of the Pusan Perimeter here in front of us. I know that one of the regiments—there were three regiments in the 2nd Division: the 38th...

Perry: 38th, 23rd, and 9th.

DePue: And did all three of those have very similar structures?

Perry: Yeah, all of them had the same structure. Then later on we got augmented with the—where the United Nations troops came in, with the French, the British, and the—

DePue: I know there's a Dutch—

Perry: —Netherlands.

DePue: Okay. But that was well after this time in the Pusan Perimeter, was it not?

Perry: Right. That was later on.

DePue: From what I've read, then, your unit in the 2nd Division was over here on the western flank of the Pusan Perimeter. I believe they replaced—was it the 24th Division?

Perry: 24th.

DePue: Does that sound right?

Perry: I think it's 25th, if I remember correct.

DePue: Those guys, probably by the time you replaced them, were pretty well beaten-up, weren't they?

Perry: They were pretty well infiltrated back through us. When you relieve a unit, you just don't go in and them drop out. You try not to be in contact with the enemy, of course, but you infiltrate back through the troops that are online. Or you infiltrate through their lines and take over their positions on the forward line.

DePue: Okay. Do you recall that date, then?

Perry: Not specific date.

DePue: Can you tell me anything about the initial combat experiences you had with the North Koreans in the Pusan Perimeter fight?

Perry: All I can tell you is that we fought. I guess later on I can guess; my citations talk about what took place and how it took place and where. Most of my action took place back up across north, after we broke out of Pusan.

DePue: So you didn't have a lot of combat experiences in the Pusan Perimeter area?

Perry: Oh, yeah, but I mean, I just took that as normal.

DePue: Did you think it was that much different from your experiences in Germany in combat?

Perry: Well, it was a different type war, yeah. Over there, you were dealing with a person that was more or less Caucasian, like you were. In the other, we were dealing with a yellow or Chinese or North Korean. Their ways of life and everything was different; their beliefs were different. The Germans weren't that fanatic; the North Koreans were.

DePue: When you were in the Pusan Perimeter, were you still a Company Commander?

Perry: Yes, I was.

DePue: And otherwise, there's nothing distinctive that you recall about the combat experiences you had there?

Perry: No, just normal hit-and-run and fighting, things like that. I guess to other people, it would be extenuating, but I don't think so.

DePue: Well, I've been reading David Halberstam books. This is several months ago. But I know that a couple companies of the 9th Regiment got hit very hard, and this would have been about—

Perry: E Company.

DePue: E, F, and G, I think.

Perry: And G. Yeah, that's right. I remember that.

DePue: But they managed to hold off this attack.

Perry: That is correct. That is correct.

DePue: And it wasn't too much longer after that—that was August thirty-first through September first—two weeks later, of course, the Marines and the 7th Division landed up at Inchon.

Perry: Inchon, that's correct. They came and developed then on the left. At that time, when they did that, our orders was to move north, towards Pyongyang, and we moved, that way. Our troops at first went to the north and on up the peninsula.

DePue: Do you recall much combat that you experienced between that breaking out of the Pusan Perimeter and moving up north?

Perry: Other than sporadic pockets. You might hit them. But we always were on the alert that we could have enemy contact. The information coming back was at that time, our troops were moving north; the Marines were landing there, and

the North Koreans were pulling back north, so that allowed us to move forward faster than normal.

DePue: I just interviewed a gentleman from the 7th Infantry Division who landed with the Marines at Inchon. His unit apparently peeled down south, and they did the linkup with the 1st Cav. [tanks]

Perry: 1st Cav was...

DePue: Probably a little bit farther north in terms of the sector.

Perry: Here you are. Here. I can't see this. Taegu? We aren't in the right area, even. Where's Inchon? [examining a map]

DePue: Yeah, the Second Division was on the flank here in the west.

Perry: Yeah, I know, but where's Inchon?

DePue: Well, Inchon would... See, this—

Perry: It's over here.

DePue: Yeah, here's the 1st Cav, and Inchon's up here.

Perry: Yeah, Inchon here. Well, the 1st Cav—we went up this way, right up through here, all the way to Pyongyang.

DePue: Pyongyang is well north of Seoul.

Perry: That's Seoul. Way north, up here.

DePue: So you recall not much resistance all the way up to Pyongyang, which is the capital of North Korea.

Perry: That is correct. That is correct.

DePue: Do you remember hearing the word that MacArthur had made the decision about this timeframe—when the Inchon landing was incredibly successful, just a few days later—he's going to make an important decision, and that's whether or not to cross the 38th parallel. Was any of that discussed at your level?

Perry: At our level, we got what was in the *Stars and Stripes*, and some information down to us. But you asked me where there could be improvement, and that's the information that was happening on a higher level or flanks of the unit; there should be more filtration down to the lower units, so you make a decision. But you don't want to overload the lower unit, because as a result of that, you could tax them with missions that they wouldn't even be expecting

or even thinking about, or may not even come. So you have to plan that way, yeah.

DePue: I know by the time you got up north that you were no longer a Company Commander. When did you get a change of assignment?

Perry: I don't remember the exact day. I went to battalion headquarters whenever I got my promotion to a major. I don't remember the exact day.

DePue: Okay, but when you got your promotion to major, what was your new position, then?

Perry: Be a S-3 in the battalion.

DePue: Which battalion?

Perry: 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry.

DePue: And you said that that would have been G, H, I, and...?

Perry: No. 2nd Battalion, E, F, G, H.

DePue: E, F, G, H Companies, and H Company would have been the heavy weapons?

Perry: Heavy weapons, that's correct.

DePue: The lines are moving very quickly now. We've still got the Pusan Perimeter here, and there's the breakout.

Perry: There's the breakout, right.

DePue: Now, we're looking at the maps again.

Perry: I can hardly see these.

DePue: Yeah, these are tough maps, but...

Perry: I can hardly see them.

DePue: I apologize for that. You've got Seoul here on this map and Pyongyang here. It's not more than about a month between the time that the breakout occurs, and then you're all the way up north in the Pyongyang area. Did the 2nd Division help—

Perry: That's correct, yeah...

DePue: —with the liberation of Pyongyang?

Perry: Yeah, we did. We went in, all the way down. After they had secured Pyongyang, we went in as a mop-up and went all the way down to Inchon. My units went all the way down to Inchon.

DePue: Inchon, or the harbor here that's...?

Perry: Yeah, I know. Where is it?

DePue: Well, Inchon's the harbor for Seoul.

Perry: No, no, Inchon is a harbor for Pyongyang.

DePue: Well, I think you're talking about Chungcheong here.

Perry: Well...

DePue: So you continued to the harbor facility there?

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: Okay, maybe it's down here. Okay.

Perry: Well, here's Pyongyang right here. We went clear on down into here. 187th was the one that was in there, and we went in and secured the area and held it. We stayed there in the Pyongyang area for some time, and then we got orders to move on north.

DePue: Okay, 187th Airborne.

Perry: Airborne, right.

DePue: They had air-dropped in to secure some of the supply lines there.

Perry: That's correct. Yeah, that's correct.

DePue: The entire front is moving very quickly. One of the debates—I know that General Walker—if you remember this—

Perry: Yeah, I remember Walker, yeah.

DePue: —that General Walker would have preferred to stay here where the neck of Korea was a little bit narrower, instead—

Perry: Narrower, right. They had—

DePue: —of going farther north.

Perry: We heard development of that. Yeah. We understood that.

DePue: What was your personal thought about that debate?

Perry: Go wherever they said to go.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: That was it. It didn't make any diff. If we had the troops, we could do the big—spread us out; but if a narrow front—defending a narrow front—yeah, more density of troops. Well, that would have been the one that I would have taken, but that's neither here nor there.

DePue: Well, this is an important time in American military history, because if it's strictly North Koreans that you're going to face as you move farther north, then the resistance isn't going to be that heavy, because by that time—

Perry: That is correct. I understand that.

DePue: —the American military pretty much pummeled the North Koreans.

Perry: Yes, they did.

DePue: But the rumors...

Perry: But there were still isolated areas where the North Korean was still well-organized and everything.

DePue: When did you start hearing about the possibility of Chinese troops being up there?

Perry: Well, I first heard about it: in the 2nd Battalion we captured an individual who said he was a North Korean. I looked at his hands, and his hands had no calluses, nothing else, and everything like that. And finally he broke down and found out he was Chinese. He was one of the advanced troops. He was heading down to reconnoiter the area long before MacArthur said that they were coming in. We had captured one Chinese.

DePue: Was that as early as October, you think?

Perry: Yes, right. Right.

DePue: Wow. And I'm sure you passed that information up.

Perry: Well, naturally, yeah.

DePue: What was the reaction you heard from the higher headquarters?

Perry: Well, it took time to react—we understood that—but never did hear really good feedback on it, other than that he was a Chinese and—

DePue: Did he have a different uniform?

Perry: He was in civilian clothes. No, he was not in a different uniform or anything like that.

DePue: But you felt he was not a civilian; he was an enemy combatant?

Perry: Or felt that he was a spy, infiltrator, down to see what he could get for reconnoitering in the area. Yeah, even that early. They knew they were coming in.

DePue: Now, obviously, I would assume, you didn't know any Korean or Chinese.

Perry: You mean in the language?

DePue: Yeah.

Perry: No, but we had interpreters.

DePue: South Korean soldiers that were working with the unit?

Perry: And also Americans that could speak the Korean.

DePue: Okay. And you had some—

Perry: And Chinese.

DePue: Okay. Really?

Perry: Yes. Yes, we did.

DePue: I know the unit moved north from Chungcheong area as well. How far north did elements of the unit actually go? Now, this map's going to be very hard for you to read, I think.

Perry: I can't see that. That's the Yalu River here, right? Yeah, must be.

DePue: Yeah, that's the Yalu River up here, right through here.

Perry: Yeah, that's it, right here.

DePue: Let's see if I can find a better map here for you, because these maps help me, but they're—

Perry: A topographical map, you've taken a reproduction. One over 250,000?

DePue: That's probably bigger than that, is it?

Perry: I don't know. It's probably more than that, yeah.

DePue: Okay. But did elements of the 2nd Division make it all the way up the Yalu River?

Perry: No, no. Not all the way to the Yalu. But I saw the Yalu River. We had recon. There was troops in here, and we reconned up to there so we would know when they advance. And we could move because they had secured that area already.

DePue: "They" being the ROKs or some other unit? [Republic of Korea military units]

Perry: No, no, ROKs. There's an Army unit. I forget which one it was. What division is that? I can't see that.

DePue: Well, this particular unit says the 6th ROK Division right here.

Perry: 6th ROK Division. It was ROK areas.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: And then there were American troops in through here, which doesn't show on this map.

DePue: Well, there's an incredible amount of detail that you can't show on a map of that scale.

Perry: Yeah, I understand that. But see here?

DePue: What was the size of the reconnaissance element?

Perry: The reconnaissance element was the size of platoon.

DePue: Okay, so just the platoon level.

Perry: It was just small, yeah.

DePue: Okay. Do you recall hearing any information about when the 1st Cav got thumped in a major way by the Chinese? That would have been very early in November timeframe. Then the Chinese kind of disappeared again.

Perry: No, I didn't hear about that, other than that we knew the Chinese was rumored to be in there. But MacArthur kept saying they weren't, so that was it.

DePue: Were you beginning to wonder if MacArthur knew what he was talking about?

Perry: I couldn't say that. I can't answer that one. I might have at that time, but you know, the thing was to the Yalu River. Everyone was thinking we would go to the Yalu River, and maybe it would stop there, but...

DePue: And end the war by Christmas.

Perry: That's right. That's right.

DePue: I think that was the word that was coming from MacArthur's command..

Perry: Yeah. Right, right.

DePue: I think it's November twenty-fourth and November twenty-fifth that MacArthur ordered the launching—maybe it's the twenty-fourth—the launching of the major offensive that was supposed to end the war.

Before we get into that in detail—because this is the most important part of the story we're about to get into—tell me what the terrain and weather conditions were like where you were.

Perry: Well, the terrain that we were in was on a river bottom. It had been mountainous, but we were down into the river bottom. I can't remember the names of the rivers.

DePue: Okay. We don't need to worry about that, I don't think.

Perry: Yeah, it's important, because it would tie in with some of your others, probably.

DePue: Let's take a very quick pause here, and we'll get a better map, and then we'll start this up again.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We have just checked the map, and he was referring to the Chungcheon River, which is well north, though it's probably about fifty miles or so south of the Yalu River area. That's where the 2nd Division units were. Really spread thin at that time, weren't you?

Perry: That is correct. Yeah. We had gaps as much as maybe a quarter of a mile between elements, and that was the defense line that we had at that time.

DePue: Now, that's well beyond what Army doctrine would say, isn't it?

Perry: Yeah, that is correct. Doctrine in this case was violated, I would say.

DePue: But again, part of that—isn't that the factor of—

Perry: It's a mission gap.

DePue: —spreading out the units as they went farther north? I mean, that the country itself widened so much?

Perry: Well, naturally, yeah. Naturally, yeah.

DePue: The order goes out, then, from MacArthur's command in Tokyo that you guys are going to launch this offensive. About a day later the Chinese launch their offensive. I want you to talk about that day. I think this would have been the twenty-fifth or the twenty-sixth of November.

Perry: It was the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth, in that area. The very day that MacArthur said that the Chinese wouldn't be coming in, I was getting shot at and crawling under a two-and-a-half-ton truck in this area, and the Chinese was the one that was doing the firing. I remember very distinctly MacArthur's plane flying overhead at high altitude; but we knew it was MacArthur because they had said that he was coming up in that area. He was sent far ahead. I guess he didn't believe that the Chinese would come into the war; they had, and we were being shot at. I imagine in some of your operations that you've talked to people, you've heard of Chinaman's Hat?

DePue: I'm not familiar with that.

Perry: Chinaman's Hat: that was a structural formation of the mountain in that area, and that's where the Chinese hit us at night, in the Chinaman's Hat. That's where we had to withdraw back through into...

DePue: Kunu-ri?

Perry: No. What I'm saying is that Kunu-ri is part of the Chinaman's Hat, where we got hit. That's where the Chinese came in. Then we were cut off from our forward lines. The division was cut off. In fact, the division had sent a message to my parents and to my wife that we were completely annihilated and written off as lost. It didn't happen that way. We fought through the Kunu-ri Pass, through the gauntlet. You've heard of the gauntlet?

DePue: Yes, yes, I've read about that.

Perry: Okay. Pull out through the gauntlet and ended up at Kaesong, I think it was. I think it was Kaesong back there. But anyway, from Kunu-ri, we came back and went into...

DePue: Well, I've got a better map for the Kunu-ri area. Let me see if I can find it pretty quickly.

Perry: I'm rushing you, I guess.

DePue: Yeah, because I wanted to take quite a bit of time and talk about what it was like to go through the gauntlet.

Perry: See, that's the thing on some of my citations, it shows you—there's one there on the Silver Star.

DePue: Yeah, that's covering the Kunu-ri action.

Perry: Yeah, I think so.

DePue: Let's go back a little bit so we can cover your life story and do better justice to this, if you will. I'm going to read your Bronze Star medal that you received before this action actually occurred, and then we can pick it up with the Silver Star citation, if you don't mind. The Bronze Star citation, which you received for gallantry, is "For meritorious service from 10 October 1950 to 2 November 1950"—now this would have been the time when you're moving up even to and beyond the Pyongyang area—

Perry: Right, that's right.

DePue: —"Awarded to Major James F. Perry, then Captain, Infantry. As Operations Officer, 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, he displayed an outstanding degree of efficiency and initiative in issuing orders and supervising operations, many times sacrificing much-needed sleep in order to accomplish the important missions of his unit. He diligently applied a technical knowledge of the ground warfare to handle many difficult situations with a willing and aggressive spirit, indicating a skill in making rapid and tactically superior decisions, which resulted in the successful accomplishment of many of the unit's missions. The untiring efforts and devotion of duty displayed by Major Perry reflect great credit upon himself and the military service." What I'm reading here is their rationale, I'm sure, for why they decided you were going to be the Operations Officer for the Second Battalion.

Perry: Right, right. Because I knew the tactics, and I knew the job of an S-3 [Operations and Training] planning officer.

DePue: Now, you have to have lots of military experience to understand the significance of being a unit S-3. You're not the commander.

Perry: Right.

DePue: There is an executive officer who is technically the second-in-charge—

Perry: Yes.

DePue: —but the man who's calling all the actions and controlling everything—

Perry: Is the S-3.

DePue: Is the S-3.

Perry: That's correct.

DePue: Okay. So, that's what's happening as the unit is moving north before the Chinese get into it. Let's go to the next one here, and let's see if I've got it in the right order. (pause)

Okay, here we go. This is the Award of the Bronze Star, first oak leaf cluster: [3] "Major James F. Perry, Infantry, Army of the United States, a member of Headquarters Company, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, distinguished himself by heroic achievement on 26 November…" This would have been a day or two after the initial assault.

Perry: That's correct.

DePue: "…in the vicinity of Kunu-ri, Korea." And what will now also include—

Perry: The Gauntlet.

DePue: The Gauntlet.

Perry: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: "On this day the 2nd Battalion forward command post was subjected to enemy mortar and small arms fire. Major Perry, Operations Officer, with complete disregard for his personal safety, exposed himself to place personnel in defensive positions and to inform higher headquarters of the attack. By his outstanding leadership, Major Perry inspired his men to make the operation a success. The outstanding display of heroism and devotion to comrades displayed by Major Perry reflects great credit upon himself and the military service."

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: So it sounds to me like you, the major Operations Officer, are out actually on the ground, positioning troops in defensive positions.

Perry: That's correct.

DePue: But that's not what an operations officer is supposed to be doing.

Perry: It is when you've lost all the others.

DePue: So your units are close to being overrun, is that what you're saying?

Perry: Yes.

DePue: Were the soldiers beginning to panic, or were they still disciplined, would you say?

[3] Oak leaf clusters are added sequentially to the original Bronze Star award for successive actions of similar merit or valor.

Perry: No, they were still disciplined. There was a lot of casualties going on and things like that, but no, they had discipline.

DePue: By this time, after just a couple days from the time the Chinese attacked, what percentage of the unit had already been casualties?

Perry: I'd say we were down to half strength, 50 percent.

DePue: This is before you even began to move through the Gauntlet?

Perry: Yes, that's correct. They couldn't get any troops up to us or replace them, so we had to fall back. That's why we fought all the way through the Gauntlet—some of them didn't make it—but fought through the Gauntlet to go back into a reserve area, to refresh our troops and equipment.

DePue: Okay. Can you tell us in more detail what it was like to go through the Gauntlet? In my reading on this, the 9th Regiment got beaten up worse than the 23rd and the 38th north of the Gauntlet. You guys were already pretty well beaten up.

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: So what was it like going through the gauntlet, if you can tell that?

Perry: Well, all I can say is that you could see the enemy, you could hear the weapons firing, and you direct your troops to do a certain thing. After that, we had to make sure that we were moving through the Gauntlet, keep moving instead of piling up or causing a road block. We moved on through—and the good Lord's with you—we made it. But you were firing a machine gun on the… I happened to be riding with a Jeep and had the Battalion Commander and I believe one of the other staff members on it—I don't remember all of them—we fought through and got back to the area that was designated as what you'd call a bivouac area in peacetime to recoup, regenerate our troops, and get replacements, and revitalize our equipment.

DePue: Were you making this run through the Gauntlet in the daylight?

Perry: Daylight.

DePue: How many hours did it take to get through it?

Perry: Oh, me, I started in the morning. I think our jump-off time—as one of those reads—jump-off time was around eight o'clock in the morning, and broke out finally at dark time.

DePue: It looks like it was probably about six to eight miles in length.

Perry: When we got into it, I was already into the area, and we fought from eight o'clock all the way till darkfall. And the Chinese sent units—I remember very distinctly—I I had about a squad of Chinese dressed up in white clothing like civilians, and they kept moving in from our left front to cut us off from moving down the roadblock or down through the Gauntlet. We shot them, knocked them out, and kept on going. The rest of it was just kind of a blur. You just kept moving and firing, shooting and firing, and that's the way it goes. And the good Lord, I say, is what brought me through.

DePue: Were the troops taking fire from both flanks?

Perry: Both flanks. Yeah. On the right flank, though, you were kind of shielded, because it was a higher cliff; as we were moving it'd be on our right. We would be moving south, and on the right was a higher wall, and this here other area was a—I won't say the river—but it was a flat area where the Chinese were maneuvering to cut us off. As you can see here, they were trying to cut us off.

DePue: The 2nd Infantry Division is what we would call a straight-leg infantry division, correct?[4] Perry: Well, we—

DePue: Were most of the troops on foot?

Perry: Most of them. By that time, we were on foot. Had very, very few—whatever vehicles was there had been in support—one or two of them might have been Quad 50s[5] and things like that, but they were still firing off to our flanks, protecting that. The rest of the time, if I remember correctly—other than a vehicle now and then—we didn't want to cause roadblocks, you know, by our own equipment, and we'd push them over off the road, down the cliff or over a hill or something, and we kept moving, and that was it. But as far as what we had to support us was straight leg. Just straight leg.

DePue: You had to have an incredible amount of casualties here. The wounded that you're trying to take out. Then they obviously, in most cases, aren't going to be walking out. Did you have a—

Perry: The ones that were wounded, a lot of them, are the walking wounded; the only thing they could do was shield themselves along this right flank and keep moving. The ones that were hit badly, there's not much you could do for them.

DePue: That they—

Perry: They were probably captured or maybe... I don't know; I didn't wait around to see. I've read accounts of it where some of them were shot right there on the

[4] Foot soldiers. Any mechanized transport was provided by other units.
[5] Four .50 caliber Browning M2 heavy barrel machine guns, usually mounted on half-track mobile equipment.

spot instead of being taken prisoners. They didn't want to waste their time on them. So. But all the war stories that go on...

DePue: Yeah, that's got to be incredibly harrowing, knowing that you're leaving these—

Perry: It is. It is.

DePue: —wounded behind.

Perry: It is. That's the way it is. Sometimes it has to be that way. Because your mission was to get through, and I think by my unit going through, it helped keep it open for other troops, maybe, to get through, while the others were maneuvering around the other—they were going up along the right side of the river and coming back down.

DePue: I think—and maybe it was the 23rd that went out—

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: Did they go out towards Anju and...?

Perry: Yes, yes, Anju. Yeah, there we are. Now we're getting it. That's Anju, yeah.

DePue: And that was a little bit easier. Though it was still tough fighting, it was not—

Perry: Yes, right.

DePue: —it's not running the Gauntlet.

Perry: But see, the Gauntlet is down in here, in Kunu-ri, and we went north. This map doesn't—

DePue: You started north of Kunu-ri where you had your first engagement with them, from what I've read.

Perry: Yeah, right. Right, right. And back down this way. We were all the way down into here.

DePue: Now, there was one particular pass—they called it the pass—and it looks like it's just like two or three hundred yards, maybe a little bit longer than that.

Perry: Right there.

DePue: Do you recall that?

Perry: I went through that.

DePue: That was especially deadly, going through there?

Perry: Yes, it was. That was where, I remember, along the side of us, there was three or four people shot and killed right there. It was fired. It was heavy. And I was moving through on this Jeep. I wasn't driving, but the driver was going, and he kept moving, and we kept saying, "Move, move, move, move." We kept going and going and going, and finally, we broke out of this and got on down. Where we got out a little bit earlier, and when they had been able to form this Chinese wall here, the rest of them had to go through.

DePue: So yours was one of the earlier units through the Gauntlet.

Perry: We were one of the earlier units that went through. But it was a heck of a move, I'll tell you. I remember that.

DePue: My guess is that the 9th was one of the earlier units because they were in worse shape to begin with?

Perry: Yes, that's correct. But we were in position to make the assault that morning, to go through this Chinese… There'd already been rumors that we'd sent units on division reconnaissance, and the division reconnaissance unit here at this gap couldn't get through. So as a result, it fell heir to the 9th Infantry—and I was 2nd Battalion—to lead the way out. And that's where we went.

DePue: From what I read—this is from David Halberstam's book—there was a tank company that was at the point of this, to move a lot of these broken vehicles out of the way as much as anything. Does that...?

Perry: The 72nd Tank. Yeah.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: And then we had our own organic tank company, but a lot of our organic tank company had been run out of business. I mean, they had been knocked out by this time; they couldn't maneuver. And let's see, if I remember correctly, the 23rd and the 38th went out that way—General Pueblo(??).

DePue: Took them out towards Anju?

Perry: Yes, went out that way. Yeah.

DePue: But it sounds to me from the reading that a lot of the artillery went down the Gauntlet.

Perry: You're right, they stayed on the road. I read of incidents where they had to fire point-blank at the Chinese.

DePue: Yeah, and that's an uncomfortable position for an artilleryman.

Perry: Well, I know that. It was a tough situation all the way through for anyone, even the infantrymen.

DePue: Any other things that you want to talk about on the Gauntlet?

Perry: All I know is that it was a long day.

DePue: What were the weather conditions like? It had to be freezing cold on top of everything else.

Perry: At night, out in here, that night before was 35 below zero, and you had to run the vehicles a half-hour out of every hour to make sure that the radios and everything worked. And that was your problem: equipment was a big problem.

DePue: Were you constantly cold?

Perry: Actually? When you look back on it, you were, but I think with all the things going on, that you didn't pay any attention to it, really. It might have affected the thinking powers of the individual soldier, but you were cold. At that time, we had ample equipment; we had received our little arctic tents. Hadn't been able to use them very much, but anyway, that was it.

DePue: Didn't a lot of that equipment, though—a lot of the division's equipment—get left in the Gauntlet or north of the Gauntlet?

Perry: It did. It did. It left. I saw them burning equipment, everything.

DePue: Okay. You left a lot of the equipment behind, then?

Perry: We didn't. Division level did, because they couldn't move it. There was no trains to move it on, no rail cars, no rail system to use. There was a lot of equipment left, but a lot of it was destroyed—I don't know how much—so it didn't fall into enemy hands.

DePue: As the Operations Officer, did you have cause sometimes to go to regimental headquarters for briefings or division headquarters for briefings?

Perry: Oh, yeah, right. And that's another thing: while the troops were trying to get their rest, the people in charge of operations had to move out over areas that maybe could have been road blocks or something like that, to get to where they were going. There were no secured areas guaranteed or anything like that.

DePue: Okay. Major General—I think he's a major general—Keiser—

Perry: Keiser, Bill, yeah.

DePue: —was the division commander at the time.

Perry: Is that eleven o'clock?

DePue: It's 10:57, yes.

Perry: Ten fifty-seven, 11:00, okay. Jim said he'd be back around 11:30.

DePue: Yeah, we'll go for just a few more minutes here. I think we're at a place where we can make a natural break. I wanted to get your views on some of the senior leadership.

Perry: Well, my senior leaders. I always took them as they were trained—most of them had gone through West Point—and some of them maybe had not been trained well enough and had staff jobs all the time. Then all at once they were thrown out into combat situations, and that could affect a lot of thinking. But they were trained basically for combat information and combat training.

DePue: So you had no issues with General Keiser's abilities?

Perry: A lot of people did. I didn't. I didn't question it.

DePue: Some of the people at that time did, that you heard some grumbling about him?

Perry: Well, you always hear grumbling. I don't know what you heard or anything like that. I don't know what you're leading up to.

DePue: Well, I just wanted to get your opinions about General Keiser, because some of the reports have not been flattering on his case.

Perry: As far as I was concerned, General Keiser was a commanding general of the division, and he was given a mission; as far as I could tell from my level of operation, I see him and his staff worked like they were supposed to. Now, if things might not have gone that way in certain areas or in certain units, but I don't know. As far as I was concerned, in 9th Infantry, it was working.

DePue: From what I have—

Perry: We had a Colonel Messinger. Have you heard of Colonel Messinger?

DePue: Was he the regimental commander?

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: I have not read much about him.

Perry: Well, he was a good commander. Yep. And then he went on to become, I think, a four-star general. Messinger.

DePue: I know that Keiser was replaced as the division commander on the seventh of December, so after they got out of this and were in a rest camp or recuperating...

Perry: Yeah, and that was, I think, because of General Almond. I think there was conflict between corps-levels and army-levels and division-levels. But of course, that didn't filter down to our level that much.

DePue: Well, I've read also that part of it was that he was replaced for medical reasons.

Perry: Yeah, that's right.

DePue: Where did you end up? After you got out of the Gauntlet, the division wasn't in much shape to do much fighting for a while.

Perry: We went into a reserve area. I keep wanting to say—

DePue: I think it was south of Seoul, even.

Perry: No, let's see here. I can't see. I need a spyglass here.

DePue: It might not be on that map. Well, anyway, what did you do? Here we go. This is what I had, in this area here. What I'm going on is the maps we've got.

Perry: Yeah. And what is this, now? What is the name of the town?

DePue: The name of the town is Cheongju.

Perry: Cheongju. This is where we withdrew back to, here. We had to come back here to get reorganized.

DePue: Okay, so that is correct.

Perry: Yeah. We might have fallen off... What's this town here? What is that?

DePue: Well, all these towns… It looks like… I don't know what the name of that is.

Perry: I can't see.

DePue: Hong Chun? You would have come through that.

Perry: Hong Chon. We came through there. We regrouped there and then moved on down. I want to keep saying Kaesong.

DePue: Well, Kaesong was where the peace talks started.

Perry: I know, but that's where I want to...

DePue: And that's right here.

Perry: Yeah, but I mean... Let's see. Kaesong, here's one...

DePue: But you might have passed through Kaesong to get there eventually, I would think. Anyway, what kind of things did the unit do then once they got there, in terms of reorganization?

Perry: Reorganization was replacements; unit training—squad, platoon-level—things that we had learned in combat; and combat teachings to the troops left to continue the fight.

DePue: Was that a matter of reinforcing the lessons you've learned or incorporating the new recruits so that they were part of the unit, or both?

Perry: Both. It was both. So they could get to know the unit, and also to indoctrinate all troops and refresh the old ones' memories.

DePue: Tell me as much as you can about the frame of mind, the attitude, of yourself, but especially the troops themselves, after getting so severely mauled.

Perry: Well, after that, we knew that we had to train and go back; we had a mission. We knew that we could fight the Chinese, and on that basis, why, we went back, just like a regular soldier, and faced what we had coming, or what we had to give. Wasn't no panic or anything like that or no mass evacuation like you heard in certain areas. But there is always panic when you get troops into combat. Yeah. And you have to be a steady force to maintain the anchor; like on a ship, when you throw an anchor out, you hope it holds.

DePue: Do you think the unit's confidence was severely shaken?

Perry: I don't think the unit's combat efficiency or their thoughts were even shaken. Maybe some of the individual soldiers were, but I don't think overall that we were that demoralized.

DePue: Was there a deeper resolve to go back and to take it to the enemy?

Perry: Yeah, yeah, there was a resolve, because someone had said there wasn't going to be anything happen like that, and we'd be home by a certain time. Well, we knew that we weren't going to be home by that time, so we were resolved we're going to be there. That's what you had to do. And that's what you had to give to your troops. You couldn't be one that was hanging on the vine someplace and hoping that they would pick you.

DePue: At that point in time, you have to totally commit yourself.

Perry: That's correct. That is correct.

DePue: What's your view of MacArthur by this time?

Perry: By this time, I would say that he was informed incorrectly by his G-2, [Intelligence] and I think that he was using some of his elevation in the hierarchy of the Army to take advantage of the situation. There were politics involved between he and Truman, so we didn't want that to get into the Army troops.

DePue: Had you personally lost a lot of faith in MacArthur's judgment?

Perry: I just figured that he would be replaced.

DePue: Okay. Well, that's going to come a little bit later in the story. Do you recall when Ridgway got to Korea and took over.

Perry: Yes. He had a morale problem, and he had to get over it. He become a gung-ho commander.

DePue: What was the change—we should mention, I think General Walker died in a Jeep accident during this—

Perry: Yes.

DePue: On December twenty-third.

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: So I would imagine Ridgway got there just a few days after that.

Perry: Yeah, I'm sure he did.

DePue: Do you recall the changes that you saw going on when he got on board?

Perry: His changes weren't immediate, but you started getting command changes down through the channels of communication, and also in your intelligence field. He let you know that he was going to be a commander that was going to get into combat, get up on the front lines and find out what was going on all the time.

DePue: Do you think that helped instill a fighting spirit in the Army?

Perry: Yes, right, I do. I do. Because the visibility of a commander in a combat area, even though it's a job of someone else, is always good for morale.

DePue: Okay. I think this is a good place to take a break.

Perry: Okay.

DePue: Do you have any final words about the experience through the Gauntlet and the initial Chinese offensive that you want to mention?

Perry: The only thing is that the Chinese were tenacious fighters, and they were not, as people informed us, ill-trained and going to just push them around. Because we were fighting the core best of China. They had just come off the Manchurian borders, they had fought World War II, and they were the combat troops of China. When we wiped them out at the Gauntlet or killed a lot of their troops in the Gauntlet, well, that knocked out a big hole of their trained cadre and their trained personnel. So we had a fighting chance to go back and start winning. That's the way we looked at it, or I looked at it.

DePue: So even though the 2nd got their butts kicked pretty severely in that area, you were taking a lot of Chinese with you and slowing down their advance?

Perry: That is correct.

DePue: That helped the rest of the 8th Army to get away?

Perry: Oh, yes. Right. And that helped the 23rd Infantry Regiment and the 38th Infantry Regiment, and some of the artillery units, get out.

DePue: The artillery for the 2nd—is that the 55th or the 155th Artillery Regiment?

Perry: For the 2nd Division?

DePue: Yeah.

Perry: For mine, was the 15th Field Artillery.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: 15th. They were organic. Only one time did we have another battalion of artillery, the 38th, and that was because of command difficulties up at division level. That's the only time. The 15th always worked with us, and we got to know the people. In artillery, you ought to know who your observers are and everything.

DePue: From what I have read, by the time you got down into the reconsolidation stage, the division had lost 5,000 casualties. Does that sound—

Perry: I would say that, yes. We did—

DePue: That's about what percentage of the overall strength? About 35-40 percent?

Perry: I would say around 40-45 percent.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: Mm-hmm.

DePue: So that's a huge hit, because most of those guys, I'm sure, are infantry or combat troops.

Perry: That's correct. Most of them were.

DePue: Okay, well, let's go ahead and stop here. /we'll start off with the unit getting back into combat after you've been reconstituted.

(end of interview #1 – interview #2 continues)

Interview with James Perry

VRK-A-L-2009-003.02

Interview # 2: February 4, 2009

Interviewer: Mark DePue

A Note to the Reader

This transcript is based on an interview recorded by the ALPL Oral History Program. Readers are reminded that the interview of record is the original video or audio file, and are encouraged to listen to portions of the original recording to get a better sense of the interviewee's personality and state of mind. The interview has been transcribed in near-verbatim format, then edited for clarity and readability, and reviewed by the interviewee. For many interviews, the ALPL Oral History Program retains substantial files with further information about the interviewee and the interview itself. Please contact us for information about accessing these materials.

DePue: Today is Wednesday, February 4, 2009. This is my second session with Jim Perry, James F. Perry. We were talking with James this morning about your experiences in the Korean War and especially at Kunu-ri. Looking at the citations you gave me, I thought we should probably go back one more time, while we're talking a little bit about the experiences you had at Kunu-ri, even though we talked quite a bit. On your first Silver Star citation, let me read this and let you respond to what I'm reading here.

"Major James F. Perry, Infantry, Army of the United States, Regimental Headquarters, 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, displayed gallantry in action against an armed enemy on 30 November 1950 in the vicinity of Kunu-ri, Korea." By this time, we've got to be talking about the Gauntlet, so south of Kunu-ri.

Perry: Yeah, right, right. That's at eight o'clock in the morning.

DePue: "The Second Battalion was attacking an enemy roadblock on the main supply route between Kunu-ri and Sunchon."

Perry: Yeah, that's right.

DePue: In other words, in the Gauntlet itself.

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: "When the forward elements of the battalion contacted the enemy, Major Perry deployed his men on both sides of the road and fearlessly exposed himself to enemy fire while directing the return fire of his units. While leading his men in an attack on a well-concealed enemy position, Major Perry was painfully wounded in the back by an exploding mortar shell. Disregarding this serious wound and refusing medical aid, he continued to direct the fire of his men. When the stubbornly resisting enemy gained fire superiority and his men became panicky, Major Perry moved among them to encourage them." I assume you're doing this while you're already injured yourself. "Organizing a heterogeneous United Nations task force, he directed them in a successful attack against a dug-in enemy force on the high ground along the road. When battle conditions allowed, he organized ammunition details to supply elements of the battalion with ammunition. The attack of the battalion was so successful that only a small group of the enemy remained. This small group was directing accurate and devastating fire on the friendly forces. Locating a light machine gun and crew, Major Perry directed them to a vantage point from which they poured such a deadly volume of fire upon the enemy that the enemy was completely disorganized and routed from its position. The outstanding gallantry and devotion to duty displayed by Major Perry reflect great credit upon himself and the military service." Do you remember that incident?

Perry: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Can you add anything to that incident?

Perry: No.

DePue: Well, I'm always astounded when I read these kinds of things. Did you think at the time that you were necessarily performing in a heroic way?

Perry: No. All I remember is that I was doing my job, and that's the way I took it. Someone else might have seen it another way, like it's written.

DePue: Well, do you remember the soldiers being panicky, as they mentioned here?

Perry: There was maybe some panicky, but not that much. There was panic, yeah.

DePue: Would it be fair—

Perry: They were not my troops; they were other troops that had been in the area. You remember it said a homogenous...?

DePue: Heterogeneous United Nat—

Perry: I mean, heterogeneous—I'll get it right. Homogeneous (laughs)—I'm all right.

DePue: So were there some Turks in that group?

Perry: There were some Turks and some other miscellaneous troops. I think there were some French in that troop, but I can't say for sure.

DePue: I know the French joined the unit later on.

Perry: Yeah, right, yeah. No, I'll tell you. We were ready to go through the Gauntlet and join the British just on the other side of the hill, I guess you'd say, but we never did make it. And the British couldn't break through to us. They were trying to break through to us, but the British couldn't get through. I think you'll find that in other reports.

DePue: Okay. It sounds in this description here that if you had not been successful—

Perry: We would have been—

DePue: —the entire regiment would have been pinned down.

Perry: Not only that, the entire group that went out the Kunu-ri Pass, it would have been bogged down. Yeah.

DePue: And I certainly don't want to make light of this, but this kind of incident probably happened over and over and over again among American troops.

Perry: Yes, right. You're right.

DePue: And not necessarily all the people who deserved to have Silver Stars got them, did they?

Perry: That is correct. That is correct.

DePue: Okay. Any other reflections on Kunu-ri?

Perry: No, all I know is it was a rough way to go.

DePue: Now, when we were talking during our lunch break, we were mentioning that there was that other option of going to Anju, and I read that—maybe criticism, Monday-morning quarterbacking—some were saying that would have been a better way to go for the entire division.

Perry: That's what you heard—rumors , after-quarterbacking. Yeah, that's correct. But they'd already committed the division, and the Chinese already had the area secured with roadblocks. The Chinese had already gone in and secured

the area, and then they left us. We figured we would go that way and not use the Anju road. They figured we'd go the regular MSR.

DePue: Main supply route.

Perry: Yep.

DePue: The situation that you're describing here, I mean, people trying to understand what happened there after the fact are struggling with the notion: how did the Chinese get past you in the first place?

Perry: They'd bypass you.

DePue: Were they taking the high ground?

Perry: We had the high ground too, but they were in large numbers, large enough numbers. If you remember, it was armies against battalion. You take and put a Chinese army, the number of troops in that, versus a small battalion maybe reduced down to 900 men, that's not a very good comparison. You couldn't contain all the ground. Yeah.

DePue: So they overwhelmed you with their numbers.

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: So many times you read the stories about soldiers in combat in the Korean War, and when they start talking about the Chinese, they all seem to remember what signaled the beginning of an attack for the Chinese.

Perry: Oh, you mean the horn?

DePue: Yeah, what did you hear?

Perry: Well, these people were already in position. They didn't have any horns or anything else. But there was horns and whistles after that, after you started into the roadblock, that you could hear the horns. They signal. They weren't fortunate enough to have all the modern equipment—if you'd call ours modern—radio and other equipment available. They used their signals, hand signals, and they used bugles and whistles to control their troops. That's all I can say.

DePue: Was it eerie or unsettling to hear that?

Perry: Didn't bother me. It did some people, I guess. Yeah, it was eerie. You could say it was eerie. I've heard other people use the word that you just used, eerie. Yeah, you hear that; you're not used to it. We use a bugle only for "Taps" and "Reveille" and things like that, and where you hear their horns for charge or whatever it might be, or signaling their troops, that would be it.

DePue: During the time you're going through the Gauntlet, what would you estimate was the range of the enemy that you were seeing from your position?

Perry: Within fifty yards.

DePue: That close?

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: So close enough to see clearly.

Perry: Oh, yeah. You could see who you were up against. Like one group, I told you, that deceived themselves: they were Chinese soldiers dressed up like North Koreans, in a long, white robe. Well, those people closed within, I'd say, fifty, seventy-five yards of closing up our line, and we knocked them out, so that took care of that resistance.

DePue: What was the weapon you personally carried?

Perry: I carried a .45 and an M1 carbine.

DePue: Okay. Did you have occasion, then, to fire your weapons?

Perry: **Yes. Yes.**

DePue: Okay, and you say that emphatically, like "a lot."

Perry: Well, yeah. More than... I've heard people say complaints that they went through a battle and didn't even fire a round. Well, I think that is a bunch of baloney, because I think everyone, unless they get to the point of where they're frightened to the point where they can't use a weapon, they're going to use a weapon unless they have a malfunction.

DePue: So from what you were seeing of the soldiers around you, they were all actively fighting?

Perry: Yeah, they were actively fighting. Yeah. In fact, some of them had their bayonets fixed.

DePue: How much of a hurt do you think you put on the Chinese forces that were trying to stop you?

Perry: A lot. Heavy, heavy. Heavy losses.

DePue: Well, let's jump forward, then, because we backtracked to talk a little bit more about the Gauntlet.

Perry: Yeah, I understand. I understand.

DePue: We've got the unit now southeast of Seoul, regrouping. It doesn't take long, from what I've read, for the 2nd Division to get back into action, does it?

Perry: No, no, it doesn't.

DePue: Were you back into action by the time Seoul fell to the Chinese?

Perry: Yeah, we were back in. Yeah, we were back in action.

DePue: So you were back in action in late December already.

Perry: Yeah, or getting ready to deploy.

DePue: Seoul fell on January third. Do you remember that?

Perry: We got a report on it. I couldn't comment upon that because it wasn't in our area, but we were concerned.

DePue: When we were last talking, I was asking you about the general morale of the unit, the attitude of the troops you were with. There was talk at that time that I think MacArthur had even given Walker and then Ridgway the authority, if he had to, to drop all the way back to the Pusan Perimeter again, and at the senior level they were even considering a total evacuation. Did it ever appear to you to be that desperate?

Perry: I would say we got the report as such, yes, and intelligence reporting and things like that in our briefings. We had permission to do so; so if we had to, we would do it.

DePue: Would you say that the 2nd Division—let's say your regiment, your battalion—at the end of December, versus what they were like at the beginning of October, was there a completely different unit, a completely different mentality, or is it about the same level of quality of fighting spirit?

Perry: No, the fighting spirit was still there. There was. Maybe you had some units that you had heard in other areas—the other divisions and things that had difficulties—but we didn't have any difficulty.

DePue: Well, I'm wondering if there was even a greater resolve to see things through.

Perry: I would say that there was. I think so.

DePue: And that sprang from what?

Perry: That sprang from determination of the individual soldier to show the Chinese that we were better than they were.

DePue: So just that plain old-fashioned American pride?

Perry: That's right. Well, not pride, just know-how and do it.

DePue: Okay, the qualities of the American soldier.

Perry: Quality of the American soldier, right.

DePue: Okay. I'm going to go through some events here. I know that as we go through these... I know for the average soldier, if you're in engaged combat—

Perry: I understand.

DePue: —they all kind of bleed together here.

Perry: I understand.

DePue: Mid-January. There was fighting around the important communications center of Wonju. There was a road network that—

Perry: Right, there was a road network in there. You had roads going from east and west, north and south.

DePue: Do you remember any of that?

Perry: That was a rail center. Yeah. What do you want to know?

DePue: Well, were you in the process of dropping back still at that time in mid-January?

Perry: No, we had been given a mission to do so-and-so, hold Wonju at all costs, and that's where we stood.

DePue: Was that the same engagement as the 23rd at Chipyong-ni?

Perry: No, Chipyong-ni was later. That was later. They were over on our left front. But you're right, it was in the same area. The 23rd deployed to our left front with the British. We were in the Wonju area, and to the east of us was the ROK division—I forget which division, but it was ROKs.

DePue: Many of the times—you read the history, it's kind of repeated in this stage of the Korean War—when the Chinese attack way up north, the ROK divisions broke, and that left your flanks wide open.

Perry: That's correct.

DePue: And we still picked up some of that when you were down in this area a couple months later—

Perry: Yes, a lot—

DePue: —that the ROK divisions weren't always reliable.

Perry: That is correct, yeah. Their command structure wasn't trained to hold the ground that they were responsible for. In other words, it was easier to go back and fight another day or someplace along the line—taking up the Chinese philosophy: it's better to fight another day than to lose a battle today. And that was it.

DePue: But it seems like it would put you in the position where—

Perry: It did.

DePue: —the entire army had to withdraw, then.

Perry: It did. It did. When the ROKs on our east flank there in Wonju area—when they broke and gave way—that left our right flank wide open. So therefore, when you start thinking of that, you're thinking of the capabilities of the enemies. They with armies can enclose or encircle you; you can be entrapped and not even have to worry about it. They'll just bypass you and leave you stranded.

DePue: Well, the critique of the American infantry at this time that I've often read is, because the Americans were so road-bound—dependent on their vehicles—and the Chinese didn't have vehicles, they could hit the high ground and infiltrate and flank the Americans pretty easily.

Perry: Well, this is a simple theory of a lot of people. But we weren't road-bound. Like on Operation Killer, we left our vehicles and went across country for many miles.

DePue: That was towards the tail end of February, twenty-second—

Perry: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

DePue: —or twenty-third. So if it had been that way, maybe up as you were approaching the Yalu [River], you had learned your lesson the hard way? Or you say it's not even true when you're up in the north?

Perry: No, the thing was that we would still use our MSRs, because you need it for your supply routes, and we could fight the hills just like the Chinese could. And that's what we learned. See, in Germany, you had a gentleman's war, I call it, where in Korea, you're fighting Indian and guerilla type of battles: isolated, individual battles, even though there was armies involved.

DePue: So oftentimes it devolved to the point where it was just hand-to-hand combat or small—

Perry: Yeah, right.

DePue: —mano a mano engagements?

Perry: Yeah, right, uh-huh.

DePue: Okay. Just going through some of the other incidents here, some of the more colorful names: the Twin Tunnels, late January, early February timeframe.

Perry: Yeah, that was in the 23rd Infantry Regiment area.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: The Twin Tunnels got its name from the tunnels that went across what covered the railroad going underneath the mountains. That's where it got its name: Twin Tunnels.

DePue: Okay. I think the especially important one was around the thirteenth and the fourteenth of February with the 23rd Regiment at Chip'ong-ni, and I know you guys were very close in the vicinity of Wonju at the same time.

Perry: As I told you, they were on—if you take it like this, here is Wonju. We as the 9th Infantry of the 2nd Division, we were deployed here, and Chipyong-ni would be off up here.

DePue: Farther north.

Perry: Farther north, northwest.

DePue: Were you aware that the 23rd—and they had a battalion of French foreign legionnaires with them as well—were you aware that they were totally isolated, cut off?

Perry: Not until later. We got the word, yes. We knew that, because that's why we were holding this area.

DePue: Were you under very heavy attack at the same time?

Perry: Oh, yes, right. Yeah. We were under heavy attack at the same time.

DePue: What were the tactics the Chinese were using at that time? Night attacks?

Perry: We had night attacks in the Wonju area, a lot of artillery fire.

DePue: From the enemy.

Perry: No. Both ways.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: The enemy used artillery, and so did the Americans. In other words, our ring of steel around Wonju is what helped Wonju so it didn't fall into the hands of the enemy.

DePue: How much air support did you have at that time?

Perry: Not too much.

DePue: And we'd mentioned when we weren't recording—

Perry: Sometimes the weather wasn't good, and they had problems that way; when we did, it was more important to put the enemy at a disadvantage in another area, not in the area that you were concerned with. So you couldn't get all the airpower that you wanted.

DePue: Not as much as you would have liked.

Perry: No, that's right.

DePue: How much did you see any air cover or air support while you were running the Gauntlet, to jump back to that? Was there any?

Perry: The only thing that I remember, later on we had some old Corsairs from the Navy come in, and they sprayed the area after we left, after I'd already gone through the Gauntlet—

DePue: Okay, okay.

Perry: —and they heard the enemy fire. But other than that, I can't say anything else.

DePue: Most people, when they think of the Korean War, think of very static lines and kind of small pushes back and forth. But we're still talking about a time when there's an awful lot of movement on the ground, right?

Perry: Oh yeah, right. Yeah, a lot of movement. In other words, the enemy had armies; we had divisions and regiments. So there was no comparison to manpower. But the artillery cut it down pretty even.

DePue: Would it be a fair assessment to say it was one gigantic pushing match, back and forth?

Perry: Simplification of it, yeah.

DePue: Okay. You mentioned Operation Killer. Do you remember anything in particular about Operation Killer?

Perry: The only thing that I remember about it is that it was put in effect. I forget which general commanded at that time; I think it was—

DePue: 8th Army Commander?

Perry: Yeah, 8th Army Commander.

DePue: That would have been Ridgway.

Perry: Yeah, it was Ridgway. He put in Operation Killer. You would leave all vehicles behind and start out across the country terrain. In other words, we'd fight friendly forces–to–enemy forces on the open terrain, which was rocky, mountainous area.

DePue: The reason for that order?

Perry: The reason for that order is to show them that we could fight, and I think give a little intuition to the troops to do something, not just sit back and have to wait for the road network to furnish troops.

DePue: That kind of goes back to what we were talking about.

Perry: I think so.

DePue: Well, this is immediately after the 23rd held at Chipyong-ni; you guys held at Wonju, and that battle, those series of engagements—

Perry: That was a turning point, I'd say, of the whole Korean War up to the point of where they made the truce.

DePue: I've heard it called the Gettysburg of the Korean War.

Perry: That's right. I would say so.

DePue: Okay, so it's very important to understand that. Right after Operation Killer, about a week or two weeks later, Operation Ripper. Do you remember that one?

Perry: Yeah, Ripper was just a continuation of Killer. It was just a new name and a code name. It was still the same operation as Killer was, but it was just a new name.

DePue: After the American forces had been on their heels for so long, what was the attitude now of going over to the offensive again?

Perry: Go, go.

DePue: Felt good?

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: Troops felt the same way?

Perry: I would say so, if it's in the command. If it wasn't in the command, it wouldn't be in the troops. Therefore, leadership was a main thing.

DePue: It all came back down to the leadership.

Perry: That's right, yeah.

DePue: I know Seoul was recaptured on March eighteenth.

Perry: Yeah. See, that's the big battles. I...

DePue: That was way to your west, I would think.

Perry: That was to my west, left of us. In fact, that would be southwest of Chipyong-ni.

DePue: Okay. And then, April twenty-second—I think that's the timeframe. That would have been the beginning of the Chinese spring offensive.

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: Where was the unit at that time, roughly? Were you north of the Wonju area at that time?

Perry: I'm trying to think where we were. Yeah, we were north of Wonju.

DePue: Yeah, I don't know if it's going to be on that map. Here's Seoul.

Perry: No, it's not.

DePue: It probably was up in this area, then.

Perry: Up near the Cheorwon and that area.

DePue: Cheorwon; that's the base of the Iron Triangle there.

Perry: Yeah, that's right. We were at the base of the Iron Triangle at that time, yeah.

DePue: Okay, good, good. Was that an even heavier portion than you'd experienced before from the Chinese?

Perry: Yeah, right. They finally put their foot down, and that's where we bounced up against them again. Cheorwon, Iron Triangle.

DePue: But it turned out differently for them this time, didn't it?

Perry: Yeah, right.

DePue: How so?

Perry: Well, I think artillery and the Air Force. Air Force caught them out in the open. The weather turned against them and in our favor. But that's about it.

DePue: By this time had the American forces received enough reinforcement so that you could have something close to what doctrine would say in terms of how close units would be, or were you still pretty well spread out?

Perry: No, we were pretty well spread out. Our territory we covered was pretty large. It didn't follow doctrine. In other words, if you say a battalion frontage, so many yards, for a battalion it might have doubled in yardage. In other words, you were spread out over twice the territory. And then later on, why, we got back into normal activity.

DePue: Okay. You're S-3 (Operations Officer) during this whole period of time?

Perry: During that time?

DePue: Yeah.

Perry: Yes.

DePue: Okay. I wonder if—

Perry: And then—

DePue: This would help me, and I hope other people down the road. Tell us what your typical day would have been like, if there was such a thing. I'm wondering especially how close you were up to the front lines, how much you were in the back or planning or coordinating with adjacent units, or things like that.

Perry: Well, mine, most generally—

DePue: What time would you start?

Perry: The S-3 in the Korean War was most generally up with the troops on the front line. Your coordination was delegated maybe to other staff officers that you had, to pick up information that you needed to fill in the gaps.

DePue: Would you be moving from company to company?

Perry: Oh, yes.

DePue: Did you have a Jeep, then, to do that?

Perry: Yes, had a Jeep. Had a Jeep, and walked. When we went on Operation Killer, we went up in the hills. You set up your command post, and it was mobile.

DePue: Did you have occasions when there would be a staff call, where the company commanders would come back to battalion headquarters to get orders?

Perry: Yes.

DePue: Were you the one who then would be leading the briefings at those?

Perry: I would lead the briefings, and then after I became a battalion commander, my S-3 did it. The S-2 [intelligence] would give his briefing; the S-1 would give the personnel situation; and the S-4, supply, would give his information on what supplies he had, and how many ammunition, and whether or not ammunition would be prorated for that day or whatever it might be.

DePue: Were you going back to regimental headquarters to get the same kind of briefings there?

Perry: I have, yeah. Not every time, not every day. Not every day.

DePue: Well, it sounds to me like all this doesn't leave much time for sleep.

Perry: It doesn't. It doesn't. (laughs) You're right.

DePue: So does that mean, not only are you constantly cold, but you're constantly tired?

Perry: Concentrating and planning and doing the things that you have to do, and have your S-2 and the S-3 go up and recon the area to see what's going on, so you know where to deploy your troops. Even the point where we got fortunate, we had helicopter and light aircraft. The—what were they called, L-5s at that time?

DePue: Observation aircraft.

Perry: Observation aircraft. And you'd go up and reconnoiter, find out what you wanted to know.

DePue: So you were even up in those aircraft occasionally.

Perry: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I didn't stay on the ground all the time.

DePue: Again, it just doesn't sound like there's much time for sleep.

Perry: There isn't.

DePue: You caught it when you caught it.

Perry: There isn't. Just like it said in there. We had little time to sleep.

DePue: Yeah.

Perry: But you're always planning. You're always having to be on the alert. And whenever you would catch a nap, whenever you could catch a sleep nap, you'd sleep.

DePue: You mean five- or ten-minute power naps?

Perry: That's right, power naps. That's right.

DePue: During this time, from about middle or late December, when the 2nd Division goes back into the line, through March, April, May timeframe, how many times would the regiment have been taken out of the line to catch their breath and to rest?

Perry: Maybe once.

DePue: The rest of the time, they're in the line every day?

Perry: Yeah, yeah. The twenty months that I was in Korea, I was on the line eighteen months.

DePue: Wow.

Perry: And the other time was traveling back and forth, whatever I had to do.

DePue: I would imagine that's—

Perry: Combat time. That's how they booked the combat pay.

DePue: Combat fatigue, then, is a very real concern, I would think.

Perry: Very much so. You had to follow the rules and do what they were supposed to do, when they were supposed to do it, and everything like that. Right.

DePue: I mean, you were in a position where you're observing an awful lot of people. Could you tell when a soldier was getting to that point where he had reached his limit?

Perry: Yeah, I wasn't a psychologist, but I sure could tell when they were reaching their limit. That's when you would rotate. Maybe you had F Company one day leading the attack, and you'd have two companies back, and the next day, you might have two companies forward, and that one that was up there that one day, let it fall back in reserve and put the other, it would be F and G, up in the line.

DePue: Now, you mentioned battalion command. Did you become a battalion commander sometime during this timeframe?

Perry: Yes, yes.

DePue: When did that happen?

Perry: I can't tell you exactly. I know it's documented, but that's...

DePue: But it was while the unit was in the heat of combat?

Perry: No, when we pulled back off the line.

DePue: That was the time when that happened?

Perry: And that's when they started rotation. They rotated out the battalion commander, and they rotated out the executive officer. But I had the S-3 and the former S-2 and things like that that I could fall back on.

DePue: Do you remember the reason for rotating the battalion commander and the XO out of the—

Perry: Time. They started the rotation plan. Have you ever heard of it?

DePue: Yeah.

Perry: Well, that's what it was. They had their time, they had points enough to go home, and they rotated them out. They didn't care where you did or didn't; you rotated out.

DePue: Tell us how many points you needed, then, to rotate out.

Perry: I don't remember, really. Somewhere, sticks in my mind, twenty-five or twenty-three.

DePue: Thirty-six, maybe?

Perry: Thirty-six? Well...

DePue: And you received more points if you're in combat?

Perry: Yeah, right. Yeah. I wasn't worried about... Whenever my time come, they would notify me, and that's it.

DePue: Did you have any question about that? This is the point where somebody is getting to be really experienced and know what the heck they're doing; they hit their points, and they rotate out?

Perry: Well, yeah, that was one of the reasons of the complaint on the rotation policy. They pulled good people out that you had trained and everything, but they went home first, so you had to make an adjustment.

DePue: Okay. Well, Jim, if you got there at the same time as everybody else in the battalion and the regiment did—

Perry: I understand.

DePue: —it sounds like you stayed there a little bit longer.

Perry: I stayed there a little bit longer. I was promised—I won't say a promised—but they told me I would probably get to be maybe a lieutenant colonel right away. I wasn't a West Pointer or anything; but jobs later on, that's where you started seeing the West Pointers and all the other regulars.

DePue: Well, the Regular Army Commission.

Perry: Regular Army Commission, right. But that was it.

DePue: Well, you're married with a son back home. What did your wife think about your staying longer?

Perry: She didn't really have much to do with it. I made the decisions. And my son—I had a son, but I figured that the good Lord had taken care of me this long; a few more months wouldn't hurt. But that was it.

DePue: But at the time you made that decision, I'm thinking, you—

Perry: Nope, I didn't.

DePue: No, you didn't make that decision?

Perry: I made the decision.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: I made the decision, but I didn't confer with her.

DePue: Did she have any objections to it when she found out about it?

Perry: I imagine later on. I don't know.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: I didn't give her the chance to say.

DePue: Well, I'm struck by the attitude that, Well, God's taken care of me so far; he'll take care of me from here. But you're in a regiment, in a battalion, that had seen horrendous amount of casualties.

Perry: That's correct.

DePue: Did you have faith that it just wasn't going to be happening to you?

Perry: I had faith that it wouldn't happen to me, and I had faith also that we would be pulled back off the line and probably put in reserve sometime, and things could happen the way they said, and that was it.

DePue: Okay. Now, we read the Silver Star citation. You got injured there. Did you receive a Purple Heart for that injury?

Perry: Yes, I did.

DePue: It sounds like it didn't take you out of the line, though.

Perry: No, but it could have. One of the fellows that was hit about the same time was taken off the line—pardon me for belching my eggs—and he was captured by the Chinese and spent eighteen months in a POW. I didn't want that, so I decided it was better for me to keep going ahead and fighting than it was to take the chance of getting captured.

DePue: So if you stayed with the unit, your chances of not being captured are much better. Is that what you're saying?

Perry: That's right.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: I don't know what you said, or what they've told you.

DePue: No, no, that's why I want to hear it from you.

Perry: Well, I don't know what they've told you in the past, but you stay with the unit, where you have better chances.

DePue: Was that the only time you were injured?

Perry: That's the only time.

DePue: So you've got one Purple Heart.

Perry: I have one Purple Heart.

DePue: Two Silver Stars.

Perry: Two Silver Stars.

DePue: How many Bronze Stars?

Perry: I have one for valor, one for combat, and if you put in for another one, I would have the equivalent of three. And I have five Commendation Medals, a Green Hornet, they call them.

DePue: Now, what did it take to earn a Commendation Medal?

Perry: Well, superior ratings for IG [Inspector General] inspections and doing your job.

DePue: So not for combat.

Perry: OER (Officer Evaluation Report). No, no. That was for administrative duties.

DePue: Okay. Well, I know that we need to keep moving forward here. The Chinese offensive hit on April twenty-second. It sounds like finally the American and South Korean troops buckled down and were able to resist that offensive.

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: And I know that sixteen May, I think Ridgway put the entire command back on offensive footing again. Does that sound right?

Perry: I would say about that. You're putting words in my mouth, but I think that's correct.

DePue: Well, that's exactly what I'm not supposed to be doing.

Perry: I know that, you're reminding me, and yeah, that refreshes my memory.

DePue: Okay. Anything else in those next few months, in the spring timeframe, that really sticks in your mind in terms of the nature of combat?

Perry: No, no.

DePue: Okay. Well, I'm going to read another citation. This is for your second Silver Star. We're at that point now. This is for actions on the twenty-ninth of May. "Major James F. Perry, Commanding Officer, (then Executive Officer), 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, distinguished himself by gallantry in action against an armed enemy on 29 May 1951—"

Perry: Yeah, I remember. That was my birthday.

DePue: Well, that's a heck of a birthday.

Perry: That's a heck of a birthday, you're right.

DePue: —in the vicinity of Inje, Korea. On that day his battalion had been directed to clear and secure Umyan-ni - Inje road, a vital supply route and communications artery, from enemy observation and fire. Company G,"—this would have been one of your companies— "while moving to attack, became heavily engaged with a well-entrenched enemy force on hill 729. The Company Commander was wounded in the initial firefight—"

Perry: Right.

DePue: "—and had to be evacuated."

Perry: That was Clark. I think that was Bill—that was Bill Clark who was wounded at that time.

DePue: [General] Mark Clark's son?

Perry: That's right.

DePue: Wow. "Major Perry, realizing his presence was needed in the threatened sector, immediately moved over rugged mountainous terrain and through intense enemy automatic weapons and small arms fire to an observation post in the midst of Company G where he could direct the movements of the company as well as the remainder of the Battalion."

Perry: Right.

DePue: So you remember that incident.

Perry: Yeah, I remember.

DePue: "With complete disregard for personal safety and though continually subjected to intense enemy machine gun and small arms fire, Major Perry directed the attack of his unit so as to dislodge the enemy force with a minimum of losses to his own units."

Perry: Right.

DePue: "On numerous occasions he moved above the hill, completely exposing himself to the intense enemy fire, to better assist in the adjustment of artillery fire and mortar fire and to render words of encouragement to his assaulting elements. Major Perry's selfless devotion to duty, his inspiring leadership and courage reflect the highest credit on himself and are in keeping with the esteemed traditions of the military service."

Perry: Did you ever run across a (Olinto) Barsanti.?

DePue: No.

Perry: He's a West Point graduate. (According to Clay Blair, in The Forgotten War, Barsanti was an ROTC graduate of the University of Nevada.) He's a colonel. He was in charge of our regiment at that time. Barsanti. He hadn't been promoted to a colonel, but he went on to be a four-star general.

DePue: Was he in this action here, you're talking about?

Perry: He was in that action early. Yeah.

DePue: You had talked before that what you were doing was strictly what you were supposed to be doing, but this is written up to say that this is an exceptional, courageous act.

Perry: That's the way I look at it, but...

DePue: Did you feel at the time—

Perry: I didn't go out there to say that, Hey, today, I'm going to go get a Bronze Star; I want to do this and do that. I didn't do that. I went in there to do my job and perform, and if I reflected those things to my soldiers and to other people, that was it.

DePue: Did you understand when you were moving around like this that you were under fire and—

Perry: I surely did.

DePue: Worried about getting shot?

Perry: You have to worry about getting the troops and doing what you're supposed to be doing. If I was going to be shot, I guess I was going to be shot.

DePue: So while you're doing this, what's uppermost in your mind is getting the job done?

Perry: Troops. Getting the job done. Getting the job done.

DePue: Did you see other people perform the same kind of courage?

Perry: Not all of them, no. But I would say that someone that I saw that was lingering behind or something like that, I would tell them to get going and things like that. No, I couldn't say that.

DePue: But did you see other officers that—

Perry: But I'm not saying—

DePue: —were equally as courageous as what's written up here?

Perry: Yeah. And some of them got written up, and some of them didn't. Now, I didn't know I was going to be written up.

DePue: Do you know how it happened that you got written up for this one?

Perry: I don't, other than I know that I guess people saw me operating and doing the things that I was supposed to be doing. That's the way I took it.

DePue: Mm-hmm. What I was—

Perry: Maybe they'd inspired others.

DePue: Yeah, it obviously made a huge difference—

Perry: That's right. That's right.

DePue: —in the success of the unit that day.

Perry: That's right. That's right.

DePue: Well, it's hard for me, again, to comprehend that kind of courage on a day-to-day, everyday basis.

Perry: It was something you had to do. I guess I was given that job to do, and that was it.

DePue: After something like that, would it kind of occur to you, holy cow, I was pretty darn close to dying?

Perry: Well, I thank the good Lord that he let me get through.

DePue: Okay. This is about the same timeframe—we're into May and especially June and July—where the nature of combat in Korea started to change a little bit. Is that right?

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: How did that change? What was the change?

Perry: Well, I think the big change is that the North Koreans more or less had given up, and except in certain areas, Chinese was our main threat. The North Koreans had been taken out of the picture, nearly, and we'd settled back into, I guess, a more routine Army life, if you can say that.

DePue: The lines became more static about that time.

Perry: Static, a little more stable. Uh-huh.

DePue: This is also about the time—late June, or middle of June—that they started talking about the peace talks.

Perry: Oh yeah.

DePue: What was your reaction, hearing that they were going to start peace talks?

Perry: Well, of course, everyone was anxious that they get peace talks going. Now, that was at Kaesong.

DePue: Right.

Perry: And people were anxious to get things going. They'd give us reports in the *Stars and Stripes;* that was the Army newspaper. They'd write it up, and we'd read that. And, of course, it got the hopes up for the troops, even though sometimes after they said it was going to be that way, it went on for another year and a half

DePue: Was there anybody that you knew who was eager to get it on and push them all the way back up to the Yalu?

Perry: I guess all of our troops were. Not individually, no. Not individually. We were capable of doing it—do it.

DePue: Would that have been your attitude?

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: Let's keep fighting until we win?

Perry: Keep going until we get a truce. Because there wasn't any worth to their truce. You knew they'd break truces. So that was it.

DePue: Okay, so let's get a truce once we've absolutely won?

Perry: Yeah, right; absolutely get one going.

DePue: Okay. Anything else that you want to mention here during this timeframe of the combat?

Perry: No, no.

DePue: How did this timeframe compare in your mind with running the Gauntlet and that experience up north?

Perry: Well, no comparison. No comparison. This is more or less like a rocking chair compared to a straight-backed chair. A rocking chair, you can sort of relax, where the other, straight-back, you have to be on your toes. That's a poor...

DePue: It's just the level of intensity when you—

Perry: Yeah, right.

DePue: —were up north was much, much greater?

Perry: Yeah. Right, right.

DePue: Okay. Did you feel your own confidence in your ability and the troops' ability growing then?

Perry: Oh, yeah, you trained all the time.

DePue: Even when you're out of the line?

Perry: Yeah, yeah. We would run combat exercises with training and things like that. That was my main concern; they would ask for a counterattack plan—our plan for the attack—but sometimes we didn't get to go and really put it through its paces to see if it would work. That was my big standpoint and bugaboo about intelligence. You would give everything, and you'd have a counterattack planned. The plan was logical, but you never got to really implement it, try it out. You know what I'm saying? That's what I took exception to.

DePue: Is that because the conditions that were supposed to trigger the plans always changed?

Perry: No, that was because you didn't have time to get into the terrain, and you moved on to the next place.

DePue: Oh.

Perry: That was the execution of it.

DePue: Okay. When did you finally come back to the States? From what I was able to gather—

Perry: Fifty. In '50, I think it was, wasn't it?

DePue: Well, from what I was able to gather—

Perry: Fifty-one?

DePue: October of 1951?

Perry: Yeah, October '51. September is when it actually started, and October '51.

DePue: Did you come back on a ship?

Perry: No, I flew back.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: Things had changed.

DePue: (laughs) What was the reunion with your wife like when you got back?

Perry: I don't remember. I remember her meeting me, and I remember that I knew I had a son I hadn't seen for a while. Those are the things. The other is sort of vague. Sixty years ago, I don't remember as far as eating a hamburger or an ice cream cone.

DePue: Okay. Did you have any difficulties adjusting back to civilian life?

Perry: I didn't. I heard that other people had. And maybe I did. Maybe I didn't recognize them. But I adjusted all right.

DePue: Because coming back to the States and living in a civilian environment, there's nothing that's similar with your experiences in Korea, I would think.

Perry: No, there isn't. No, no. But don't forget, I went from there to a Reserve outfit. I went and took command of a training center in Madison, Wisconsin.

DePue: So you didn't end up and stay in Washington.

Perry: No, I didn't. I went to Madison, Wisconsin. I had my two daughters there, and I had a normal life. I had a nice home on the Lake Mendota, and the adjustment was good, because I was dealing with soldiers like you. In the daytime, they worked with jobs in the economy, and at night, or once a week or whatever it was, they had training.

DePue: I know that we want to move on here pretty quickly, but just some more general questions for you to reflect on things.

Perry: Okay.

DePue: What do you think was the toughest part of your tour, your experience in Korea?

Perry: Well, the toughest part was going to Korea—being deployed and going right into combat.

DePue: How was that the toughest part?

Perry: Well, that gave you the indoctrination on what you faced in the future.

DePue: A crash course in learning how to survive in combat?

Perry: Right, right.

DePue: Okay. We talked a little bit about it, the integration in the military. Since you were at the very beginning of that...

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: After seeing this newly integrated army in combat, what would your assessment be?

Perry: My assessment was still the same, that it could be done. And they fought good. They fought.

DePue: Was it the 38th Regiment that before the war was the black regiment?

Perry: No. It was in the 9th Infantry, 3rd Battalion.

DePue: Okay, I'm sorry.

Perry: It was the 3rd Battalion.

DePue: Okay. Was that battalion any more or less successful once they got to combat?

Perry: No. No. In fact maybe they didn't come up to the standard that some of the others did, yeah. They hadn't reached that proficiency.

DePue: What did you think of the fellow soldiers you served with, in terms of the quality of their fighting abilities?

Perry: Well, I was very fortunate. I had good soldiers, and of course, at that time, we had the cream of the crop for World War II and Korea. And Korea, we had trained the units, and we got a lot of people integrated into the units. The thing was that they were not physically qualified, maybe, as some of the younger units, because they were older people they had pulled in from the ROTC.

DePue: Mm-hmm. You're a young officer at this time, and maybe you kind of got into this territory already, but how good were the NCOs that you had? How important was that part of the team.

Perry: They were good. I had good noncommissioned officers.

DePue: Were these mostly World War II veterans?

Perry: A lot of them were, yeah.

DePue: Did they seem to be better?

Perry: Not necessarily. I don't know what you're comparing black with white, or...

DePue: No, no, I just mean the NCOs.

Perry: No, no. But what I'm saying, the noncommissioned officers, you asked me the question, and I don't know whether you're comparing it with something you've already heard or some knowledge you have, and I don't know what that is, so that's it.

DePue: Well—

Perry: But I was saying that they were the same.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: Noncommissioned officers are good. They're the backbone. They're good. There's bad ones, but there's good ones and outstanding ones.

DePue: Did you have any KATUSAs [Korean Augmentees to the United States Army] that were assigned to the 9th Regiment?

Perry: Yeah, but they were put under headquarters command, under the headquarters company, and they were operating under the S-4 mostly. When you say KATUSAs...

DePue: The Korean soldiers who...

Perry: Yeah, but when you said KATUSAs, I'm talking about the supply type. We had supply Koreans that we used for chugging up the hills and carrying ammunition and supply train. But we also had Korean soldiers. At one time, we'll say out of a normal squad, you could have as many as six Koreans in there. And some of them were not good, some of them were spies, and some of them were well-trained, and they did all right. But overall, in general, I would not want them.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: They belonged with their troops, and that was it, and wherever they had—

DePue: Rather than integrate them in with Americans?

Perry: Yeah, rather than integrate them.

DePue: Did that integration process happen after you got back from Kunu-ri, or was that going on even when you were moving north towards the Yalu?

Perry: Well, I would say it happened after Kunu-ri. After Kunu-ri, and after the Wonju area. And it was an ongoing process. You didn't know when you were going to get them. But when they were trying to train the Korean regiments and the divisions, well, we didn't see as many come back in, because they were taking them and drafting them into their army. So it stopped the flow of those. Then our people, as far as the supply of human beings was concerned, it picked up. We got our replacements all right.

DePue: You've talked a little bit about this already, but I want you to evaluate the—

Perry: This is a hard, hard chair.

DePue: Are you needing to take a quick break here?

Perry: No, no.

DePue: Evaluate the differences between German enemy, North Korean, and the Chinese.

Perry: You can't. The German was Caucasian, and as I told you before, they were a gentleman as far as warfare was concerned. They believed in our Christianity; they believed in this, that, and the other.

DePue: Basically the same rules of war?

Perry: Yeah, same rules of war. But the North Koreans and the Chinese, they didn't have any. They just had one thing: kill the Americans. And that was it. There's no comparison.

DePue: Did you have respect for the North Korean and Chinese fighting ability?

Perry: Oh, respected them that they had the manpower and that they could manipulate them the way they wanted without all the modern communications, things like that. Yeah, they were a force to be recognized. Yeah, and to fight up against them, there's no comparison in the two types of warfare, even. As I told you before, I think I told you, that the Germans fought a gentleman's war, and in Korea, we fought like the Indian warfare. I think I told you that before.

DePue: Okay, and from your standpoint, was the Korean experience, then—

Perry: Different.

DePue: —much tougher?

Perry: Yes, right. Yeah, much tougher. You had more exposure to the terrain, where in Germany, you could find billets and things like that; in Korea, there wasn't any such thing.

DePue: Just plop down wherever you are—

Perry: Manhole.

DePue: —in the hole.

Perry: Yeah, in the hole, and if you were lucky enough, you got a little squad tent, and hide in a hole, and that's it.

DePue: Were you able to stay in touch with your family while you were in Korea?

Perry: I wrote letters, yes.

DePue: Were you getting letters?

Perry: I got letters.

DePue: Were you even getting letters when you were up north beyond Pyongyang?

Perry: When we come back in reserve.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: You wouldn't get it up there in the top. You might get the *Stars and Stripes* because they'd mail it, but the mail didn't always come through. When you come back into reserve areas or you rotated back, they'd have mail call for you, when you had hot chow and things like that. And yeah, those communications was still there. It wasn't a big change. It wasn't a big change, other than that you didn't have to use stamps.

DePue: Especially during the time when there's an awful lot of movement going on, how often were you and your men getting hot meals?

Perry: Well, that is one thing I always took pride in. Whenever we could stop and have it, and we had the rations, we got hot meals. At least try to get them once a week, twice a week. Sometimes when you're back at the reserve area, you got hot meals every day, and it wasn't C-rations; it was cooked. It was a good meal. I always took pride in selecting good cooks and having good food. And I had an officers' mess set up and had a table for them, and they got to eat after the men. We didn't eat before the men. My policy was, My men come first, and then me. And that's the way it was. We didn't get anything to eat special on the table other than what was served in the line.

DePue: You were there fifteen-plus months, actually in Korea, in combat, close, or very close to combat.

Perry: Yeah, I think it was credited to eighteen months, I'm not sure.

DePue: Okay. Any leave time in there?

Perry: Had one R&R, back to Japan.

DePue: When was that, do you recall?

Perry: It was when we had a break up on the line, one of them.

DePue: This would have been in the springtime, I would guess?

Perry: I was trying to think. Yeah, somewhere that sticks in my mind. I don't know. I want to say May or something like that.

DePue: Was it tough to go back after that?

Perry: No, not for me. I knew I had to.

DePue: Were you eager to get back or anxious to get back, maybe?

Perry: Well, after you see how the Japanese lived and how they went on and the things that went on, yeah, I was glad to get started back.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: And you got a new change of clothes.

DePue: Well, that was the next question here. How often did you guys get a shower, even?

Perry: Oh yeah, yeah. We got showers, at least try to. When they come off the line, when they rotated back, we always had a hot shower set up for us. You got clean clothing.

DePue: But Jim, we're not talking about every night; we're talking about every—

Perry: Oh, no.

DePue: —month or so?

Perry: Oh, about every month. Yeah, yeah.

DePue: People getting pretty ripe about that time.

Perry: No, no. You could take a spit-bath in a helmet. You required shaving. Required shaving. Washing your face, hands. You did that. That's where the old iron bucket or the old steel pot came in handy, where the new helmet is not very adequate.

DePue: You remember any especially humorous incidents or events that happened while you were in Korea?

Perry: Oh, yeah. Once, we was up on an OP, outpost, and it had been snowing; it was cold. And you know what the 5-in-1 rations are?

DePue: Yep.

Perry: Okay. I took my S-3 sergeant, myself, and my S-2 sergeant. No, he was the assistant S-3. I'm sorry, lieutenant, sergeant, and myself, and we went up to observe the Chinese. That's when the Chinese was coming in. We observed them. We took a 5-in-1 ration, and it was frozen slush, you know, pineapple and all, the fruit in the cocktail and stuff like that. Three of us ate a 5-in-1 ration for one meal. And that was the funniest thing. And to this day, my assistant -3, he remembers that too, and the sergeant. They remember that.

DePue: That you were eating like kings that day?

Perry: Yeah, eating, and not only that, but the main thing was eating. Three of us ate rations for fifteen people. (laughter) And didn't even feel hungry when we

were eating, then eating more. It was because our metabolism, and the going through and observing, seeing what you saw. That's the first day that I ever realized that they raise cotton in North Korea.

DePue: Oh really?

Perry: Yeah. Well, see, the Russians influenced them a lot. The Russians, with the pork—they had pork hog farms and everything like that.

DePue: It sounds to me, Jim, like almost the entire time you were in Korea, you were—

Perry: Doing something.

DePue: —you were very hungry—

Perry: Yeah.

DePue: —cold—

Perry: Right.

DePue: —and very tired.

Perry: Yep, you're right. That is correct. That sums it up pretty good, down to those three words.

DePue: Okay. Can you tell us about maybe your worst moment while you were there?

Perry: My worst moment was when we were going through the roadblock at Kunu-ri—you call it a gap, I call it the roadblock—at Kunu-ri. We were completely cut off from any of our other troops or other regiments, and they had written us off the map as being lost. They sent telegrams back to my family and my wife and my mother that I had been killed, and then they found out that that night, I had come wandering in, I guess, into the reserve area.

DePue: Did you ever hear any stories about the reaction of your wife and your mother when they found out you were alive after all?

Perry: Nothing other than relief. Nope, I didn't hear that.

DePue: Okay.

Perry: They were so glad to hear, I guess, that they couldn't put it in words.

DePue: But they didn't hear it from you, I would assume. You're not making anything like a phone call or anything.

Perry: No, no. I did later on; I think, made one phone call.

DePue: Was that while you were on R&R, maybe?

Perry: On R&R, I made a phone call. And in fact, I picked up a string of Mikimoto pearls6 for my wife.

DePue: So there you go. You probably hadn't had a chance to spend much money in combat, had you?

Perry: No, no.

DePue: Well, let me ask just some very general questions in closing. You were there during the absolute worst of the Korean War, that first year.

Perry: I'd say so.

DePue: Do you think the sacrifice that you and so many other people experienced while you were in Korea, was that worth it?

Perry: Was it worth it?

DePue: Yeah.

Perry: Yes. You know that without even asking me that question.

DePue: Well, this is an opinion question.

Perry: Well, it might be—

DePue: You don't always get the same answer.

Perry: Well, I understand. Yes, I do. Because I had at a different level than maybe a lot of other people had. I had it at my command level, and the attitude that I had, which might have been different than the individual. Like you said, it's an opinion. My opinion was, yes, we were worth it; we did what we were supposed to do; and we stopped communism, as far as I can see, or at that time, in the Far East.

DePue: And that was the reason it was worth it.

Perry: That's right.

DePue: How did that experience change you, or did it change you?

Perry: I don't think it changed me. I think I was just as gung-ho as I ever was after I got out of Korea, went to other places. I implemented the same thoughts that I had, and I did the job that I was supposed to do, and I took my commands from the sources concerned.

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[6] The Mikimoto company in Japan perfected the art of developing high quality cultured pearls.

DePue: Did your wife or your mother or anybody else ever suggest that you had changed somewhat while you were over there?

Perry: Well, my mother might have, but I didn't take that. That's been a long time ago. Oh, Mom, you don't need to say that, or something like that, you know, dismissive. My wife, I'm sure, saw a lot of change. Yeah.

DePue: After that time, fifteen years later, Americans were consumed by the Vietnam War and all of the debate about the Vietnam War. What was your thought about that?

Perry: The Vietnam War?

DePue: Yeah.

Perry: My thought about that was that we are fighting another limited Korea. In other words, I think we were there to stop communism. And I didn't change my mind there. My son went.

DePue: Did you have some resentment that the American army wasn't allowed to stay there and win it?

Perry: Yes, I did. This is opinion, now. My opinion was, if the State Department would have kept out of it and let us do our job, we could have won the war. It was already being won, and they stopped it. I'm sorry I keep moving around, but I—

DePue: No, that's fine.

Perry: —but this chair is getting hard as a board.

DePue: Well, we're about done here. But I very much want to get your opinions on a couple things. The Korean War is known as the Forgotten War.

Perry: Yes.

DePue: Do you have any resentment about the way it's kind of lost to American memory? Does that bother you?

Perry: No, it doesn't bother me. It might have bothered a lot of them, and a lot of the people are dead. You have to realize that Korea was in two phases. There was an early group that went in, and then they stayed long enough before the truce. There's been a lot of people integrated into the Second Division, and you have different chains of thought: the younger thought and the original Korean thought veteran. And that's it.

DePue: There are very distinct stages of that.

Perry: Oh yeah, very distinct. I don't resent anything of being a forgotten war. It wasn't forgotten by me.

DePue: Okay. That's a good way of looking at it.

Perry: That's it.

DePue: Any last words of wisdom or comments you've got for us, then?

Perry: The only thing I have to say is just keep up the good work.

DePue: In recording the stories of people like yourself?

Perry: Yeah, right.

DePue: Well, it's very important, and it's been a real pleasure for me to hear your story, Jim. Thank you very much.

Perry: Thank you. I hope—I tried to help.

DePue: Oh, you did.

(end of interview)