

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY WITH MR. WILLIAM DAVIS

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17 APRIL 2001
TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW

OFFICE OF MEDICAL HISTORY
BUREAU OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY
WASHINGTON, DC

Interview with former hospital corpsman William Davis, Company B, First Battalion, Seventh Marines. Present at Chosin Reservoir Campaign.

Where are you originally from?

Frostburg, MD.

When did you join the Navy?

June of 1948 in Baltimore.

Was there a particular reason you joined the Navy?

Harry Truman's draft was off and on. On because we had problems in Berlin--the Berlin Blockade. I was going to go to the state teacher's college in Frostburg and be an English teacher. So I thought to myself that I'd go in and get the 2 years over with, and then I could come back and go to school. Well, I went in and never came back.

I was a hospital corpsman because I had talked to a neighbor of mine in Frostburg who was a Marine on Iwo Jima and he said, "If you're going to go anywhere, go in the Navy and be a corpsman." That sounded all right. My mother was a nurse so I was inclined to that. What he didn't tell me was the casualty rate for corpsmen with the Marines . . . Anyway, that's why I did that, and I had to wait for 2 weeks before I could go in because they didn't have any room in the Hospital Corps school.

Where were you assigned when you got out of Corps school?

To the Annapolis hospital as a ward corpsman. Eventually I became the senior corpsmen on the midshipmen's surgical ward. We had a chief nurse there who was a lieutenant. You had to take your broken thermometers to her between 10 and 11 o'clock each day to get replaced. I had a patient down on the ward that was a post-operative patient and began to bleed and had arrhythmic problems so the doctor, the nurse, and I were trying to get him stabilized. We finally did except I missed the 10 to 11 window for taking up the thermometers. I went up after that and went into her office and told her I had been busy and couldn't deliver the thermometers. She gave me this long lecture about having organization here and what have you. And I said, "What the hell did you want me to do, have the patient die just because of these silly rules of yours?"

Well, she slapped my face just as the executive officer was walking by. Two hours later he called me up to his office and she was there. He said, "Miss von Stein has something to tell you." Then she apologized for doing that. Then he said, "Okay, Miss von Stein. You can go. Davis you stay." And he said, "I think you might want to look for another assignment in the hospital other than in the

nursing service." And he was right. So, I went to the diet kitchen and that's where I was when I got orders to go to the Marines.

What do you remember about that?

I went to Camp Pendleton aboard American Airlines. None of that riding in a troop train or any of that stuff. There were three of us that left Annapolis together. About that time, the Marines and the Army were in the Pusan Perimeter so they were especially looking for corpsmen. We flew out to San Diego and got a bus to Camp Pendleton. We went to Tent Camp No. 2. It was up near the northern end of Camp Pendleton and the San Clemente gate.

When we got there they were forming the 7th Regiment of the 1st Marine Division. Sixty percent of that regiment turned out to be reserves, units from different cities. Some of them were 17 years old; some were 30 years old, World War II veterans. Some didn't even have boot camp. None had any shots or health records. None of them had dog tags. For some reason, in addition to giving shots and making up health records, the corpsman's job was making dog tags. This was something I never could understand.

We were there for 2 weeks and never did go to Field Medical Service School. We went to the rifle range three times. Two of the times we pulled targets. The third time it was dusk and we couldn't even see the targets. So that was my military training. The next day they let us go out in the dark and throw one hand grenade. I never saw a doctor while we were there to give us any kind of field medicine education. Then we went down on September 1st and boarded a ship, the USS *Okanogan* (APA-220) at San Diego and headed for Japan.

The plan was that we would go up in the mountains of Japan and get cold weather training. In the interim, on the way over there, Douglas MacArthur decided to land at Inchon so we never got off the ship and never got any further training. On the way over on that ship they would take us corpsmen back to the fantail and throw great big gold-colored coffee cans over the side forward and we would lay on the deck and shoot at those with carbines they issued to us.

We had a doctor who attempted to give us some field medicine training, except he was a LTJG and he had been drafted into the Navy and was out of medical school for 8 months. He didn't know a thing about field medicine. In fact, he joined us on the pier at San Diego. He hadn't even gone to Camp Pendleton. That was it.

We had a machine at the dispensary when we were doing the dogtags. By the time we were ready to leave, we hadn't finished making dogtags for everybody in the battalion so we got aboard ship and the shipfitter cut out aluminum squares and gave us a die set and a hammer. So we made two dogtags for each person that didn't have them from these squares of aluminum with rough edges and a hole punched in them.

And we did it with one die at a time. And that's what they wore all the way through.

I'd like to digress for a moment. We were all in a troop compartment, which was eight bunks high. I had the top bunk because I was smaller than all those ugly Marines. I was lying right under one of the pipes surrounded by asbestos. If you jumped off to get down you landed either on a jeep or a howitzer, or something they had tied on the deck below. It was pleasant weather so they let us stay up on deck at night. I was up on deck all the time anyway because that's where I was making those crazy dogtogs.

Right before we got to Kobe, we had to give everyone encephalitis shots for Japanese brain fever. And that afternoon we caught the tail end of a typhoon. The ship was rocking left and right. Four thousand people were throwing up all over the place. That encephalitis shot will make you dizzy and sick if you're on dry land but it really did a number on everybody on that ship.

We landed at Kobe but didn't disembark, even though we were allowed to go ashore for 2 hours. Well, that was a very big mistake. There were two ships and we ended with half of the Marines from the other ship and they ended up with half of the Marines from ours. It was just a crazy thing to do since we weren't going to stay there very long. They were out rounding people up firing into the air from jeeps. Fortunately, I got back on the right ship.

We landed at Inchon on September 21, 6 days after the 5th and the 1st Marines had landed there, and proceeded to move toward Seoul.

What kind of equipment did you have?

We had a bag from World War II. It was called a Unit 1. It was a fairly good-sized bag to carry and it was quite heavy because it was filled with bandages and a surgical kit that had a bandage scissors. In addition to that you had to carry that stupid carbine which only got in the way.

I've heard complaints from other Korean War veterans that you didn't always get the best equipment.

We ended up with all the stuff that was left over from World War II, some of which should have been burned or destroyed. The mortars wouldn't go far enough or the rifles weren't firing properly because they'd been sitting in storage somewhere. A lot of the medical gear was left over. The morphine was not old; it was brand new. Those damned shoepacs we got at Chosin Reservoir were certainly a problem.

Did you have a sidearm at that point?

No. At that time I didn't because they had issued us carbines. After we had been there for 3 weeks, they called all those carbines

back because their range was so short that the people who had them--sergeants and officers--tended to be shooting too close to the troops who were in front of them. So they took those back and gave us M1s. Well, the damn M1 felt like it weighed more than I did. At that time I probably weighed about 105 pounds. Two or three days after trying to do my job with that thing, I gave it to the company gunnery sergeant and told him that I couldn't carry a rifle and do my job. He asked me if I wanted a carbine and I told him I really didn't want anything. Four days later I had a machine gunner casualty who carried a .45. He said, "Doc. Do you want this .45?" It was in a blonde leather holster. I thought that even John Wayne would put one of these on. So, I strapped that thing on and carried it until we got to the 38th parallel. It was in September when I got the pistol and never took it out of the holster until we were surrounded by the Chinese in late October. When I fired it about 2 pounds of dirt came out of the barrel. The platoon sergeant said, "Doc, put that thing away. You throw grenades; I'll fire weapons." But that's the only time I ever fired it and it's lucky it didn't blow up in my face.

How did you get ashore?

On those landing craft. It could carry two tanks. We had to climb down the side on cargo nets which I had never done before. That was exciting. I didn't fall. A Marine told me to hold on to the verticals and put my feet on the horizontals. That was fairly simple.

It's not very far from Inchon to Seoul but we moved through rice paddies and on the road on up there. We saw a lot of tanks and trucks on fire. We didn't see that many casualties.

However, I had my first casualty between Inchon and Seoul. It was in a rice paddy and was a guy that was shot through the upper part of his leg, around the femur. And the bullet went through his gonads. That's a bandage job that will defy any ingenuity. But I did it with a couple of bandages. I took off my field jacket and put it under him because we were in a rice paddy. He asked me not to leave him and I didn't.

I stayed there with him and it began to get dark. And then the North Koreans began firing green flares. I knew that we didn't have green flares. And that gave me enough light to see a group of people walking on the dike surrounding the rice paddy. I knew they were Americans because I could see the silhouette of the radio on someone's back. I hollered out and pretty soon they stopped and four or five of them spread out and came toward me and this casualty. It turned out to be the battalion commander and his staff. And his name, coincidentally, was Davis, Ray Davis. Of course, he got the Medal of Honor at the Chosin Reservoir. He was my battalion commander. We brought the casualty over to the dike. And Davis just chewed my ass

because I had not taken care of the patient and moved on with my platoon. And he was correct. The theory is that you take care of your patient and move on because the collecting and clearing company will come and get him. Well, they had had 3 hours to have done that and didn't. So I stayed with the guy and I think he survived because I was there.

After LCOL Davis chewed me out he told me to wait while they got on the radio and called his jeep to pick me up and take me up to B Company where I should have been all the time. Well, we started to drive up there and it was colder than hell. I had given my sweater to the casualty and I no longer had a field jacket. But underneath the seat was a field jacket. Well, it was dark so I got it out and put it on. The next day, the driver came looking for me and his field jacket. But my guys hid me and he never got it back.

We ended up at the Han River, which flows through Seoul. They had boats to take us across but there was a village over there where the water was low. There were machine gun emplacements firing at us. I happened to be next to the naval gunfire officer who was calling one of the battleships out in Inchon Harbor for fire support. He gave them range changes and things like that and then he told them to fire for effect. And they fired a broadside. He told me later that they fired all the 16-inch guns at one time at this village. Well, you could look up and I'm not kidding, you could see it flying through the air and hear it because the shells were on their downward trajectory at that point. That broadside hit the village and when the smoke cleared there was a lake full of straw and no village. It was absolutely gone.

So we all got into the boats and went across. Our regiment turned north of Seoul and our function was to catch any North Koreans who were trying to go north. The 1st and the 5th Marines were pushing them out of Seoul. We had a number of firefights in that engagement. It was a fierce battle. We ended up at a town near the 38th parallel called Uijombu and stayed there for 2 or 3 days while they were deciding whether we were going to cross the parallel. At that time, they decided not to so they brought us back to Inchon and we were bivouacked in a brickyard factory. It was really a terrible place to try to get some sleep. They never resupplied us so in the interim the Army had come ashore. They had several depots. The company commander assigned each platoon a job at night to go down and steal certain things from the Army. It was my good luck to go down with our platoon and steal socks. So I had a bag full of socks which later on kept me from getting bad frostbite.

Where you in Joe Owen's outfit at this time?

Yes. In B Company.

Wasn't that a mortar outfit?

They had a mortar platoon attached to each company and a machine platoon attached to each rifle company. B Company therefore had mortars as well as machine guns and three platoons of infantry. This was the normal TO [Table of Organization].

And Joe was in charge of the mortar company.

Yes. It was up north where he became leader of the whole damn company, not just a platoon.

We stayed in this brickyard for transportation around to Wonsan. We got our gear together and went to the battalion aid station and got resupplied and just hung out. The Army brought beer, which cost 25 cents a can. You couldn't give them cash. You had to give them military scrip. I don't think more than 10 percent of our people had military scrip. We had a guy named José Jané. He was a regular Marine, a light heavy weight boxing champion in the Corps. He stole beer for us.

We then got on a Japanese LST. It was an LST we had left in Japan after World War II. It had a Japanese crew and one Navy chief quartermaster. It was the Q010. It was supposed to take us around and land us at Wonsan. We were on that LST because the 7th Regiment, which was the last regiment of the division to come ashore, was going to be the assault regiment at Wonsan when we landed up there.

So we went around. We had two meals a day. They had a thing called B rations where they have pork and beef in pretty large size cans. They would cook it and serve to a large group rather than individual rations. So that was going to be our food as we went up there. Well when we got to Wonsan Harbor, we ended up spending 11 more days than we were supposed to because there were mines all over the place and they were trying to clean them out before we could land.

That's what they called "Operation Yo-Yo."

That's exactly right.

That must have been miserable.

First of all, we ran out of food. Then we went down to one meal a day. On the tank deck of that LST, there were individual C-rations stored for our use once we got ashore. Of course, hungry people found the food. So they ended up having to put guards down there to keep us from stealing all that food. In the meantime, we were eating just one meal a day.

We had another problem. It was a Japanese ship and the sick bay had supplies in the Japanese language. The galley had been used to cook Japanese menus. The company commander said to five Marines,

"You, you, you, you, and you will be the cooks. And all you have to do is put this stuff in a pot and cook it and make some biscuits."

Well, it turns out that they did exactly as they had been told. They didn't bother to clean the place first. After the first meal, we had hundreds of cases of diarrhea. I looked in my Unit 1 bag and I had an 8-ounce bottle of bismuth and paregoric, which was the treatment for that particular problem. Well, it didn't take but 10 minutes for that to run out and so I didn't have anything. I used to hold sick bay in the head because I had that same malady as everybody else. I also had sulfa tablets and also sulfa powder. Back in 1950 we were putting this on wounds because it came in a medical bag left over from World War II. I thought, what the hell do I have to lose? I had this big bottle of sulfa tablets and gave them all out to people who had diarrhea, and damned if it didn't work. It cleared it up. In the meantime, we determined what the problem was and they went in there and cleaned up the kitchen before we had another meal.

We didn't do anything on that LST but play poker and shoot dice because it was just back and forth and back and forth.

During the course of that "Operation Yo-Yo," there was a machine gunner who was cleaning his .45 pistol and it had a round in the chamber. He shot himself in the hand. You could hold his hand up and literally look through it. It was in the palm of his hand when it went off. It was a bad wound. I did the best I could. I stopped the bleeding and put bandages on it and changed them on a regular basis but this guy was going to lose his hand if we didn't do something. I went to the company commander and told him that I couldn't do any more for this man and that if we didn't do something pretty soon he was going to lose his hand or even die because he was bleeding like crazy. I told him there was an APA nearby and it had a doctor aboard, and that I could take him over there.

He said "Yeah, but I won't be able to stop the ship to do that." I asked him if he would mind me going to the radio shack where the chief quartermaster was and call over and talk to the doctor about it. He said okay, so I went up there and they connected me with the doctor and I told him what my problem was. He told me to get the guy over there so he could do something definitive. I told him the company commander wouldn't stop the ship. He said he would take care of it. Pretty soon the commanding officer of the APA called over to our ship, talked to our company commander, and we stopped. They put a boat over the side and I went over there along with this patient. Before I left, everybody said, "Doc, if you're going over there, go to the PX and buy all the candy bars and cigarettes you can buy." And they gave me all this money, scrip as well as U.S. currency. I went over with a pocketful of money, delivered this guy to the sick bay, and then

asked the officer of the deck if he would mind if I went down and made some purchases at the PX. He saw to it that it was opened for me. I bought all the candy and cigarettes the money would buy. So we survived on candy bars for another 4 days until we landed at Wonsan.

When we got to Wonsan we were all hyped up for this landing. In the interim, the South Koreans had crossed the 38th parallel and occupied Wonsan. The 1st Marine Air Wing had flown into the airport there. When we landed there was this great big sign that said, "Bob Hope and the 1st Marine Air Wing Welcome the 1st Marine Division to Wonsan."

COL [Homer] Litzenberg, the regimental commander, was mad to say the least. He had had this vision of charging ashore. Marines don't want to come ashore and find Bob Hope there.

So, COL Litzenberg said, "We're getting out of here." So we marched to Hamhung without stopping. Hamhung was probably 35 miles from where we landed.

And you guys were out of shape by then.

Let me tell you, we could hardly move. But we did to get away from there. When we got to Hamhung they put us in some kind of warehouse and we just sat around and waited for something to happen. The song we sang at that time was "Goodnight Irene." I guess that was the popular song for the Korean War. So we sang "Goodnight Irene" in this big warehouse for hours.

One of Joe Owen's runners, a guy named Kelly, had been an engineer on a railroad in Chicago. Well, we found a railroad train outside and someone thought it would be nice to be able to drive it. Kelly said that if we could get some wood he would be able to drive it. So we went out and found wood and old Kelly got it started and we all had a ride up the road, not going anywhere in particular, just back and forth. This went on until they came and dragged us off there. But it killed the time.

We weren't there 2 days and then we began to form up for what would be the move to the north. It was fairly calm until we got to a place called Sudong. This was early November. In Sudong we were on a hill. It was the first time, it turns out, that the Chinese were actually in combat with the 1st Marine Division. They were feeling us out. The 1st Battalion, 7th Marines was the first unit to fight with the Chinese. That's when they had us surrounded with bugles, loud speakers, green flares, and it was at night when they attacked us. That's where I fired that .45 for the first time, but put it away when the platoon sergeant said I'd kill somebody, including myself if I fired it again. That was a tough night. It was one hell of a battle.

So, as a corpsman, you had some work cut out for you.

Let me tell you, we worked all night long with casualties because we had one hell of a lot of them. And that was our first real problem. We'd had firefights and casualties before but we never had anything like this before. Down in South Korea was a piece of cake because, after Inchon, the North Koreans were on the run and we were just chasing them. But this was an attack and it was one big firefight. One of our casualties was a guy named Archie van Winkle, who was a platoon sergeant of the 3rd platoon. He had been shot in the belly. He was lying on the deck and I went over to him. All I could get was a thready pulse. He was bleeding and I put bandages on him but I didn't think he was going to make it down off that hill. And I wrote that on his little toe tag that he was KIA. Well, obviously he wasn't because he got down off the hill and recovered, stayed in the Marines, and eventually became a colonel. And he was later awarded the Medal of Honor for what he did on that hill.

So you were able to apply a battle dressing.

I had to bandage him in four different places. He was very badly hit.

Did you have any plasma?

No. It was just bandaging. That and morphine; that's all we had. But they had to get back to the battalion aid station before they could get IVs and what have you. I had a kit with which I could sew but I never used it. And I wouldn't want to use it. We had an evacuation system that I understood by that time and we would get them back to the battalion aid station in pretty good shape.

So you had more than him to handle that night.

Oh, yeah. As I think about it, our company, which might be 150 men, maybe a little more than that with the mortar and machine gun people, had something like 30 or 40 casualties that night. And that's a hell of a lot of casualties for one battle.

Did you know, at that point, that these were Chinese?

No. And they just disappeared and we never saw them again until we got up to the Chosin Reservoir. By then, we were on a road surrounded by mountains. Down south they were hills and it was easy to traverse, but up north they were mountains, and it certainly was not easy. As a matter of fact, when our company moved out, I was always the last one in the company so I could go forward if needed and help the people who were having problems. Because we had a lot of people who were not in good shape because they were reserves and had not had any difficult exercise... We had some 17-year-old kids who were

still in high school. . . So we had a lot of people lagging behind because they couldn't keep up with the march over the hills. That's why I was behind to goose them a little bit and provide any assistance. I ended up carrying more machine gun ammunition than machine gunners did because it would be dropped all over the place because it was heavy. I rigged up a strap I had and hung them around my neck--and then carried whatever I could.

These were belts of ammo?

Yes. In a metal box. This was ammo for the machine guns, and the boxes were very heavy.

We had a couple of incidents on our way up there. The Koreans have an outside brick oven like a Dutch oven. They cooked on them and also hid in them, whether from the North Koreans or us. One of the civilians came and told our translator that there was somebody inside one of those ovens who had been hurt. They sent me over there and it was a girl about maybe 12 years old who was wounded in the hand with gangrene up to her elbow. Here I am with a Unit 1 bag. I dumped as much sulfa on that as I could but I knew damn well that it had advanced far enough so that it would take her arm at the least or kill her at the worst. But I put the sulfa and a bandage on anyway. I left some bandages with them and we took off. That was one of the sad parts of being a corpsman over there. After I left those people had nothing, absolutely nothing to go to.

How far up was that?

It was pretty far up. That was after Sudong. We were probably coming up to where we crossed over what later on turned out to be where Fox Company was at the power plant for the Reservoir. We weren't too far from the Reservoir at this point.

And the weather had turned cold.

It was quite cold. We didn't have any winter clothes at this time by the way. We didn't get those until we were nearly at the Reservoir.

Shoepacs. What did those things look like?

They were rubber on the bottom and leather on the top, coming up to your ankles.

Kind of like those LL Bean boots.

Yes. They had removable inserts and the theory was that during the day you would walk and they would keep you comfortable in cold weather, and at night you'd change your socks and put new inserts in. Well, that's very nice for a training manual but it wasn't worth a damn in combat. I know that those shoepacs contributed to 90 percent

of the problems we had with frostbite. People couldn't take them off at night. Your feet would get sweaty during the day because the rubber would make things warm. And if you didn't take them off and change your socks and inserts, then you ended up having frozen feet. We called them all kinds of things--Mickey Mouse shoes and a bunch of other things. I had socks in my bag that I stole from the Army and so I did have a change of socks. So did some of the other people. And we were able to at least ward off the frostbite, which I really didn't get until after I got wounded and didn't move for 2 hours. But until that time I had no problem with it at all. We had one guy in our platoon--a BAR man--very tall and broad-shouldered. He wore size 13 ½ shoes. And they didn't have shoepacs in 13 ½ size so he wore his boondockers and legging through the snow, which was now beginning to fall. I sent him back to the battalion aid station three times with a tag saying that he couldn't walk or he'd get frostbite. And they sent him back two times. The third time he never came back and don't know whatever happened to him.

So, things were getting cold and you didn't know where you were going.

We knew we were going to the Chosin Reservoir. The west side of it. The east side of it was the 7th Infantry Division which was going to go up to the Yalu River. I didn't know this at the time. A grunt doesn't know what the grand plan is but the 10th Corps commander, GEN Almond said that we were to go up there and go west of the Chosin Reservoir and then go further west and hook up with the 8th Army. At that time they weren't even there. They had already retreated. But we went up there and were strung out. Supplies and ammunition were a big problem. We would have some air drops from time to time. And they would provide us with some rations and some ammo and medical supplies. I used to go back to the battalion aid station and get that refilled. I was a third class corpsman when I was over there. But there was a chief in the battalion aid station who I knew who had been an instructor in Hospital Corps school at Great Lakes when I went there. He gave me some 95 [percent] alcohol to put in one of my canteens. Corpsmen carried two canteens. One was their own and the other was to give a drink to a casualty. I put 95 in one of them and water in the other which I carried next to my body. If you didn't it would freeze. You put that next to your body along with a couple of cans of rations. I put some of the boxes of morphine in there and didn't know that morphine would freeze.

These were boxes of syrettes?

Yes.

How many syrettes would be in a box?

Twelve. And I carried a box of those next to my belly underneath all the clothing I had on. And I carried four of those syrettes in my mouth when we were going into action. That would keep them from freezing and keep them pliable. Some of the other corpsmen did the same thing.

The road up to Chosin twisted around the mountains and went through a natural cut made by a river. There would be the railroad track, the river, and the road, and then mountains growing up on both sides of them. I had a Marine forward observer for the artillery. He was trying to get somewhere to get a good look at what he wanted them to fire on when the North Koreans attacked. So he hid inside this train tunnel. But so did the North Koreans. He was in there for 3 days with those North Koreans. Finally they left and this guy came out a babbling idiot from laying three days in there. It was not funny. We had to treat him. He was my casualty.

What did you do?

I did nothing. I got some gauze and actually tied his hands together because he was reaching for his gun and waving his hands in the air. I took him over to the road and hailed a jeep and put him in it instructing the driver to take him back to the battalion aid station. I never knew what happened to him. He had bad dementia.

I had another Marine who came up to me. He was a World War II veteran who went through the Pacific islands and contracted malaria. This was when we were almost to the Reservoir and it was snowing and cold. He said, "Doc. I think I have malaria." I said, "You can't have malaria. It's 10 degrees below zero." And he insisted that he had it and told me he had had it before. Reluctantly, I wrote down on his casualty tag that I thought he might have malaria. He never came back to the company but I found out from someone in the battalion aid station who did a lab test that he did have active malaria. It's not very often in 20 degrees below zero weather that you'll find someone with malaria.

Now this all happened before Thanksgiving, before the Chinese really came in.

This was the middle of November.

Do you remember Thanksgiving Day?

Oh, yes, very well. Actually, it was the day after Thanksgiving. We went out on a patrol on Thanksgiving Day and got back very late at night. It was pitch dark, but the field kitchen was still there. And it was very, very cold. It was not 20 degrees below but 10 degrees lower than that. The company came back so the field kitchen opened

up to feed us. That had tin trays and they put the turkey and mashed potatoes on there and everything immediately froze. I couldn't even eat the mashed potatoes; they were hard. But we did eat the rest of the stuff even though it was cold because it was a meal. Bear in mind it was darker than pitch. As a matter of fact, Joe Owen and I went over and found a jeep. We turned the lights on and sat on the hood eating so we could see what we were doing. When we did that we were illuminated. There was a sniper somewhere firing at us and Joe and I just sat there eating our meal and didn't even bat an eye at that sniper who really had poor aim. I recall one of the shots ricocheting off the jeep.

Now we were coming to the Chosin Reservoir. We came to Hagaru first and the whole Division but for the 1st Regiment was there. The 5th and the 7th were there. GEN [O.P.] Smith decided to split us up. The 5th Marines were going to go on the east side of the Reservoir and they were there until the Army came up and relieved them. Then they joined us on the west side of the Reservoir. We had already been up there and had a couple of skirmishes. We think they were with North Koreans.

Could you actually see the Reservoir?

Oh, my goodness, yes. It looked like a big ice skating rink. When we were in Hagaru, it was right there. We walked on it in the course of moving up to some hill somewhere. It was the 28th or 29th when we started to move to the west rather than further to the north, allegedly to team up with the 8th Army. History shows that GEN Smith was not at all enamored of doing that. He didn't like the fact that the whole division was strung out over all that road. He didn't have the whole division within sight.

At that time we began moving in battalion as opposed to company because we had lost enough people. So we did battalion operations. We were bivouacked on some hill. Baker Company was sent out to make a reconnaissance on what we were going to do the next day. So we went out and were in this valley. The Chinese were in the hills. This was the first time they attacked us. They had mortar emplacements, had aimed them and found out where they were going to land. They began throwing heavy automatic weapons and mortars at us. They had an artillery piece which they towed with horses. And it had those wooden wheels like we used to see on old carriages. But they didn't have any up there where we were.

The North Koreans had a 120mm mortar, which was a Russian weapon. The howitzers were 105 and 155mm. This was a 120mm mortar with a barrel you could almost climb down. I never saw it fired but once and I didn't know what it was at the time. It landed right on top of a battalion aid station and blew it to smithereens. It killed all the casualties

and most of the staff. But the Chinese were using the little mortars and firing them down at us in this valley. And that's when I got wounded from one of those mortar shells. They had already registered and were firing at us. We were having a hell of a time.

Did that hill where you wounded have a name?

South Ridge, Hill 1419.

Did you see any of the enemy?

Absolutely. In fact, they tried to attack down the side of this hill to overrun us but they didn't make it because we had enough firepower to drive them back. But I had also seen the Chinese at Sudong where I had that ill-fated firing the pistol episode. There were lots of them there. The first line had weapons and the second and third line didn't. And the fourth line had weapons. So the second and third lines were attacking head-on and would pick up the weapons from the casualties in front of them. There were dead Chinese all over the place. They were armed with burp guns and even Thompson submachine guns. I don't know where they got those.

Eventually, Charlie Company came up and helped us get out of there but we were there for hours under fire. I had five guys behind an outcropping of rock that I had treated and was with them when somebody yelled "Corpsman!" So I got up to go and when I did, three of these guys got up to follow me. I turned around and said, "Stay there. I'm just going out to attend to another casualty. I'll be back." When I was in the process of hollering at them, a mortar shell went off right in front of me. All the shrapnel went through my open mouth and the side of my face, plus many other places on my body.

But there were more casualties and I had to take care of them. But before I could do that, I stopped first to put a bandage on. Now putting a bandage on inside the mouth is very difficult. So I turned one of them inside out, cut it, and then folded it in half so there would be gauze on both sides and stuffed it inside my mouth. That stopped some of the bleeding. My other wounds were in my chest, arms, and legs but I was still functional. Then I took care of some casualties. The other guys, realizing I was in bad shape, helped out. By then Charlie Company showed up and some of their corpsmen took care of some of our people.

I lay on the ground for about an hour before I could get out of that valley. There was a road and I ended up riding in a 6 by truck for 2 more hours. That's when I got the little bit of frostbite on my feet. My hands were never a problem. Mine is inconsequential compared to some of the other people. You know, corpsmen took their gloves off to take care of their casualties. The good thing about that was that when you cut through a casualty's many layers of clothes

it was warm, and if you put your hand in the wound it was warm. Other than the fact that your hands were dirty and bloody, I really didn't get any frostbite on my hands because when you finished your job, you put the gloves back on again.

How did you treat patients through all their clothing?

We had huge bandage scissors that were absolutely marvelous. You could cut right through straps and clothing without any problem at all. You knew where they were hurt because they either told you or you could see where the projectile or whatever it was went into them.

Did you have any problem with bleeding or did the extreme cold slow things down?

It helped. You'd open them up and what you would expect to be a fairly effusive and bloody wound wasn't.

So you were now knocked out of action. What happened next?

They took me back on this 6 by truck to Company C of the med battalion. They had a little dwelling they were using. They put me next to the pot-bellied stove. After a while I told them they would have to move me because it was thawing out my feet and they were hurting like hell. I was only there overnight, and the next morning an artillery observation airplane like a Piper Cub flew in and landed in the road beside this medical company. They then loaded me aboard this airplane. But the door wouldn't close because the stretcher stuck out. The plane had a black Army pilot. I'd never seen a black Army pilot before. It didn't matter to me. He was going to get me the hell out of there. They ended up tying the door to the end of the stretcher so it wouldn't flap around and he took off from the road and flew me back to a MASH unit because they had oral surgeons there.

This was not an ambulance plane?

No. It was an artillery observation plane. They just folded down the passenger seat and shoved the stretcher in.

What do you remember about the flight?

It was colder than hell! The wind was blowing right in through the open door. Even though he wasn't flying very high, the ground temperature was 30 below zero! The flight was less than 30 minutes long. I ended up very close to Hamhung

They debrided the wound and took out lots of metal that was in my mouth, did some bandaging. They were also going to do some surgery to keep some of the facial tissue together. I had a hole in the roof

of my mouth that went up into my sinus on the left side. They wanted to do something with that.

Prior to my getting wounded, I had been back to the battalion aid station and got some dexadrine so I wouldn't sleep at night. By the time I had taken that for 3 days I was really hooked. When I got back to that MASH they gave me some seconal or something and I couldn't go to sleep because I was high. So I sat up all night with a night nurse named Anderson and I folded 4 x 4s and mixed penicillin. She knew I was a corpsman. In those days penicillin was crystalline and you had to mix distilled water with it. I did that until they operated on me and gave me sodium pentothal and I went out. I never had any more problems after that.

From there I went to the Fukuoka Army Hospital because that's where this MASH evacuated their patients. It had Army casualties and also casualties from the other nations that were there. In the same ward I was on there were five people from the Turkish army. These guys were walking and some were bed-ridden. They still had their swords and a bottle of whatever their national drink is, which they wouldn't surrender. They would drink a case or more of Coke a day and then drink this Ouzo or whatever it was and begin fighting with each other. They would fight by hitting with the flat side of their sword. The nurses had a hell of a time trying to separate them.

Fortunately, I was only there 3 days before they flew me to Yokosuka and things got back to normal. Actually, it wasn't normal because there were 2,600 patients there. These were the casualties from the Chosin Reservoir. My place in the hospital was in the corpsmen's quarters. The nurses quarters was a ward and the hospital was a ward. The passageways were a ward. Even the auditorium was filled with patients. Prior to evacuation back to the States, my bed was on the stage of the auditorium. The staff lived in the caves which the Japanese had built around the hospital.

The Commanding Officer of the hospital pinned the Purple Heart medal on me. He was CAPT Walter James who by coincidence was the Executive Officer at Annapolis when I had my run in with the Chief Nurse. The Nurse/Dietitian who I worked for at Annapolis as well as other nurses and corpsmen I knew were on the staff. They cared for me very well as they did for all casualties in what was a crowded and confusing environment. The same great care was duplicated as I was returned to the States and ultimately to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital.

What did they do for your frostbite?

They didn't do anything at Yokosuka but when I got back to Philadelphia Naval Hospital, where I stayed for 6 months, I was on a ear, nose, and throat ward. That was right next door to a ward where

they had 42 patients. At least 40 or those were frostbite patients. There were six different types of treatment going on at the same time. They didn't know how to treat them. You would find a guy in a bed with a heat cradle over the top of his feet, with a light in there to warm his feet. You would go down two beds and there was a guy with an icepack on his feet. Two more beds down you'd see a patient with nothing but a fan blowing on his feet. It was hit and miss.

What kind of treatment did you get for your frostbite?

I didn't get any because mine didn't bother me. It bothered me in later years, though. I lost my toe nails and to this day they keep falling off. I still had feeling in my feet so I wasn't a real candidate for treatment.

What was the story with your chest wounds?

I still have shrapnel in there. It went into my chest and when I was at Philadelphia they were going to take it out. They had a device with which you could detect metal. I don't think anybody in that operating room had ever used it before. They were doing this with me on a local anesthetic. They injected me, cut me open, and stuck this thing like a wand in there trying to find this hunk of metal. They weren't having much luck. I, of course, was awake hearing all this going on. I was going to feel a little pain as the anesthesia was wearing off. I heard this doctor ask for a rake. A rake is an instrument that looks exactly like that, except it has curved ends on it so you can lift the tissue out of the way. Well, they put that rake in there and I went about 4 feet off the table. They finally stopped and sewed me back up saying they'd look at it later. It turned out that this fragment, which is about the size of my thumbnail, had worked its way down behind the sternum, where it resides to this day. Fortunately, it's covered in scar tissue so it doesn't move, and hasn't since 1951.

I still have five pieces in my face. They took the tissue from the right side of the roof of my mouth and flopped it over to the left side of my mouth where this big hole was. And that's how they closed up that hole. Then they made me a plastic denture--a guard--which I wore all the time until that flap began to heal and was strong enough. I was on a liquid diet for 4 months! Back in 1951 the normal liquid diet was Jello, soup, and milkshakes, period. After that I ended up weighing 85 pounds.

The fragments in my face don't bother me. I had some in my leg and arm that came out after that by working their way to the surface. We just plucked them out. I should say that this mouth wound took out the whole left of my face inside. It took the gum, the bone, and the teeth so there's was just a great big hole there. Before I got

out of the Philadelphia Naval Hospital, they made a prosthesis for me but I couldn't eat on that side. They couldn't replace the gum or bone. In fact, it was 17 years later, in 1967, that the oral surgeon at Bethesda did a bone and tissue transplant to give me gum and bone in the left side of my mouth. In that interim I could only eat on the right side. Let me tell you, I beat the hell out of the teeth on that right side doing that. I spent half my life in the dentist's office either when I was on active duty as well as at the VA Clinic, Orlando where I am a regular patient in the Dental Service.