Interview with Robert Berry

VRK-A-L-2007-018

Interview #1: September 12, 2007

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Wednesday, September 12, 2007. My name is Mark DePue; I'm Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I am here today with Robert Berry. We're in Bob's residence in Bettendorf, Iowa. We just came from a meeting of his Korean War group that always meets at Maid Rite in East Moline. Is it in East Moline that we meet?

Berry: Yes.

DePue: A bunch of Korean War veterans get together and just share the good memories, and probably talk some things out as well. Bob, it's a real pleasure for me to be here. Thank you very much.

Berry: You're welcome.

DePue: This is what I usually like to do, Bob. To start with, give me a little bit of information about when and where you were born.

Berry: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, August 9, 1930.

DePue: Okay. Did you grow up in Chicago?

Berry: I grew up in Chicago. I left Chicago when I was approximately seventeen years old. I moved to Bettendorf, Iowa, which was the home base of my father, that grew up here. I had a grandpa and uncles and aunts that lived here at the time, and I moved out here on a vacation. I enjoyed it so much that because it was a rural area and a country type atmosphere, and I got a little tired of Chicago and all the people and all the hullabaloo, or whatever you want to call it, the rustle bustle, and so I liked the quiet, more, life.

DePue: Were you out on your own at that time, or did your father move here?

Berry: My father had died when I was 6 years old from a heart attack. And he died at the age of 35. My mother was left with four children to raise.

DePue: What neighborhood of Chicago?

Berry: On the North Side of Chicago. I grew up around Lincoln and Belmont, Belmont and Diversey, and Belmont and Clybourn Avenue, and mostly on the North Side.

DePue: What was the ethnic breakdown of that neighborhood?

Berry: Well, it was a lot of Swedish, a lot of Germans, a lot of—a few Polish, but mostly Swedish and German, and some Irish as well.

DePue: What was your father doing before he passed away?

Berry: He was an automobile mechanic.

DePue: A kind of job where you can go anywhere to find work.

Berry: Right, right.

DePue: So he had pretty steady work through the early part of the Depression?

Berry: Not too much, because of the fact that he had contracted rheumatic fever as a kid, and consequently it weakened his heart, and so he could only do so much work.

DePue: So, can I assume, then, that you guys didn't have much money?

Berry: No. When my dad died, it left my mother with four children to raise, and I think she had total assets of $38.00.

DePue: Did she have work herself at that time?

Berry: No.

DePue: So how did you guys live during those dark times?

Berry: Between Aid to Dependent Children and also from help from my uncles and aunts, and doing odd jobs, and so on and so forth as kids, and everything else, we just—we managed to survive.

DePue: I can see why you were happy to come back out to Iowa. Seventeen years old. Had you graduated from high school then?

Berry: No, no, no. I had two years high school, and I didn't like school that much at the time. And back then a young man could go any place in the country and get a job, because of the lack of manpower during the war.

DePue: You were born late—mid-1930. So you certainly remember Pearl Harbor?

Berry: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

DePue: Were you listening—

Berry: I happened to be selling newspapers at the time when the word came out that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. And consequently they ran an extra edition of the newspapers saying that the United States was at war with Japan.

DePue: What were your thoughts when you heard about that?

Berry: Really, I was quite—I was too young to really catch the full brunt of it. But I really didn't have too much to think about it at the time.

DePue: You were only eleven years old.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: But you're approaching your teen years while the war was going on. Were you watching and paying attention to World War II pretty closely?

Berry: Oh, yes, oh, yes. And I was a lot of things, with the paper drives and all kinds of different things during the war to try to stimulate the front, the home front, and to try and relieve some of the pressures at home while the men were out fighting and stuff. I was too young to enlist to go in the service, but if perhaps a year or two later, I would have gladly volunteered.

DePue: So, like everybody else, caught up in the spirit of the day—

Berry: Right.

DePue: —and needed to win this thing.

Berry: Right.

DePue: You got interested in military service during the war, then, during the Second World War?

Berry: Yes.

DePue: Then the war ends in '45, and it must have been about 1947 when you came here to Bettendorf.

Berry: Yes, '46 and '47, yeah.

DePue: What were you doing, then, when you moved here?

Berry: Well, I moved here and I worked for the—I lived with my uncle and aunt—consequently I worked in a local factory, and I was doing anything I could to earn a

living. I was trying to help make enough money to send home to my mother and help support my brothers and sister.

DePue: You mentioned there were four of you. Where did you come along?

Berry: I'm the second oldest. My older brother was killed by a hit-and-run driver when he was twelve years old. And then that left the three of us, and so I was trying to make some money to help my mother raise my younger brother and sister.

DePue: Well, your mother dealt with quite a bit, then, when you were a young lad.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: Between 1947 and 1950, then, you were working at this—

Berry: At the Bettendorf Company in Bettendorf, Iowa, yes.

DePue: In June of 1950, when the North Koreans attacked South Korea, obviously you were paying a little bit of attention to that. What were your thoughts at that time?

Berry: Really I didn't pay much attention to it at all, except until I was drafted and they talked about going to Korea, and I didn't even know where Korea was at. At the time I never studied it that much in school, as far as geography was concerned. And I really didn't know what it was all about when I got drafted. As far as why we were in Korea, and what we were doing there, all I know is that the federal government had a war going on over there.

DePue: And that you're going to be going to it.

Berry: Right.

DePue: You were drafted, though, in the middle of 1951?

Berry: Yes.

DePue: So that's a—

Berry: May of '51.

DePue: So roughly a full year after the war started.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: During that interim period, I know that you mentioned earlier that you had a girlfriend here in the States.

Berry: Yes. I had a—she later became my fiancée and then my wife eventually, but a local girl that grew up here in town. Like I say, we finally got married after I got home from service.

DePue: Well, it's going to take a while before we get back to your return from overseas. What was her name?

Berry: Vera Lybeck was her maiden name.

DePue: How do you spell Lybeck?

Berry: L-y-b-e-c-k.

DePue: Is that a good German name?

Berry: Yes.

DePue: What was she doing?

Berry: She was a schoolteacher.

DePue: So here you are, a high school dropout dating a schoolteacher, huh?

Berry: Right, right.

DePue: Okay. How did it come to pass, then, that you got drafted? Talk a little bit about that.

Berry: Well, because of my name was Berry, it was easy to remember. It was on the top of a list, and so consequently when they had the draft, when they sent out the draft notices, I had to report for a physical. I was classified then; later on I was classified as 1-A, and so then I was told to report for Des Moines, Iowa, for a physical, and the pass.

DePue: And what did Vera think about you being drafted? You were engaged at that time?

Berry: Well, at the time, she didn't like it too well, but it was one of those things, because she had lost a brother during World War II in the Air Force in Europe. And so consequently, she had some bitter memories of that, of losing a brother. And so consequently, she didn't like the fact that I had to leave. What can you do? You had to—it was the law.

DePue: Which she understood—

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: —but didn't like it. And your mother—the same reaction?

Berry: Well, yes, yes. Because my mother, of course, was in Chicago with my brothers and sister, and she didn't like the fact that, you know, one of her own had to participate in the service.

DePue: And at this time you were sending money to your mom to help out?

Berry: Prior, prior to that, yes.

DePue: And being drafted, I'm sure your pay dropped a little bit.

Berry: Yes, yes, yes.

DePue: Okay. Where did you go for basic training, then?

Berry: I was inducted at Des Moines, Iowa, and then I went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois to get a haircut and to get some uniforms and some shots. And then I had my basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

DePue: Okay, well, I've been there. You were not alone to go to basic training there.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: What was basic training like for you?

Berry: Well, it was rough. And because of the fact that I was not what you'd call in real physical shape at the time. Although I loved sports, and I had played a lot of sports and so on, but naturally you're not in shape like you would be in basic training. And I'm a guy that occasionally I like to think for myself. And the turnover from civilian to military life was a little bit difficult at first because of the fact that I was not used to being told everything, what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.

DePue: Well, you had grown up for a lot of years. You were basically the man of the family, weren't you?

Berry: A little bit.

DePue: So you had a lot of responsibilities, then, too. Were the drill sergeants you had World War II veterans, Korean War veterans?

Berry: Well, a couple of them were Korean—come back from Korea. But there were a lot of young people that were cadre that were sent down there, that were like graduates of ROTC or something like that. And basically they'll all try to do their job, that they're there to convert you from civilian life to a military life. And sometimes you resented it, and sometimes you had to go along with it.

DePue: Yeah. Do you remember any particular stories from basic that stuck with you?

Berry: Well, in basic training, I was a temporary squad leader in my particular squad. And one of our men that was in the squad, he committed suicide because he couldn't get along in military life whatsoever. And at that time I thought it was a little ridiculous that they couldn't defer him, or couldn't—because he had hardships at home and so on. And a little later on, it got to him so bad that he committed suicide. And of course, I had to give a report as to what kind of a character he was, what his attitude was about military life. And I hope they took my word for it at the time. But I

remember that, and of course there was people that was being drafted from all walks of life, and all different areas in the country. And some were real nice people, you know, real responsible type people. And then others were – sometimes you'd wonder if the stairs ran all the way to the attic, you know.

DePue: You were a little bit older than a lot of the recruits, weren't you?

Berry: Right, right. Yeah, I. I had turned twenty-one years of age at Fort Leonard Wood in basic training.

DePue: In those circumstances, did you end up getting called things like "pop" and "old man"?

Berry: Not really. Not really. No, I just got along with them, but the only thing was that I was trying to do the best I could without getting myself in any trouble, because all I wanted to do is to go and fulfill my obligation to the military, and to get out of there, and to go home. And—

DePue: And I'm sure you weren't alone in that sentiment.

Berry: Yeah, right.

DePue: When did you find out that you were going to be an infantryman, and that you were going to be in the Airborne, of all places? How did that happen?

Berry: Well, of course, I took engineering basic down at Fort Leonard Wood. And because of my background in mechanics and that sort of thing, they scheduled me to go to Fort Leonard Wood to be an engineer. And consequently, while I was in engineering basic and learning all the rigmarole of engineering, and so on, why, like I said, there was men that were all from all walks of life, and everything. And some of them were like very responsible, very good type people. And others were, if you put it in plain English, a couple of knuckleheads, or you wondered if they could walk around a corner, you know, without being told. At the time I was under the wrong impression that—I felt at the time I was informed, or whatever, I was misinformed – that after graduation, we would all go as a unit to Korea, and to be in a combat zone. And I didn't realize that most of us were just replacements, and we'd go all over the world or all over the country. And so one day they—

DePue: You thought you were going to be in an engineering unit, I suspect.

Berry: Oh, I thought I was going to be in an engineering unit, yes. And then it turned out that they posted on the bulletin board about they were going to give tests to join the Airborne, if anybody was interested in a physical exertion test to join the Airborne. And because I was one of the older men, and I wasn't quite in shape, and everything else, why, these guys gave me the horse laugh and told me that I'd never be able to make it, as far as physical was concerned. And I was nuts that I would volunteer to go in the Airborne, or so on. But my first love, if could have had the health, and also the education, if I could have had that, I would have been a pilot. I would love to be a

jet jockey. And I couldn't fly because of my health and also because of my education, and so consequently I figured the closest thing to it I could get to go up was the Airborne. And so that's why I volunteered. And I made the physical. I passed the physical, and so consequently I was picked to go down to Fort Benning, Georgia, for Airborne training school after graduation from the engineers.

DePue: Okay. I've been there. Was that where you joined up with the 187th, then?

Berry: No. After graduation from Airborne school, it was approximately 168, or 170-some people that were in my company, to fall out for training. And finally, after the physical was over with and the training was over with, why, I think there was something like sixty-two or sixty-three of us that graduated. The rest were flunked out, or sent to someplace else, or whatever. .

DePue: Well, I have a great feeling of your accomplishment, especially when people are giving you a hard time about not being in shape to go there in the first place.

Berry: Well, I went down to Fort Benning, Georgia. I felt I'd never worked for anything so hard in all my life as down there. But I was very content and happy that I completed it and I didn't drop out. I made it, and I felt like I've accomplished something. And so consequently, when I got overseas, there was only a fourth tier of about eight or nine of us that were Airborne status that was on this ship going over. We landed at Camp Drake in Tokyo, Japan. And consequently, we were interviewed by an officer over there at the time, and he looked at my record and seen that I was Airborne status. He told me that if I cared to relinquish my status as Airborne and go to a straight leg outfit, that he could have me in Korea and home again in less than six months. But he didn't explain that I'd probably be in a bag when I came home, because they were in dire need of bodies on the front line. And not because of that, but I asked the officer at the time, I said, "Well, I don't understand why I should go through all this training, and the government should spend so much money to train me to be a jumper, just to give it up that quick." I said, "I don't know, I'd rather go to an Airborne outfit." So at the time the 187th was stationed at Camp Chickamauga in Bapu, Japan. And I became part of the organization down there. I was in the Headquarters Company of the 1st Battalion. And I was assigned to a P & A Platoon as an engineer. And—

DePue: What's a P & A Platoon?

Berry: A P & A Platoon, a Pioneer and Ammunition, so-called, they call it, that's what it stands for. But primarily it's a company carpenter, it's a company demolition man, it's a company mine man, and just whatever is necessary that somebody close by that knows a little bit about engineering.

DePue: Had you gotten a little bit of engineering training at Leonard Wood, then?

Berry: Oh, yeah, yeah. I had six or eight weeks of basic training in engineering. And I had mines, I had bridges, I had everything imaginable, you know. But when I got assigned to Headquarters Company, and then of course I was in the P & A Platoon, a lot of times I was the so-called company carpenter. And other times I was demolition

man, and once in a while would give instruction on mines to people that hadn't had any education on mines other than what they saw in basic training.

DePue: You're in the 187th Airborne regiment in the Headquarters Company?

Berry: Headquarters Company.

DePue: And they were still where in Japan?

Berry: At Camp Chickamauga in Bapu, Japan, in southern Japan.

DePue: How would you spell that? Do you know?

Berry: B-a-b-y, I think.

DePue: There's a B-a-p-u in Japan. Is this the correct one??

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: Was the trip over from the States to Japan memorable at all for you?

Berry: Well, at the time going overseas, I think there was 3,200 of us going over on the ship, and I was on a troop ship. And consequently we all, you know, tried to get by as easy as we could and do whatever we had to do, and that was it. But there was only—like I say, there was only six or eight of us, or something, that had Airborne status at the time. And so they assigned us to different jobs and whatever we were capable of doing. I was just more or less one of guys going over, but on the way coming back, I was assigned—because I was assigned to—well, no, I'll take it back. Going over, they utilized us something like SPs, because we were only a small group.

DePue: Security Patrol?

Berry: Yeah. And going over, we just stood guard at different gangways and different gangplanks, and told the guys they couldn't go on there, or whatever, and that sort of thing. And then coming back, I was assigned to the cooks, the bake shop. And of course, these were civilian cooks, and what do they call them, not regular Navy men, but they were civilians working on there.

DePue: Stewards?

Berry: No, no, not stewards. (exhales) That word—

DePue: Oh, don't worry about it.

Berry: Merchant Marine.

DePue: Oh, Merchant Marine, okay.

Berry: Merchant Marine, yeah. They were Merchant Marines. There was an incident when I got assigned to the bake shop. I don't know if this is any, you know - this one guy was a baker, and he came on to me like he was some kind of a general, you know. And he started giving me all of these orders and all this kind of stuff, and what we're going to do and what we're not going to do, and he's laying the law down. And finally, I asked him, I says, “Pardon me.” I says, "Are you in the military?" And he says, "No, I'm a Merchant Marine." And I said, "Well, in other words, you're a civilian?" And he said, "Yes." And he says, "I'm a civilian working on a ship." "Well, fellow," I says, "if you don't mind," I says, "I'll do what you ask, and I'll do it, you know, as best as I can." But I said, "Get off this crap about giving me orders about everything to do. I've listened to that for the last few months, and I've had enough of it. I don't need any more, especially from a civilian." If you were military, that's different." But I said, "You treat me like I'm a man and not like I'm your whipping boy, and I will get along fine."

DePue: (laughter)

Berry: You know, so we did. No problem after that.

DePue: When you arrived, the 187th were in Japan. Had they had some time in Korea before you?

Berry: Prior, they had made two combat jumps prior to before I joined the outfit. And they were two jumps that I understand were up toward Seoul, up around in Seoul.

DePue: I think it was on either the drive to or just north of Pyongyang.

Berry: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: So that would have been late 1950.

Berry: Yeah. And so I says, "There was a lot of people that were injured and hurt, and so on before, and—" (phone rings)

DePue: Okay, we'll pause that.

(break in tape)

DePue: Okay, we're recording again here, Bob.

Berry: All right.

DePue: So the 187th had been in Korea, they had made a couple of jumps, and they'd lost a lot of people in the process, obviously.

Berry: Oh, yeah.

DePue: I mean, they were there for the toughest part of the fighting at the first year.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: And they had been in Japan for a while by the time you got there?

Berry: Yeah. They went back to Japan, There was rumors. I don't know if it ever came about, or if it was true, or not, but there was rumors that if the 187th Airborne ever came back to Korea, that the Chinese would sacrifice a full division, if they had to, to get them, because they were not liked very much in Korea. And one thing I'll say — everybody that ever served with any group, if they had any pride in their group whatsoever, will always feel that they had one of the best groups that they served with, or a bunch of the best men, or whatever. But I will say one thing, back in Japan—in the non-combat areaI should say—there was a bunch of foul balls, a bunch of gooks, and a bunch of clowns that were in the group. But when we got in combat, there wasn't any better outfit in Korea.

DePue: So when you say—

Berry: They never backed up an inch from anybody.

DePue: When you say the 187th wasn't thought too well of, you mean that the North Koreans and the Chinese had an awful lot of respect for the 187th?

Berry: They didn't call them Angels from Hell for nothing.

DePue: Okay. How long were you with the 187th in Japan, then?

Berry: Actually, from—well, when I first got over there, I went over, knocked over, and—

DePue: '51?

Berry: —from '51—I became stationed from there until May of '53, until I got out.

DePue: Well, then, about May of '52 when you went over Korea, then.

Berry: Yeah. But I mean, actually, with the 187th, I was with them all the time.

DePue: So what kind of training did you do with the 187th in Japan?

Berry: Well, most of the time, it was physical combat training. We'd go up into the hills, and we're always combat ready at the time. Because we had the ability as an Airborne outfit to go any place or to strike any place in Korea, whether it be on the Yalu border or down in Pusan, we could strike any place in Korea on a twenty-four hour notice.

DePue: You already mentioned that the theater was in dire need of infantrymen.

Berry: Right, right.

DePue: You guys were a regiment filled with some of the best infantrymen in the United States Army.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: But they were kind of the fire brigade (unintelligible; overlapping conversation)

Berry: We were held in reserve at the time, for something that would break out, or a major thing, or so. And that's the reasons that we got called up to go to Koje-do when they captured General Dean down there in the Compound 76.

DePue: Well, that's an area I definitely want to spend some time listening to you explain. A little bit of background here for Koje-do: isn't it just south of the Pusan area?

Berry: Yes.

DePue: It's an island – is that the Yellow Sea or the Japanese Sea?

Berry: Off the mainland of the south of Korea. I don't know exactly the grid coordinates or anything on it, but I know it's just south. Now I understand that one of the guys was telling me, that was a stationed there as a straight leg, I should say. (That's a term that we use for non-Airborne: straight leg.) And he was a straight leg outfit that was stationed on the island itself, and they were part of the group that was taking care of all the prisoners. During the war, the biggest percentage of the Chinese and North Korean prisoners were shipped to Koje-do Island to be incarcerated down there.

DePue: These were not small prison camps, were they?

Berry: Oh, no. Oh, no. Compound 76 had over three thousand prisoners in it.

DePue: I've been reading about it. That was primarily a North Korean compound, from what I understand.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: Immediately prior to your going down there, well, for months before that, there had been a screening process going on, where they were determining whether these North Koreans wanted to go back to North Korea or wanted to stay in the South. And apparently the ROK [Republic of Korea] soldiers and the UN troops were doing the same things for the Chinese as well. That was the rub, and that was apparently what turned these prison camps into war zones themselves.

Berry: Right.

DePue: How much did you know about all of that?

Berry: I didn't know anything about it at all. I didn't even know it existed. I had no idea of Koje-do, what it was all about, or anything else at that time, because, like I say, I was

stationed in Japan, and we had moved from Camp Chickamauga to Camp Wood. And what they did, they split up the regiment. Most of the regiment was stationed at Camp Chickamauga and Beppo, and they took the first battalion down to Camp Wood and at Kumamoto, Japan, which is a very southern tip island, or southern part of. Where the second battalion went, I don't know, or the third battalion, I don't know. But one stayed at Camp Chickamauga; but the rest, we went down to Camp Wood. When we got the alert to move out, we were actually on a train heading for an air base in Japan to make a practice jump.

DePue: Was that your first practice jump in Japan?

Berry: Oh, no, no. But this was like a pay jump, or a practice jump.

DePue: Okay, so, to keep your status.

Berry: You keep your status, right. There was only something like a hundred of us, or less than that, 120 or something like that that was going to make this jump. So we were heading, and then they stopped the train in the middle of some little town The next thing you know, the train is backing up and we're heading back to camp, because we got a red alert. The alert came through that we went over to Pusan by air, but we didn't jump. We landed. And I was on the rear detail from Camp Wood at the time when we got there. Our basic job was to transport a lot of ammunition. We had a basic load of ammunition for the battalion, and we had to transfer that on aircraft, and then off onto trucks and whatever. And different things as far as the military unit need was for our supplies.

DePue: You were still in the P & A Platoon.

Berry: Yeah, I was still in the P & A Platoon, right. Consequently we went in to Koje-do, then—

DePue: You flew from Pusan to Koje-do?

Berry: Yeah. (phone rings)

(break in tape)

DePue: You were talking about going from Pusan to Koje-do, and I assume you flew there.

Berry: Yeah. Well, no. When we got to Pusan, yeah, we flew and landed in Pusan and unloaded. And we unloaded onto LSTs or LSTIs, and then went by ship to Koje-do. And once we got to Koje-do, of course we were in our own compound under Bob Weyer(?), in our own area, as the 1st Battalion, and as several companies that were in this one compound. And so consequently, we got to stay in our compound. That next day, or a few days later, we started building smaller compounds for the prisoners of war.

DePue: Had you been told much about what was going on inside these POW camps?

Berry: No, no. If you wanted to know anything, you asked the Japs, or you asked the Koreans. You didn't ask any of your own personnel.

DePue: So all you knew was you needed to build some small POW camps.

Berry: Yeah, right, right. And they just told us that they had so many prisoners in this one compound. Then finally the higher-up told us that they had so many prisoners in this one compound, and we've got to break them down from three thousand to three hundred in smaller compounds and make the whole bunch of them so that we could control them.

DePue: Now, by this time, though, I'm thinking, the North Korean and the Chinese prisoners had already captured General Dodd. General Dodd, and General Colson, who was on the outside of the wire, had already begun long negotiations with the North Koreans to gain his release. That was huge news back in the States. You probably found out about that later, but you didn't know anything about that.

Berry: No.

DePue: Okay, tell me a little bit more about building these small POW camps.

Berry: Well, after we built these small compounds, when we got them built, and of course, by doing that, we—everybody, regardless of what job they had, if were S-2, or if they were cloak and dagger, or cooks, or if they were a body, they were building the compounds, regardless of who they were – in our group, in the 1st Battalion, or in Headquarters Company.

DePue: Can you describe one of these compounds, the particular compounds?

Berry: Well, all they are is just a big enclosure in a box, and they put up posts and then string barbed wire around it, string wire around them on the inside, and then there is a no man's area. And then you build another row of wire, and so on. And so consequently, the prisoners, the ones that cooperated, we would escort them into the smaller compound. Then they would have to build shacks and stuff to live in, and so on, while we had control over them.

DePue: So the prisoners themselves are building their shelter.

Berry: Well, partially, yeah. And we'd give them some of the materials and stuff to do it.

DePue: These things were designed to hold, what, three to five hundred?

Berry: Well, they were—yeah, originally, I don't know for sure what the original thing was on it, as far as what they were designed for. But because of the fact that they were so huge. Each one of these compounds, we found later on, had tunnels that they had dug.

DePue: The older compounds.

Berry: The older compounds, from one compound to the next, they could go all over that island, practically. And, you know, I mean, from in our area, like, and to go into these compounds. And the thing I do remember prior to going in to—

DePue: Compound 76.

Berry: —76, we lined up for three days in a row, and we ran around that thing, doing the Airborne shuffle and doing exercises. Plus the fact, we went around that compound with tanks. Plus the fact that we went around that compound with military vehicles like jeeps with .50 calibers on them and .30 calibers on them. We walked around the compound with recoilless rifles. Went around the compound, stood out in the street with flamethrowers and shot the flamethrowers. And two or three days prior to going in there, to give the people—I would say the animals, not people—get them animals an idea of what we had firepower available, and what we could accomplish. To put it in plain English, they told us to go jump in a lake, you know.

DePue: The prisoners did.

Berry: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Just to make sure I've got this in context: what you're talking about here is, you're circling this huge Compound 76 where there are thousands of hardened prisoners – this was probably after the release of General Dodd—

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: —and after both General Dodd and Colson had left and had been reduced to colonels.

Berry: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DePue: And General Boatner came in.

Berry: Right.

DePue: Do you remember anything about General Boatner?

Berry: No.

All I can remember is during the compound seizure, somebody was standing up in a tower someplace, some high ranking officer standing up in a tower. I don't know what his rank was, or what his name was, or anything else. The guys were throwing concussion grenades and also smoke grenades into the compound during the conflict when we first went in. And all I can remember is hearing over the loudspeaker system was, "Do not throw any more grenades. Do not throw any more grenade.,"

DePue: Do you remember your instructions? I want to spend as much time as your memory recalls of exactly the assault on the prison camp. It boggles my mind that here we are; we have to assault a prison camp held by our enemy, because they had basically

taken over on the inside. Again, I think Compound 76 had a lot of the very dedicated, hard-nosed Communists, that they had separated themselves before—

Berry: They had went to the extent of making gas masks—

DePue: The Chinese had?

Berry: —out of cloth. For eyepieces, they used bottle caps and they cut the inner side of the bottle cap off. How they got their hands on bottle caps, I don't know. How they got their hands on any of that stuff, I don't know. They cut the bottle caps out. They turned around and they put some kind of, like, isinglass or something like that, in between and compressed it together, and that was their eyepieces. They took a canister and put it in the fires, and then stuffed it full of cloth, or something like that, to breathe through, supposedly a homemade gas mask. So when we threw these smoke grenades and tear gas grenades in, they didn't affect them that well.

DePue: What were the Americans told as far as rules of engagement – how you could use your weapons?

Berry: Well, I was different. I couldn't tell you what the Army, what the regular riflemen were doing. There were six of us in that compound that were carrying flamethrowers. And I was one of them.

DePue: Were you told you could—

Berry: I was standing right alongside of an officer, and I was given direct orders from him not to use that weapon unless he gives me a direct order to do so. Or the only reason, if he got hit, or killed, or whatever, or injured, and he couldn't give me an order, then I was to use my own common sense. We had turned them around like a bunch of cattle, or a bunch of geese, or a bunch of animals that we put them all in one big area, like, when we moved inside the compound, and we herded them into this one big corner. They were all, hundreds of them, in that area. The word went out over loudspeakers, megaphones, if they cared to surrender—we broke down into groups of two hundred or three hundred, like we wanted them to do—all they do is step forward, and we'd take care of them. The guys that tried to do that—when they left that huge pile of guys they tried to come to our side—they were killed halfway across, trying to get out of there.

DePue: By the other prisoners.

Berry: By the other prisoners, with a spear in the back. Back then, they had these corrugated metal roofs, and they gave them that metal for protection, or whatever. These guys cut that stuff up and made spears out of it and used them on a pole, or some kind of a stick. Later on, we found them up on the front lines like that, as well.

DePue: Wow.

Berry: And so that just shows you what kind of an enemy you're fighting, what kind of a IQ this person had, in the respect that they let somebody snow them to the point that they were invisible, that that spear would protect them. In the meantime, this other guy is sitting across the way, and he's got a BAR, [Browning Automatic Rifle] he's got an M-1 rifle, he's got a .45, he's got every kind of automatic weapon imaginable, and this guy's coming at you with a spear.

DePue: But from what I read, everybody was put on some pretty strict restrictions not to fire. And apparently you had a lieutenant or an officer right there with you.

Berry: Oh, yeah. I never fired the flamethrower at all.

DePue: Did anybody else on your side fire?

Berry: What I know of, I think there was one flamethrower that was shot at a building and caused the building to catch on fire. But other than that, in fact, the only casualty that happened during this whole conflict was a kid that was carrying the flamethrower in my outfit, in my group. He was nineteen years old. Two days or two weeks before we went into the compound, he turned nineteen. His name is Johnny Sadler, and to this day I can remember him. I've got pictures of him in the paper here. But that's the only casualty we had. He was hit by a Molotov cocktail somebody threw at him, and it caught him in the groin and exploded.

DePue: Did he survive?

Berry: No, no. It killed him instantly. But one thing I do remember – later on, after this compound was over with, and after we broke these prisoners down, and so and so forth, and transported them out of there into groups of three hundred, and whatever…Well, there's two incidents. Coming through the fence at the main gate—

DePue: When you came through the fence?

Berry: Well, we were staying on the outside. We would break these prisoners down into single file coming through the fence, and as they come through single file, somebody would stand with a delouser spray and spray DDT on them, or something, and delouse them and stuff. Some of them would have hats on, some of them would open their shirts up and spray them down on their shirt or something, see. But this one prisoner came through, and he had a hat on. We told him to take the hat off, and he wouldn't do it. So finally somebody reached up there and grabbed the thing and pulled it off; here was a woman. She got through the tunnel; she came from another compound where they had women prisoners, and she was in that compound. Came through the tunnels!

DePue: Wow.

Berry: Now that was one incident, and then another incident. Now outside the compound there was a great big, kind of like a drainage ditch built. And I could remember our guys—on a detail that they probably didn't like—but they were either medics, or I

don't know what they were. But they had stretchers, or something. A dead body was laying in the compound, they had to roll it up on the stretcher, and they carried it out through the gate, and they get out to the edge, along this ditch. Then they just turned around and dumped him into that ditch. I can remember a pile of guys, you know.

DePue: Were all of those people killed, when you guys stormed it, or had some of them been killed earlier?

Berry: No, that was killed because of their own guys. Their own people killed them.

DePue: But did it happen during the time that you guys tried to reestablish control?

Berry: Yeah, right, right.

DePue: Or were there some of these that had been killed long before you?

Berry: No, no, no. When we were trying to get control. Because when they first moved in, the way I understand, they lined them up, you know, and they told them, we're going to hit this thing at 11:00, or 10:00, or 9:00, whatever. Three days in a row, they broadcast it to them that they were going to come in at 9:00.

DePue: And this is while you guys are running and marching.

Berry: Yeah, yeah. And they told us—

DePue: Maximum intimidation, I'm sure.

Berry: They told us to go to heck, and we didn't even pay any attention to it. So what happened when 9:00 came, the next thing I know, why, here come the tanks. And the first thing the tanks did was ride through the barbed wire enclosure and knock the fence down, you know, so it would make an opening in a couple or three places. Then the guys would start funneling in. In the meantime, they were throwing grenades and throwing smoke grenades and tear gas grenades, and stuff like that.

DePue: And concussion grenades, you said?

Berry: Well, sometimes the concussion grenade, but very often very little of them. But mostly tear gas and smoke grenades. And then another thing that I can remember, when it was all over with, and we got back to our compound, which was probably 1:30, 2:00 in the afternoon, 3:00 in the afternoon, or something, and we were looking for some chow, and we were going to get some chow, and one of the guys had one of these Zenith Transoceanic radios. Did you ever see one of them?

DePue: No.

Berry: Big job, back then, it was a good radio, and it had shortwave on it. Here we were sitting here eating, and the shortwave was turned on, and Tokyo Rose [a female who

was used by the Japanese to spread propaganda] was telling us just exactly what we did fifteen minutes before that, or twenty minutes, or an hour before that.

DePue: Was she putting a very negative spin on what was going on?

Berry: Oh yeah, oh yeah, (unintelligible: voice drops)

DePue: Where you guys were the ones who had killed all of these people?

Berry: We just brutalized everybody, without mercy and without (unintelligible) are the most, what do you call it, negative type—

DePue: It was all pure propaganda, then.

Berry: Yeah, oh yeah. Here we are, sitting in our own compound, way on a different part of the island, you know. We weren't exactly associated with them. And then we heard her telling us exactly what was going on.

DePue: What was your reaction and your buddies' reaction to hearing her talk about it?

Berry: (laughter) It was like, you know, how the heck does she know that quick? How did they get the information out that quick? We'd just done it an hour before, two hours before, and yet this is being broadcast from Russiaor wherever it was. How did they know? That's what really got us, see. Here's something that you won't probably see again in your lifetime. My aunt saved that for me.

DePue: Oh, my. We're looking at a *Life* magazine.

Berry: Look at the date on it.

DePue: It's June 23, 1952.(Pause) I'm flipping towards the back of this thing. If I recall, I think the date that this incident we're talking about occurred was June 10. Does that sound about right?

Berry: Uh-huh. (looking at magazine) Come on.

DePue: Isn't it curious, though. You guys are on the ground, and sometimes you know a lot less than the rest of the world knows about what's going on.

Berry: That's right. That's right.

DePue: Well, I definitely am going to need to get some of these photos scanned in, because these are pictures from the incident itself.

Berry: Yeah, right. That's here, yeah.

DePue: Okay.

Berry: The 187th Airborne right there.

DePue: Well, is this a picture of you guys exercising?

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: So this is while you're intimidating the compound, or at least trying to.

Berry: Right.

DePue: Amazing. I see what they're carrying, a North Korean flag?

Berry: That's honey buckets, that's honey buckets.

DePue: Okay.

Berry: Human waste. And every one of them cans. It would stink! Jesus, oh my God. I couldn't wait to get off that island for the smell of it!

DePue: Well, from what you've mentioned, and from what I've read, from the world perspective we had lost the propaganda battle in this particular amazing incident. Is that how you guys looked at it? Probably not. No, not at all.

Berry: We did our job. We broke them down and what we were told to do. And that's all we could do. We treated those people humanely. We didn't brutalize them. We didn't interrogate or intimidate them, or anything else. Naturally, we treated them like prisoners. They were prisoners, and if they wanted to act up, we could act back. But if they wanted to cooperate, we were willing to cooperate with them and get along with them.

DePue: The accounts I've read about this particular incident—and to me this is obviously why they brought the 187th from Japan—this is kind of a peculiar mission, the last thing you guys thought you were training for—

Berry: Right.

DePue: —but they needed to have a very highly disciplined, well trained, cohesive organization. The operation apparently went very efficiently.

Berry: Right. I think it did, because of the fact that the casualties that occurred on the Korean side, or on the Chinese side, were all caused by their fellow people killing them, not because of Americans killing them. We had the opportunity, we had the motive, we had the materials to do the job if we had to. But we did not do it that way. No, we broke them down in intimidation and to just put overwhelming force, not by shooting at them, or not by firing at them at all—that wasn't the way it was done.

DePue: So you talked a little bit about this earlier. When you first made that broadcast to this huge mob of prisoners, and people started to move forward, and then other prisoners were murdering these people, how did you eventually get beyond that point where you could start to break them down?

Berry: Well, they got to the point that they finally gave up, because they'd feel that we were not going to back off, and we were not going to let them intimidate us. If we had to, we would move into that group and literally grab them and pull them out, one at a time if we had to, but we didn't do it that way. They finally had enough brains, or they finally got to the point that they realized that they had no control over us, and we were not going to back off any of it. So then they finally decided to cooperate, so we broke them down into groups of three hundred, marched them over to the different compounds, locked them up, and forgot about them for that particular day, and we went back to our own compound.

DePue: How long did it take, then, for these prisoners to be broken down into these smaller groups and be moved?

Berry: Oh, I have no idea. All I know is that from the time we moved out—we had to get out of there with them flamethrowers, they were heavy to carry around—so we had to go take them back. That's what they utilized our particular group for that fall. That's what we were assigned to do.

DePue: Well, I can't imagine a weapon that's more intimidating than a flamethrower.

Berry: It's wicked. It is wicked.

DePue: Yeah, and not something that you want to try to tangle with.

Berry: If you're not familiar with it, inside that cylinder there's three cylinders in it. The two cylinders are full of napalm, liquid petroleum, napalm. The center cylinder is compressed air. And there's anywhere from—I forget exactly what the figures are anymore—but anywhere from seventeen hundred pounds to twenty-one hundred pounds of pressure, something in there, in a reinforced cylinder. When you hold that gun up there like that, you pull this trigger here, and there's a cylinder inside there that has matches on it, like a cigarette lighter. You pull that, and it strikes, that match, starts a burn. When it burns, you open that valve up in the back to allow that napalm to come through. And after that valve is opened, then you pull this trigger.

DePue: The back trigger.

Berry: Your air pressure, and your napalm comes through, hits that spark, it's on fire. You get it on your hands, you wipe it off, your hand is on fire. You get it on your clothes, you wipe it off, your hand is on fire. Anything it touches will be on fire, and it's hot. It's hot. It's wicked. As far as I'm concerned, it's the most wickedest weapon we had in Korea. And because of the fact we not only used it from the aircraft, but through flamethrowers, and through tank flamethrowers, and stuff—the tank could sit here like that garage that's over here, across the alley over there.

DePue: About fifty, seventy-five feet away?

Berry: Yeah. Well, a regular flamethrower would hit the back of this garage, right here. A handheld—

DePue: About twenty feet.

Berry: But, I mean, a tank flamethrower could shoot from here to the back end of that garage over there across the alley, because they had enough pressure behind them, and threw it out there that far. That's what they used during the Iwo Jima, and the Marines and so on, World War II. But we had fifty gallon drums of it, and thirty gallon drums of it. And we used to bury them in a hillside. And (unintelligible) put a charge underneath them and a charge on top with a delayed fuse on it. If the gooks start coming at us, or we were going to be overrun, and if you had time to do it—now this was more or less in a stationary position, it wasn't on a move—if the gooks were coming at you, and you had time for it, you set off the top charge, it would blow the lid open, and it would cause it on fire, and thirty seconds or fifteen seconds later that delayed fuse went off underneath.

DePue: So you had flames that were spread all over the place.

Berry: Yeah, and you'd have them pointed outward. Well, you've seen pictures of where planes come in and drop the napalm on the bomb on a hillside.

DePue: Your battalion commander at the time was Colonel Westmoreland?

Berry: General.

DePue: So regimental commander.

Berry: General, one star general.

DePue: Westmoreland. What was he like?

Berry: Great. He was a commander. He was a commander. He was a commander. A lot of this crap here that—this is all from Japan.

DePue: Okay, and you're thumbing through some pictures there of what's going on.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: You have pictures of Westmoreland in there, do you?

Berry: Yes, I do.

DePue: And he was the 187th Regimental Commander?

Berry: He was the 187th Regimental Commander.

DePue: Well, I know he was a field artillery guy to begin with. How did he get a prestigious position like that?

Berry: I don't know, but he was a good one, I'll tell you that. Later, of course, he was in Korea, they had—later on they had Mark Clark, and M. B. Ridgway, and Bradley—or not Bradley, but what the heck—

DePue: I think about the time that you guys went into Koje-do was the time that there was the handoff between Ridgway and Mark Clark.

Berry: Yeah, yeah, something like that.

See this guy here was one of the best friends that I had in Japan. He was a—

DePue: A Japanese civilian?

Berry: Yeah. And believe it or not, he was a kamikaze pilot in World War II. The only reason he didn't die was the fact that he came down with pneumonia when his group took off, and it was the last attack from kamikaze pilots. But he was also an artist, and he was the artist for the service cloth.

DePue: Well, Bob, what I'd recommend here is that we go through these pictures after we're done with the interview.

Berry: Yeah, yeah, go right ahead.

DePue: And we'll continue with this. Do you recall any other incidents at Koje-do that really stick with you?

Berry: Well, the only incident I can recall—well, this is probably not the brightest thing in the world to talk about, because it didn't pertain to war, and it didn't pertain to the fighting, or nothing like that—but I was on the rear detail echelon after the main body moved ou. We had a pile of ammunition that was laying in the middle of our compound, and it was all covered up with tarpaulin and stuff. And that was our basic load of ammo for the company and the battalion, I should say. Anyway, most of this ammo, most of this stuff, was processed in 1941, '42, or '44, or something like that. The order came out that it was too old, we couldn't depend on it, it had lost its value. Now, we transported this stuff from a cave in Japan, we transported it over there for their use, but then it was claimed it was no good, or it was obsolete. So at the time, myself and two other guys, we were in the P & A Platoon. I was considered the demolition man at that time, and I had orders to blow it. And so I got my orders, and we set charges, and we blew it. And when we blew it, why, boy, it just went up. You know, it was like a Roman candle, and it was all destroyed. Later on, when we got up to the front lines, and all of a sudden we started yelling, "Where's the field artillery binoculars? Where's the compasses? Where's the night scopes? Where's this and where's that?" It was in that pile of ammo, and I had orders to blow it. I had orders from the lieutenant to blow it. So one lieutenant got chewed out for not knowing what was in that pile.

DePue: Oh, boy. Was this the same lieutenant who had his own house?

Berry: No, no. That was a—

DePue: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Berry: Well, that lieutenant, maybe this is out of line, but, you know—

DePue: It's fifty-some years ago; you can talk about this now.

Berry: Well, anyway, I think this lieutenant was out to make rank and out to get as many brownie points as he could. So there was a major in our outfit, and he was in charge of the company, and also the 1st Battalion. So consequently, I was told that the company carpenter [was to go] to a one-room house while we were in our own compound, so that when the major got up in the morning and off his cot, why, he wouldn't have to step on a bare floor. The rest of us were sleeping on the floor, on the ground, by putting a shelter half, or whatever. That's what we slept on, or an air mattress, or whatever we could scrounge. That was okay for us, but we had to have this house for this major. So, anyway, we constructed this house. We finally, with the help of some civilians, some Koreans, there, we constructed a one-room house, and we hauled it from where I constructed it to the area where the major would be, and so on. And so that's how it came about, was that house. But otherwise, why, it was just one of those things that I thought was a little bit out of line, but rank has its privilege, I guess.

DePue: So it was the major who you were building for?

Berry: Well, I think so, yeah.

DePue: What happened with your regiment, then, after this incident at Koje-do, and you got all these prisoners finally segregated?

Berry: Well, then, the main regiment moved out toward Taegu. They were up toward—the advance detail—and the main body moved up to Taegu. And later on, at the rear area, which was two or three days later, or a week, a few days later, I was on the rear detail; we got cleaned up and that area cleaned up, and so on. And I blew this ammunition, and all this other stuff. And then we finally got on the LTIs or LSTs and went back to Pusan. After we got to Pusan we loaded onto trains, and the next thing I know, we're on the way up north on a train. They were carrying cars, and trucks, and jeeps, and whatever, and also a few guns. So we were more or less guards for them while in the transit, while they were being transferred. In the meantime they were transferring us, you know, we were rear detail. Then when we got to Taegu, we had to set up tents outside this apple orchard, which is right adjacent to the airbase. So every morning, we would be woke up by Saber jets going off of that landing strip. They would fly off of there three at a time and heading up to MiG alley or something. MiGs [acronym for the Russian name of a fighter aircraft used by North Korea – the alley was an area where they flew regularly] are running, turn around, and come back, you know, and whatever.

DePue: Did the regiment have a practice jump?

Berry: Yeah, three of them, at least three of them, yeah.

DePue: What were you guys jumping from? C-47s? [U.S. Air Force cargo/troop planes]

Berry: Yeah, 47s, 46s, and 119s, whatever we could find, whatever we could get.

DePue: From Taegu, then, you were getting some practice jumps in, and getting decompressed, obviously, from the Koje-do experience. What happened to the regiment after that?

Berry: Well, we went straight north. We got up to the Kumwha Valley.

DePue: Kumwha Valley is at the base of the Iron Triangle, isn't it?

Berry: Yeah. And then we got up in that area, and consequently, from that point on we were just ordered to take over. I forget what outfit we relieved up on the line, which was kind of a funny thing, because we weren't trained to do that sort of thing. But, you know, we were trained to hit and run, and get back, recuperate, and go back again.

DePue: When you say you weren't trained to do that kind of thing—

Berry: Well, I mean, an Airborne outfit, there's a reason for Airborne, and that is mass transportation and mass employment in a short period of time. In other words, go behind enemy lines, or drop behind enemy lines, or drop in front of enemy lines, or whatever, do your thing, and then get the hell out of there.

DePue: Well, you're not organized to have a lot of heavy equipment, are you?

Berry: Well, no, no.

DePue: And you're not organized to be in front lines, and this is basically a trench line system.

Berry: Yeah, right, right. Because it was—well, we formed lines, we formed a perimeter up there. We took care of our part of it, and in the meantime they sent out patrols. Behind us, you would hear all the time during the night and during the days, they would either be firing the 105 howitzers or eight inch howitzers. You could hear eight inch stuff going off overnight.

DePue: Well, there's a lot of difference between 105's and eight inchers. Those eight inchers had to have a distinctive sound to them.

Berry: Well, the eight inch, they were so far behind, I don't know where the heck they were at. They could have been back in Taegu, as far as I know. But, when they went over, (imitates sounds), that's all you heard, you know.

DePue: Was the 187th involved in some offensive operations?

Berry: Well, we would send out patrols constantly; recon patrols, ambush patrols, and then also defend our position at the time; we didn't make any assaults, you know, to try to establish a new line of defense and stuff. It was kind of a crazy affair at the time. I didn't know what all was going on; as far as a GI is concerned, they don't tell you nothing at all. And so I remember one time an officer came up from the artillery and I had to go with this officer for security purposes—

DePue: The observation post?

Berry: Well, no. Just to get it so he could go up toward the front line, and just beyond the front line, to where he could observe. And anyway, he had set up—we'd talk about this at the Graybeards – he'd set up a firing mission from guns behind him, and they had this map all laid out. I said, "What's all these squares?" And he said, "Well, those are grids. When I call for grid 6-4, they all have it back there on their map, and they'll just shoot over and drop them into that grid 6-4." And here, they spent two or three days doing that, laying out the grids, and laying out that whole thing, and whatever. Occasionally you'd see a round come over and drop in the area in case Joe Chink tried to make an assault; we could stop him that way. Anyway, one morning, one of the guys mentions that, "What the heck's going on? Do you see what I see?" And couldn't hardly see with the naked eye, but looking through a twenty-power scope over the hill and over the valley, you could see Joe Chink moving down out of the hills, around the mountains and he's carrying something. Well, what the heck is he carrying, you know? Well, it turned out, when he's closer to where we could [see], it was bundles of straw, just bundles, great big bundles of straw, and they were packing them out into the valley. Next thing you know, the next day or something like that, they lit those bundles. When they lit them, the smoke came out; you couldn't see a damn thing. Not a damn thing! That whole valley was just covered with smoke. And here we are, shooting thousands of dollars worth of artillery, and just lay down this and lay down that, this grid and that, and there's gooks [U.A. soldiers' name for North Korean soldiers] coming down there with straw, and you couldn't see nothing. (laughter)

DePue: What were they screening?

Berry: I don't know. They were infiltrating through that smoke.

DePue: But there was no attack at that time?

Berry: No, they're not, but they were infiltrating, they were trying to sneak through our lines and get behind our lines, see.

DePue: Didn't work, though?

Berry: No. Well, some got—a little bit did, a few of them got caught, but not all of them, no.

DePue: So—

Berry: You lost your thing there; it fell down to the ground. (microphone noises)

DePue: They might not have heard a couple of the questions I asked, then.

But anyway, it sounds like there's not one continuous front line of trenches. They're on the high ground, and then there are the valleys—

Berry: Yeah, just we're on the high ground, and you'd move around. You'd move around, and I remember we had a quad 50 [caliber machine gun] mounted on a half track. [a vehicle with two wheels in front and two rear propelling tracks] Occasionally it would stick up here and fire harassing fire during the night, and the next it would be over here, and the next day it would be over there. They'd move around below the hill, behind the hill, alongside the hill. But one morning, the gooks had it drilled in just perfectly, and boy, they dropped two or three recoilless rifle shots all at one time and killed four guys right there, right on that thing.

DePue: Were those guys in your regiment, then?

Berry: No, no.

DePue: Okay. Was there one time when your organization was attached to the 34th Regiment?

Berry: Uh—

DePue: I thought you mentioned that to me earlier.

Berry: I'm not positive; I think that's when we were up on the lines there; we were assigned to them. I'm not sure if that was assigned—if it was the 34th that we were actually relieving, or part of it up there at the time. Because they didn't tell us a damn thing.

DePue: Yeah. Were you still with the P & A Platoon at that time?

Berry: Well, (phone rings)

DePue: Another call.

(break in tape)DePue: Anyway, you were still with the P & A Platoon?

Berry: Well, I don't know if I should tell you this over the radio or not, but anyway, I got in a little trouble with a company platoon sergeant. Up until that point, I had a good record, and I had no problems whatsoever. But when I had got in this trouble with the platoon sergeant over an incident where he took a couple of my men who was in my squad and put them out in a minefield and told them it to clear it, I mean to clean the mines out of there. These guys, prior to that, three weeks before that, or two weeks, or whatever, they were in the mess hall. And because they come down with VD, [venereal disease] they were kicked out of the mess hall and they were put into my squad. And anyway, he utilized them to clear these mines. They didn't know any more about mines than my daughter does. And so consequently, we got in a little argument over that, because he didn't go through the chain of command like he was

supposed to. That was just one incident, but I didn't like the guy, and he didn't like me. So anyway, he kept threatening to take my stripes away, which I was a corporal at the time. I decided I'd had enough of it, and I pulled the stripes off, and I was going to jam them down his throat. Anyway, the only thing that saved me was the fact that I had a good record up until then, and I had the first sergeant of the company, was a good man, and they knew me, and so on. They didn't court martial me, but otherwise I could have been shot, because it was up in a front line area. But anyway, they stuck me in the S-2 then, because they needed personnel. I didn't know any more about what S-2 meant than the man in the moon.

DePue: Well, S-2 is the intelligence

Berry: Yeah, well, I found out in a hurry, because every patrol that went out from that point on, there was an S-2 representative that went with them.At one time I went out on an ambush patrol, and I had carried a modified version of a Remington on a Winchester frame of a .12 gauge shotgun with nine pellet bullets.

DePue: Whoa.

Berry: And I was told, if it got hit, if they had to leave me there, leave me there, but bring

that gun back. (laughter)

DePue: That gun was important. It sounds like that's for some nasty close-in work, huh?

Berry: Yeah, yeah. So anyway, when you go out on an ambush patrol, you're ready for firepower. You want to make as much noise and throw as much lead as you can, you know.

DePue: So how far forward would these patrols go? How close to the enemy lines?

Berry: Oh, anywhere from three hundred yards or a thousand yards, or maybe more, or something, depending on—. One time we went on a recon patrol, and we were laid out in the valley for two days and one night, before we come back.

DePue: Most of these patrols were night patrols?

Berry: A lot of them. You'd go out at night, and then set up an area, and then so on.

DePue: A listening position just to lay there and—

Berry: Yeah, yeah. Just lay there and observe. You don't make any noise, and you don't fire, or whatever. You just try to take it all in, as much as possible. And then, of course, being an S-2, if there was any prisoners, or any paperwork, or any maps, or anything like that, it was my job to pick it up and to make sure it came back with us. That's the way I—after seeing the Koreans in Koje-do, and then hearing stories about how our stories were treated—then when we caught a prisoner or had a prisoner, I'd have to keep him separate from the rest of the people.

DePue: And these were Chinese you were capturing.

Berry: Chinese, or Korean. Sometimes, once in a while, a Korean. I'd have to keep them separate and keep them away from the rest of my troops, or the rest of the guys. We'd bring them back to the rear area; there'd be a tent area set up behind the MLR [Main Line of Resistance], and this tent would be set up with coffee, and candy bars, and cigarettes, and pretty decent, you know. And, you know, if they had water, and if they had medical stuff in it, they had a few bandages and stuff like that in it, and so on. So this was the first step with the prisoners. We'd try and get them to talk, or try and get them to give you some information. Of course, they'd have interpreters there that could talk to them.

DePue: How often did you go on these patrols?

Berry: Oh, you know, maybe once a week, or maybe a couple of times a week, or something like that, depending on what they sent out. Then we'd alternate. You know, there would be more than one guy in S-2.

DePue: How many people generally were in the patrols?

Berry: Well, anywhere from a nine man patrol to fourteen to sixteen, could be even twenty, twenty-five, something like that.

DePue: So as S-2, rep, you're going with a line squad or a line platoon?

Berry: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Okay.

Berry: Once in a while we'd have a guy with a dog, and the dog would take us out, like, on an ambush patrol, and we'd go out with him.

DePue: The dog was for what? Sniffing out the enemy?

Berry: It was his nose.

DePue: Just sniffing out—

Berry: That's right.

DePue: —the enemy, or bombs, or—

Berry: It was the enemy, the enemy. He could smell them goddamn gooks. Oh, I had an incident where I had a dog handler come up; it was one evening just before we went out on the patrol in a couple of hours, and this dog was over there on the side. I love dogs; I'd had a bunch of them over my years, you know. I went up toward the dog, and the guy yelled at me, "Hey, fellow, get the hell out! Are you going in there to—" and I said, "What?" and he said, "Don't go near him. He'll tear your arm off." I said,

"Wait a minute. I'm not the enemy." He says, "It don't matter. I'm the only one that goes near him." I say, "Okay," so I stay clear of him. Then we had orders from the handler that, if we went out on a patrol, and if the dog smells any gook – if you're laying there and it's real quiet, and you try and keep as quiet as possible – if you hear the dog moan, get ready.

DePue: So that was what they were trained to do. They were trained not to bark but to a do a low moan.

Berry: Low moan, get ready. And when that dog barked, you opened up.

DePue: Oh, so the dog would bark when they were within a certain distance.

Berry: He could smell, yeah. You fired in the general direction. Each one had a field of fire, you know. If you're on an ambush patrol, you didn't go around like this, or not like this. (Gestures) You fired right directly in front of you. You couldn't tell if you hit anything or not. You may, but the idea was if you throw enough lead out there—each guy—you'rehoping that you'll knock down something, or do some damage.

DePue: Were you still armed at this time with the shotguns?

Berry: Not all the time. That was just one patrol that we went on.

DePue: Okay. So most of the time you're armed with a carbine, or was it an M-1?

Berry: M-1 or a carbine. And of course, being in the Airborne, all of us carried .45s, [.45 caliber pistol] and everyone had a .45. In fact, we had to guard them with our lives, and that's because our fellow buddies would steal them and sell them to the British. (laughter) And vice versa, yeah.

DePue: You mentioned, when we first talked, that sometimes you'd take your unit patches off.

Berry: Yeah, yeah. When we left Taegu, every emblem that we had on the truck, all these wings, everything that we had on vehicles, and everything like that, they all had to be just painted over, and all the patches we used to wear, 187th Airborne, you know, that all came off, and all the wings on the hats, or any of that stuff. They didn't want anybody to know that we were there.

DePue: Well, I would suspect that guys in the 187th Airborne are intensely proud to be in that unit; they had some opinions about that unit.

Berry: Well, orders are orders, you know. They claimed—that was the rumor; I don't know if it was true—but they claimed that they had a full division of Chinese sitting on the other side of the Yalu River.

DePue: Yalu River.

Berry: On the north, above North Korea, in China, they had a full division of Chinese waiting for the Airborne to come back so they could take care of us.

DePue: So you guys wanted to make sure that nobody knew the Airborne was in the lines.

Berry: (laughter) Supposedly. I suppose.

DePue: Now, on these patrols that you went on, do you recall any one in particular that was especially hairy?

Berry: Well, the only one that really, really got in my craw – we lost three men on that patrol one night. The reason why we lost them was because of the Chinese; they had set up some kind of a mortar-firing type thing in the rear. When we started firing they could pick us out as to where we were at the time, somehow or another they laid in some mortars on top of us, and stuff, and they got hit pretty good. Three of them got killed. Other than that, I don't know how many men we stopped. I don't know how many enemy we hit, or nothing. All I know is we fired, and if they got in the way, they had had it. Just like when we first got over to Korea, or got up in the front lines there—back then, if you're familiar with it--everybody wanted to carry a carbine or a pistol, because they were light and portable, and they weren't heavy; you could carry them in the chow line. But when we got up the front lines and studying what was going on, away goes the carbines. We used them in the bunkers, and the guys that were on patrols, or on the lines, and that weren't in a bunker or something, they wanted an M-1 [rifle]. They wanted a [Garand], something that would reach out there three hundred yards and stop them, you know, something there with some firepower. Now, we used to take—if you're familiar with them – we'd take a thirty round clip, or a fifteen round clip for an M-2 carbine and tape three of them together. You had to hold them up into the magazine because of the weight, but they would stay in the bunker with us and stuff. So if Joe Chink was making any kind of a run at the hill, you could lay down a lot of fire with this, especially with a fully automatic carbine. But if it's just a semi-carbine, a semi-automatic, you know, you'd throw down a lot of lead, make a lot of noise, and keep their heads down.

There was an incident that I'll never forget. We were on the lines one night, and it was just turning dark. I was back in S-2 section then, and I was called up. They said, "There's something out here in the valley. You've got to come up, listen to this, you've got to come over here. What the hell is going on; we're going to find out." Anyway, we could hear some noise out in the valley, and somebody's talking. So we turned around and tried to talk back. All of a sudden this noise that we heard, some guy was down there, and he was behind a big rock;he was hidden, out of sight, and cussing like you wouldn't never heard in your life. Calling everybody under the sun everything, just cussing up a storm. And finally, they realized that this was an American, because nobody in the world can cuss like an American, see?

DePue: (laughter)

Berry: So they sent out a patrol to investigate, an eight or nine man patrol. Sure enough, this poor devil has escaped from the enemy. He had worked his way back north or south, got back as far as our lines, but he wasn't one of our group, or he wasn't even—he was so far away—but he got back to our lines anyway. After they investigated, they find out that he's an American, and he wasn't armed or nothing like that, so they brought him back up. So we put him in the tent temporarily, then we found out what was going on, and then we sent him back to the rear. But I'll never forget that guy laid there, and he just cussed up a storm. He called us everything on the—and so finally somebody got the message, you know, just to call out and say—and I remember him yelling, "Don't shoot, don't shoot, don't shoot!" and then he starts swearing. You know, "Don't shoot!", and so, finally I think it was when the patrol got out, you know, they could understand it and stuff. Yeah.

DePue: Well, he's one lucky soldier.

Berry: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

DePue: How long was your unit in the front lines, then?

Berry: Well, actually, we were up there about six months. I think so. Not quite six months.

DePue: So your comment earlier that this isn't the way you're supposed to be employing the Airborne is—especially when you're—

Berry: Well, I was always under the impression that we were in to do a job, either to drop behind enemy lines, or to reinforce a particular—not reinforce, but they used us like a spearhead, and spearhead a drive, or something like that. And we weren't meant for that. We were meant for other stuff, (unintelligible: voice fades)

DePue: Did you come out of line the same time that the regiment came out of line, then?

Berry: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We went back to Japan.

DePue: The whole regiment did.

Berry: Yeah. We got ready and recuperated and got new clothes and stuff, and got things oriented back into more of a quiet life. And so on, to work, but still always training, always training.

DePue: Do you recall when they went back to Japan?

Berry: Well, I was—

DePue: Early '53?

Berry: I got—I was back for about—I would say that they left Korea in August or so and—not in August, no. Wait a minute.

DePue: Before the war ended, I would think.

Berry: I would say around February or March, or something like that, when we left the line and came back, because I had been back in Japan, I think, about two or three months, something like that. I never kept track of dates and times and so on. I cannot say for sure, but all I remember is being back in Japan for a while, and then finally I got orders to rotate. And that was some of the best noise that I ever heard, you know.

DePue: I suspect. Well, you had more than enough points by that time, I would think.

Berry: Well, I'm not so much—it was my time was up, because (unintelligible; away from microphone).

DePue: Your enlistment was up.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: It just occurred to me. You're on the front lines, you're going out on these patrols, you're lying out in front of the front lines trying to be as quiet as possible, in the dead of winter in Korea.

Berry: Not in the winter. No, wait a minute. It was in the fall and in the—or not in the fall, but in the summer, early part of summer. It wasn't that bad, as far as weather is concerned. But in Japan, when we trained, we were up in the mountains all the time and training in snow, and cold, and damp.

DePue: But your regiment was in the front lines in the wintertime, though.

Berry: No, no, not actually, not actually.

DePue: Okay.

Berry: No, but—they were earlier, where they jumped in, they would get that, but they'd been in Korea three different times.

DePue: Well, you mentioned earlier, though, that you were there in the front lines in the Kumwha area roughly six months.

Berry: Yeah, yeah, in that area.

DePue: So not the entire time in the front lines.

Berry: Oh, no. Well, yeah—well, I'm thinking about from Koje-do on up.

DePue: Yeah.

Berry: You know, I'm not actually—

DePue: Those six months.

Berry: Yeah.

DePue: Okay, from Koje-do.

Berry: Yeah, from Koje-do on up, six to seven months or so. Because I'm not actually saying that we were on the lines that long.

DePue: Okay..

Berry: I've got friends, you know, in the Graybeards —in fact, we've got one gentleman that, he's a battalion sergeant major, which is, you know, the highest rank—

DePue: Would be the ranking NCO [non-commissioned officer]

Berry: Yes. And he was in the Chosin Reservoir in the Marine Corps. He'd been wounded, got three or four Purple Hearts, and I don't know how many other (unintelligible: voice drops). Too bad he didn't—well, you interviewed—

DePue: Carl Greenwood was with the Marines. I don't know if you know him.

Berry: Who?

DePue: Carl Greenwood. He was from Springfield.

Berry: Oh, no, no. But you interviewed our POW man—

DePue: I haven't interviewed him yet. Gene?

Berry: Oh, I see. Yeah, Gene Bleuer. Well, we were at the house, you know.

DePue: Right.

Berry: Gene used to be my foreman at Farmall, at the International Harvester Company. I didn't recognize who he was until I got in the Graybeards,.

DePue: Where we got to the story here is, the 187th came back to Japan. You were there for a couple of months, it sounds like, and then you got your orders.

Berry: Yeah, I got my orders to ship up.

DePue: Your enlistment was up.

Berry: My enlistment was up, to get back to the States. Of course, I was in a so-called Ready Reserve that would last for six and a half years after that, in the respect that I could be called back at any time after that.

DePue: So what was it like going back to the States?

Berry: Well, really I was a little disappointed, because in the respect that it wasn't the idea that I wasn't happy to be home, or nothing like that. But five minutes after I took off my uniform, nobody even knew I was gone. Nobody, except my local family, only my local people, you know. And now, I can tell you of an incident when we came back. First of all we came back into Seattle. We got off our ship at 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning, went into Camp Drake in Seattle, and turned around and got some shots, got some paperwork done. The next thing I know, at 3:00 in the morning the following morning, we were all marching down to a train, and we got on and went from there into Camp Carson, Colorado, where we were going to get discharged or separated. We get down to Camp Carson, Colorado, and by the way, the military give you a nice snow job, you know. If anybody cares to re-enlist, we'll have you out of here, bag and baggage, with $300 in your pocket, in six hours. Now, if you don't care to enlist, it's going to take about a week and a half to two weeks for us to process you out of here. Everybody moaned about that.

So anyway, it turned out we were there at Camp Carson. There was five or six of us, five our guys. We all went to basic training together; we were in Fort Leonard Wood together; we were in jump school together; and we were in the same outfit together later on, with different companies and stuff. This was one of the incidents that kind of maybe stuck in your throat. We go in at Colorado Springs, and this is 1953. We go to the best hotel in town, and all we want to do is sit down at a table, and have doilies, and napkins, and they have silverware, and without standing at a damn chow line. We want to be waited on, you know. And we're just a group of guys that wanted to get together and go out and have a nice dinner together. That's all we wanted to do.

DePue: Were you in uniform?

Berry: Yes. Every one of us was in uniform. And we go in there, we sit down, the waitress comes by. “Oh, fine, I'll take care of all of your orders except that gentleman there; I can't serve him.” He's a black guy. And this black guy is part of our group, you know; like I say, we were all together at the time, same outfit. So this one kid – I remember him, he was a great big burly kid from Wisconsin – he wasn't a kid, he was a man. And he turned around and he told the waitress, "You go get the manager or whoever's in charge, and you tell him, either you serve this man, and treat him like a man, or we're going to tear this place apart. And believe me, lady, we can do it.” This was the first time within a four hour or six hour period that we were released from the military, from the Camp Carson base; it was the first incident that we had back in civilian life. You know, I was coming back out of Korea and war and everything, and then they come along with that crap. Finally the guy comes around, and he says, "Well, I'm sorry, I don't normally do this, but because you fellows are together, and so on, we don't want no trouble or nothing." He sent over a bottle of wine for us and told us he would serve the man. And he says, "Normally we don't do it." And said, "Well, you know, this is not right." And I said, "This man just bled for us over in Korea, and he worked with us, and everything else. And now, all of a sudden, he's not good enough to eat with us?" and so on. It just—stuck in my craw,

you know. Anyway, it all turned out to be fine. They took care of us, no problem. But that's the kind of crap that went on.

DePue: And I suspect he's never forgotten that incident, either.

Berry: No, no. No. The ironic thing was, two days later we went in the town again; we were going to do the same thing. He says, "Let's go to my side of the town." So we went over to the black side of the town, and we were treated the same damn way, the rest of us. DePue: They didn't want to—

Berry: They didn't want to associate with us, either. No. You know, and here we all are, got the same uniforms on, the same, you know, and everything. (laughter) I'll never forget that.

DePue: When you got back to the States to Bettendorf, did it take you a while to readjust to life back home?

Berry: Well, it did in the respect that I was so—it's hard to imagine, from somebody that never seen it—and you've seen it—it's hard to imagine how other people live in other parts of the world. When I first got to Japan, I saw people living in the riverbed and washing in the dirty river that the kids were crapping in upstream, and so forth. You just wonder what the standards of life are like in different parts of the world. And when you grow up as a citizen of the United States, and you see the stuff that we do—and just like here. It sticks in my craw when I hear about all these imports, cars, all these import stuff that we're getting from Japan and we're getting from Korea and we're getting from all these other countries, and so on and so forth, you know.

DePue: China.

Berry: And China, and whatever. And they tell about how brilliant they are, and how smart they are, and how good a job. I said, "Well, get off my case. That's a bunch of crap. When I first hit Japan in 1951, them people were still living in the 18th century. It took our technology and it took our moneys and our manpower to bring them into the 20th century. You know Those people are still living like that. I went in to beautiful homes, so-called beautiful homes, where people were still crapping in a hole in the ground, right there. And then somebody comes in there once a week and dips it out of there and takes it out to his farm and use it for fertilizer." DePue: Did you have a lot of Korean soldiers working with you in the 187th?

Berry: Not really, not really, unh-unh. I did have an incident where—right behind the front lines, when we first got up to the front lines – an old man comes along and says [to] me and this other guy, it was our job to repair a bunker that was up on the hill, and putting sandbags on them and new logs, and so on. I said, "That's fine, but do you expect two men to repair all them bunkers? No way." He said, "No, you've got so many civilians working here with you--eighteen eighteen to twenty of them of them, or whatever. They'll do the manual labor and stuff." And I'm, "Okay, that's fine." Well, we turn around and go back to the rear area and get materials, the way we can use and stuff, bring them up to the line and going to go up on the hill, they get up to

the base of the hill, they stop. They don't go any further. I say, "What's going on?" I couldn't speak Korean, you know, and they couldn't speak English. Finally I made it out that they didn't have to go up there, or something. So then I went and talked to the old man again, and he says, "Oh, yeah, they've got something in their contract that they don't have to go up to the main line of resistance. They can go back rear of it three hundred yards, or something, but they don't have to go any closer than that." I say, "Well, is that so?" And he says, "Yeah." And I say, "Well, how do you expect to—" He said, "I'll tell you this way. Either you get the guys to take the stuff up there, or you're going to do it, one or the other." And I says, "What can I do? Do you have any control or do you have any objections to the control?" And he says, "Use whatever control you need. It's up to you." You know, he just laid it in my hands. Well, I come back and I find out the so-called ringleader, you know, the guy, and I try to point it out to him to go up the hill.*He just, whines* (speaking in a whine). Well, I just turned him around, give him a good, swift kick right in the rear end with a number 10 D.

DePue: (laughter)

Berry: And he finally woke up a little bit and got the idea, and then I told him to get that stuff and get it up on that hill. (whining), *You know, he started giving me a bunch of static,* the kid and I. He says, "Well, what are you going to do?" And I said, "You back me up, and Watch these guys." So I pulled out my .45 and turned around; I cocked that thing, I pulled back the hammer, and I stuck it right up under the man's nose, right there. "Get up on your goddamn, I'm going to blow your God— you know. He finally got the idea that I wasn't fooling around, and then he went— Here we're paying these clowns. Here I'm over there in no man's land in this God-forsaken world, that I never even heard of when I was a kid, protecting their God-darn interests, and we're paying these clowns, and this is the kind of crap we get, you know, to help us. And that they don't have to go up on that line, but it's okay for my blood, you know! it's okay for me to get chopped up! I just couldn't see that, boy, and I'm telling you, I had—I think I'd have taken that guy's ears off, or something, or close to it. I mean, I was (clicks tongue) a little disturbed!

DePue: Well, you probably—it sounds like you might have gotten back to the States about the time the war ended. Is that about the case?

Berry: Just after I got back, the war ended. In fact—

DePue: What did you think?

Berry: In fact, I was standing on the deck of the ship, and we were listening to a radio some guy had in Seattle, Washington. We had just got in there, and I had heard where a volcano had erupted in southern Japan, Mount Aso. We used to go up there and watch this volcano and see it; it was dormant for so many years. They used to haul kids up there to show them the volcano, and then all of a sudden this thing had erupted again in southern Japan. That was in May of '53.

DePue: Okay, so that's about the time you got back.

Berry: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: So a few months later, you're probably back in Bettendorf by that time—

Berry: Oh, yeah.

DePue: —when the war ends with the Armistice.

Berry: Yeah, right.

DePue: What did you think about that?

Berry: Well—

DePue: About the way the war ended.

Berry: I thought about—when I got to thinking about it—but it took me years afterward to realize what it was all about, before it drifted into my numb skull what we were there for to begin with. And finally I drifted and told me what it was all about, and I got the drift of it. But I didn't like the idea that it ended in that kind of a fashion. And then I didn't like—I still don't like the idea that it's not a—it never was declared a war. It's declared a police action, you know. Even our own federal government that took the liberty of sending me over there, is telling me that it wasn't a war. But I saw guys chopped up and bleeding just as bad as they did in World War II, or Vietnam, or Iraq, or any place. They bled the same way. To this day we still don't have a charter for our Korean War Vets, you know, which we're trying to get going. [A monument was erected in Springfield near Abraham Lincoln's tomb in 2010] But it took me a long time to realize that we helped stem the tide of Communism, that Communism would have moved in to Japan, and then later on to the rest of islands, and worked its way across the world if we hadn't have stopped it, made a stand over there and stopped it. But I still don't like the idea that it ended in such a manner that we've still got thirty-six thousand troops over there, or thirty-some thousand troops. My grandson's one of them, and for what, fifty years later. Maybe this doesn't sound right, but here's a little two-by-four state that ain't as big as Texas: southern Korea.

DePue: I think it's about the size of Iowa.

Berry: All right. They're number sixth in total production in the world, and here we are, one of the biggest, most industrial giants that ever lived, that ever existed, and they're letting a little two-by-four place like that dictate to us on what to do. And why? Because we're supporting them, we're taking care of them. You leave here and go up to Chicago right now, and go around the city of Chicago, and you'll find out how many South Koreans are in Chicago. You can't believe it, yeah.

DePue: Well, North Korea is a completely different kind of place, isn't it?

Berry: Yeah, right.. Right. And it's all because of the Communists, and the Chinese, and whatever. DePue: You kind of alluded to this before, but you felt like when you got back, you took your uniform off, and nobody even knew you had left, and you just kind of—

Berry: A lot of people didn't even know it was going.

DePue: So that bothered you, too, did it?

Berry: Well, when you thought about what we did over there, you know. Like I told people, I said I'm not proud of what I did, but I'm proud of the fact that I followed orders and I did what I had to do, and what happened from what I did. I'm not proud of the fact that some of the things that I did, you know, that came and destroyed somebody else's lives, or somebody else's feelings, or whatever. But I did what I had to do as I followed orders that I was trained to do. That's all.

DePue: What's your thought about how the American public deals with the Korean War in particular? I mean, it's been called "The Forgotten War."

Berry: Yeah, right. They don't know what it's all about. And it's just like, when we were in the parade the other day, last Saturday. We were down at Andalusia, at a parade down there. One of the guys that was sitting there in the Jeep with me. I can't march anymore, because I've got a fibrillated heartbeat, so I ride in the Jeep with the guys. One of the guys that was riding in the Jeep, he's got a bad hip. We're all in our seventies, you know. We're all young kids. And so we were going by, and in front of us were the guys marching, carrying the colors, carrying the flag. We had two flags mounted on the Jeep in back of me as we were riding along. You ride along, and here's these lousy teenagers that are eighteen, twenty, twenty-five years old, twenty-some, full of earrings and tattoos and, you know, the modern generation crap that they got. They won't get off their dead ass to even stand up and put their hand over their heart when the flag goes by. One of the guys was sitting in the Jeep, he says, "Hey, what's the matter with you? You're supposed to take your hat off when the flag goes by," or something like that. Finally, I told him, "You better shut up, or we'll get in trouble," But this is the kind of crap that you wonder about. You look at one, and then you say, this is what I went to war for, you know, for this kind of crap. You know, protection, like that, yeah.

DePue: How long after you got back, then, did you get married?

Berry: Oh, I got back in May, and I was married in October.

DePue: And where did you find employment, then?

Berry: Well, back then, at that time, I could have went back to my old job, which I had, because I got drafted, and I had to leave it. But I didn't want to go back in the factory again at that time. I got a job with my wife's uncle; he was in the dairy business, and I became a milkman. I was a retail route salesman; I used to be a milkman for fourteen years or so, until the companies went bad.I It seemed like for some reason or

another every company that I've been affiliated with somehow or another went under, or bad, or something, or quit, or whatever. You know, that's just the way that things worked out.

DePue: Except for the United States Army and South Korea.

Berry: Yeah, right, right.

DePue: Now, when did you start getting involved with veterans' activities?

Berry: Well, actually, a friend of mine that lives over in Milan,—he's a shirt-tail relation to my wife—he was telling me, "You're a Korean vet, you've got to come to our meetings," or something like that; he told me a couple of times, and I never did pay no attention to it to speak of. Then, finally one day, well, I've got nothing else to do, why don't I go over and have breakfast with the guys once and just see what's it's like. So I went over and I talked to them. I got acquainted and I kind of liked it, and I liked the fellows; we all had something in common. One of our biggest things in common that people don't realize is that we're all survivors. That's all. We're all survivors of Korea. Because we could have got chopped up, we could have got left over there, we could have anything else. But we're survivors, and this is our common bond between one another, regardless of one guy's in the artillery, the other guy's in the tank corps, the other guy's in the airplanes, or whatever. They all kid me about being a jumper, and you know, jumping out of good aircraft, and all that. But I wouldn't trade my outfit for most of the outfits. And there's only one other outfit that I would even care to join, or two other outfits. One was the Green Berets; back then it was the Rangers. I volunteered for them, but they disbanded them. They had the last group of guys going just as I got out of jump school. They were disbanding the Rangers, and later on they became the Green Berets or Special Forces. Or UDT frogmen, or something. [Navy Seals evolved from the Underwater Demolition teams.] But I'm not—I love to swim, but not out in the middle of the ocean, you know. I'm not a Navy man.

DePue: Well, you were drafted. It didn't take long to make your way to Korea. You were at Koje-do and saw some very important incidents occur there. You spent a lot of time on the front lines. You saw more of your share of death and destruction. How did all of this change you?

Berry: Well, it taught me one thing, to value life, day and day out I've got a son and daughter, and I tried to explain to them, You don't look forward to what's going to happen twelve years from now, fifteen years from now, thirty years from now, you look for today and you make each day count. If all you do is just sweep the floor, or take out the garbage, or go get the newspaper, it's something that you did that day, and you accomplished something, regardless of what it is. And to try and keep smiling, OK? Because if you let these politicians, you let this misery get to you about the world, and all the miseries in it, and all this stuff, then consequently, eventually, it'll eat away at you like a cancer. If you can make somebody happy, make them grin, or make them smile, or even yourself, if you can smile at something. And I'm not a

guy to run around with a grin on my face all the time, and it takes me a lot of time, a long time, to understand somebody and to know them. But once I know them, they're welcome to the shirt off my back, you know. But as long as they treat me like a man, I treat them like vice versa. And now I don't care if it's just to cut the grass, or whatever it is, if you accomplish something, and you feel like you're a man—when you get to my age—you don't know it yet, but when you get to my age, you've got a thing to look forward to, something to do, something to think about, something to work on, when you get to my age, and everything is done. Everything—you look around this place—it'sall mine. I don't owe a dime on any of it, see. Now, years ago, I was sweating my tail off, trying to figure out, how in the hell am I going to pay for all of this stuff? All right. But as the years go by, you accomplish different things. And just like I bought and paid for this house. And for a guy that had no education, and so on, I think I did all right. You know, because there's a lot of people that are college graduates and some of them, I call them the "educated dummies".

DePue: Yeah.

Berry: They ain't got the brains that God give them when it comes to common sense, you know. But that's just one of things—my theories on life.

DePue: Well, one of the things I always like to do to finish up these interviews is to ask you about what advice you would have for your kids or for the future, but I think you've somewhat answered that question.

Berry: Well, what's the sense of worrying about things that you cannot change, things that don't mean nothing to you, that you forget about five minutes after you hear them, and stuff like that? Try to make your own life something to smile about and be happy about, and something to accomplish. You know, that's all. That's all I can say.

DePue: Any last comments you'd like to make as we close up here?

Berry: No, the only thing I could say is that if I had to do it all over again, if I was young enough and strong enough to do it all over again, I wouldn't hesitate to go back. As much as I dread thinking about it, and everything else, but if the time comes to defend my country and to defend my democracy, I would go back again and do it all over again, as long as I could join a good outfit and they would have me.

DePue: If you can do it, you're going to be the best at it, huh?

Berry: Well, I don't want an outfit that hits and runs. I mean, I want an outfit that will stand up and call a spade a spade, you know. But that's the only thing I can say.

DePue: Well, Bob, thank you very much.

Berry: You're welcome.

DePue: It's been a very good interview.

Berry: You're welcome.

DePue: I especially appreciate your willingness to talk about some things that I'm sure are kind of painful for you, and I just respect—

Berry: Well, what can you do? It's all part of life, you know, and all things that's happened over the years. I learned a long time ago, as a kid. You know, I lost my father when I was six years old. I lost my brother when I was about eight. I know death and destruction, and I know hard times. I know what things can be like on that. Some of these kids today, and some of these people today, they—it's like 9/11 yesterday, and people talk about all the 9/11, and everything like that. But it took something like that to wake up some of these nations and some of these people that realize that some of this destruction in the world could happen in the United States.

DePue: Well, maybe your generation made it too easy for all of us, and we take it for granted.

Berry: Well, yeah. Well, one thing I find out, just like I don't believe in this—am I still on camera?

DePue: Yeah, you sure are.

Berry: I think that one of the greatest deterrents that this country has of a foreign country trying to invade us—if they can invade us, they're going to do it internally, and they're going to bust us from the economy-wise, you know, that sort of way. But to come in and to physically try to take us over, I think one of the greatest deterrents this country has is the fact that the individual family in this country owns a weapon of some kind. Hunters, and just imagine—now, you know yourself, how many guys do you know that own a weapon, and maybe you own a few yourself. Maybe you don't like them, maybe you think they should be obsolete, but stop and think and look at history. One of the first things that Adolf Hitler did back in the days when he tried to conquer Europe was to disarm everybody. Not that I'm with the American Rifle Association, or anything like that, but I do love to hunt, and I do love to fish. I used to do a lot of hunting, but not anymore. But anyway, that's when I feel like one of the biggest deterrents that this country has. We're being overrun right now from the south, and I don't appreciate that one damn bit. And I didn't appreciate the fact that our politicians are bending over backwards to these people to try to get their votes, and that kind of crap. And I still believe if you're in America, we speak English, we write English, and we talk English, you know? And I grew up in a city where they had—

DePue: Every different culture in the world.

Berry: —every nationality imaginable. But when it all got right down to it, they all spoke English.

DePue: Or working hard to learn how to speak English.

Berry: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

DePue: Well, Bob, I do think we need to close this off. Again, thank you very much for a wonderful interview. It's been an honor and a privilege to talk to you.

Berry: Thank you.

(end of interview)