

# John H. Perry Jr.

June 3, 2021

Interviewed by Leah Cohen

Recorded and filmed by Brad Guidera at Lake County Veterans and Family Services Foundation

Transcribed by Sonix with corrections by Hans Johnson

Edited by Hans Johnson

Web biography by Hans Johnson

Produced by Angel Melendez

**Cohen:** [00:00:55] So today is June 3rd, 2021. My name is Leah Cohen. I'm the Oral History Manager at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library and we are here at the Lake County Veterans and Family Services Foundation, and we are very honored to interview PFC John Perry, who served in the US Army from 1949 to 1953. He saw much combat during the Korean War, including the Battle of the Chösin Reservoir. He is indeed one of the Frozen Chösin.

**Perry:** [00:01:33] They give me that name. [Laughter]

**Cohen:** [00:01:36] We thank you so much for coming in today and for sharing your story and thank the organization and volunteers as well. So, we'll begin at the beginning. When and where were you born?

**Perry:** [00:01:49] Born in Waukegan, Illinois. St. Theresa's Hospital.

**Cohen:** [00:01:53] And which year?

**Perry:** [00:01:55] Nineteen thirty-two.

**Cohen:** [00:01:58] And what was it like growing up in Waukegan?

**Perry:** [00:02:02] Well, kind of half and half. Half like the north and half like the south.

**Cohen:** [00:02:08] So which half did you live in and how did people get along from the north and south?

**Perry:** [00:02:13] Uh, fair. In those days it was a lot different than it is now, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:02:22] What was different about it?

**Perry:** [00:02:24] Everybody had job along the lakefront down here, they had all the different factories and everything—down here and all that. And they had Northshore [rail line] running that—everybody missed that train. that that went on about, oh, sixty, I guess somewhere around Northshore. It used to run from Chicago to Milwaukee.

**Cohen:** [00:02:45] And what did your father do for work?

**Perry:** [00:02:49] He worked on Northshore then Glencoe, he lived in Glencoe for a while down there. He lived on the place. He took care of the uh-the flower orchids and stuff, raised orchids, transplant[ed] orchid, a white orchid and a black orchid and a pink orchid, in the same, same thing.

**Cohen:** [00:03:07] And what about your mother? Was she—

**Perry:** [00:03:10] She died way back in the uh, probably '30s, '40s somewhere—wait, well no way back in the in the late or early '30s.

**Cohen:** [00:03:21] So, you were still a little boy?

**Perry:** [00:03:22] Yeah, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:03:25] Did you have a stepmother?

**Perry:** [00:03:28] Oh, I had some housekeepers come in for a while. Then I got a stepmother after a while.

**Cohen:** [00:03:36] Do you have any brothers or sisters?

**Perry:** [00:03:38] I have one sister. She just passed here about a year ago, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:03:43] Do you have any stepsisters or brothers?

**Perry:** [00:03:45] Oh, no. Well, I had a stepbrother. He's gone too, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:03:52] Which school did you go to?

**Perry:** [00:03:55] I went to school—a school in Chicago, went to boarding school in Chicago, then the one in Milwaukee, boarding school.

**Cohen:** [00:04:01] What was it like at these boarding schools?

**Perry:** [00:04:05] Like the army, you're marching in and out every morning yeah, yeah. It was like the army. They march you in and march out and all that yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:04:14] Were the classes very tough or the teachers, very strict?

**Perry:** [00:04:18] Oh yeah. He was taught by... not Catholic priests, but brothers. And a lot of them were ex-boxers or drunks or so, yeah, they weren't they weren't priests, but they just, you know, they ran these different schools yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:04:36] Did you have a lot of sports at these schools?

**Perry:** [00:04:39] Uh, basketball.

**Cohen:** [00:04:44] Did you play basketball?

**Perry:** [00:04:45] Uh yeah, we had to go to Marquette University up in Milwaukee to play.

**Cohen:** [00:04:50] And which subjects did you like at school?

**Perry:** [00:04:56] Oh, I don't know, a little military history and all that stuff yeah, History, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:05:03] Did your father or any other relatives, cousins, uncles, serve in the US military?

**Perry:** [00:05:10] My father was in World War I and his brother in the Spanish-American War.

**Cohen :** [00:05:14] Oh, The Spanish-American War. Wow. What had they told you about these wars?

**Perry:** [00:05:23] Uh Not too much. You know, these kids stayed in their place. You know, you didn't ask to—I think my daughter, asked my father before he died, a lot of questions, but stuff that wouldn't you know, he didn't tell his personal, you know. And when the kids—when the grown people talk, you went outside.

**Cohen:** [00:05:39] Yeah.

**Perry:** [00:05:40] Yeah. You didn't stay in the same room—

**Cohen:** [00:05:42] [interrupts] It wasn't respectful.

**Perry:** [00:05:43] And you didn't talk back either. Because he would slap you through this wall yeah. No, no, these, they was, you know. Other words, they told you to stay in your place.

**Cohen:** [00:05:54] Yeah, no its true it was a different, different time.

**Perry:** [00:05:56] Well, the teachers, too, in the school, you know. They'd give you a good whipping too and call up and tell your parents that you got a spanking in school, and you'd get one when you get home.

**Cohen:** [00:06:06] So, it's a very different way of raising children.

**Perry:** [00:06:08] Yeah, different, oh, yeah. Yeah, different, all together in school. But all the parents knew all the teachers, so they could come back and forth all the time, see what's going on, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:06:20] One would check on the other.

**Perry:** [00:06:24] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:06:24] Uh, did you have friends at the boarding schools, like were people, did people get along?

**Perry:** [00:06:31] Oh, I guess back, yeah, I guess they did often. They had an all-boys boarding school. Yeah. It was strictly, like a military. You know, you had to eat at one time and that was it. Get up and go. You don't eat, if you miss it, you don't get nothing. They're pretty strict. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:06:49] Was it integrated? Were there Blacks and Whites in the school together?

**Perry:** [00:06:52] No, no. Not till uh, integration didn't come in in the military and all the schools until about uh, oh I think around the Truman. Truman integrated the [US] Army it wasn't integrated in World War II at all.

**Cohen:** [00:07:05] So, the schools also were, were segregated.

**Perry:** [00:07:07] All the schools around here. Yeah. Everything yeah. No, the military, they didn't integrate until uh '53 when Truman gave the order. No, everything was uh—well you see in my book there, in the outfit you trained all separately.

**Cohen:** [00:07:28] Did you graduate from high school or...?

**Perry:** [00:07:32] No, I went right in. I got out; I went up to about the seventh grade then I went on in the military.

**Cohen:** [00:07:39] So, so what, oh, sorry, go on.

**Perry:** [00:07:41] I went in when I was sixteen or so.

**Cohen:** [00:07:44] So, what motivated you to join the [Army]?

**Perry:** [00:07:48] I just wanted to see what you know, getting the excitement was like. A lot of people were going in during the Korean War, and so we all went in, yeah. We all were sworn in the morning and afternoon we was on our way. There was no going home.

**Cohen:** [00:08:03] Were some of your friends from school with you as well, when you joined?

**Perry:** [00:08:08] No, no, no, they were all scared to go. Yeah, they didn't.

**Cohen:** [00:08:14] Did your, did your father or stepmother or guardian need to sign a paper?

**Perry:** [00:08:19] Yeah, my stepmother had to sign me in, yeah. Time to raise your hand, and that was it. You're on your way. There were no going home now. No.

**Cohen:** [00:08:30] Where did you raise your hand?

**Perry:** [00:08:32] Uh I think it was done in Chicago at one of the big places down there. Of course, I think it's about five hundred of us went in down together, yeah. In the morning, and afternoon, night was on the train, yea.

**Cohen:** [00:08:44] So, so you had heard about the Korean War before you, before you started?

**Perry:** [00:08:50] It was starting to start up. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We took quite a beating over there. You know, the north when the Chinese came in—well before the Chinese came in. The South didn't have no army. We had to go over there and try to back 'em up.

**Cohen:** [00:09:06] So that was your like that was one of the reasons why you wanted to...

**Perry:** [00:09:10] Yeah, yeah. I went in and I wanted to get those jump wings and I went to Fort Benning, Georgia to get them wings.

**Cohen:** [00:09:16] Wow. So, before you went to Fort Benning, do you want to talk about where you did basic training and what it was like?

**Perry:** [00:09:24] At Fort Knox, Kentucky yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:09:27] And what was a typical day like in basic training?

**Perry:** [00:09:32] Reveille at 4:30 and they'd run you till almost dark... eight weeks of basic training and sixteen weeks of jump school down there.

**Cohen:** [00:09:41] Was it hard physically to do?

**Perry:** [00:09:43] Oh, yeah. You got to be in good shape. Yeah, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:09:47] How did it compare to boarding school? Like was it easier for you who followed a routine in school?

**Perry:** [00:09:55] About the same almost. Yeah, more stricter, yeah. Because your sergeant had charge over you. You belonged to him. He could slap you around when he got ready, you know. You couldn't say a word. You can't do that now, but before that, he was the one that, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:10:12] Like the drill. The drill sergeant would be very tough.

**Perry:** [00:10:17] Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. The first day he'll tell everybody he's, he's your father and mother. That's what he used to tell us. I'm your father and mother for the next eight weeks. Yeah that's right.

**Cohen:** [00:10:29] So, did you learn how to shoot at basic training?

**Perry:** [00:10:34] Yeah, we had all that, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:10:35] So, what kind of weapons were you learning on?

**Perry:** [00:10:39] Uh, about all the machine guns and all them. You had rifles and all that.

**Cohen:** [00:10:45] Had you used a gun before, like when you were at school or...?

**Perry:** [00:10:49] Uh a little hunting and B.B. guns and stuff like that. Nothing big, no. It was all new we got in there it was all uh, all different, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:10:59] What was it like learning? Was it easy for you, challenging?

**Perry:** [00:11:04] I just had to follow the rules that's all. Get up at 2:30 in the morning and regularly it was about 4:30. You go eat and then you go back to your regular duty. You know, they put you on there. KP, we used to pull our own KP [Kitchen Police]. You know we had our cooks, and we had our own kitchen police. We did our own not like now where they got people doing that, we had to do all of everything.

**Cohen:** [00:11:29] Oh, so the whole thing like the cooking and the cleaning?

**Perry:** [00:11:31] Yeah, cleaning and peeling potatoes, all that stuff. Yeah, yeah, we did our own. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:11:36] What was the food good at the time?

**Perry:** [00:11:40] Uh, had a lot of canned stuff.

**Cohen:** [00:11:41] Yeah, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:11:42] We made it by the gallons they, they cook food and carried A big pot, you know.



**Cohen:** [00:11:50] Yeah, oh, yes, for the huge quantities.

**Perry:** [00:11:52] Yeah, that's how everything was. Mostly can, canned everything. Your coffee was all powdered coffee powdered cream and all that.

**Cohen:** [00:12:03] Yeah. Because it really is.

**Perry:** [00:12:04] Yeah, everything. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:12:06] So out of curiosity what made you want to join the Army rather than let's say the [US] Navy?

**Perry:** [00:12:14] Well, I went down there, and they took us all right in yeah, there were no choice. Once you got in and they locked the doors and you raise your hand, that was it. They locked the door so we couldn't get out until the train came. Yeah. Well, they need the manpower. Yeah. The Navy, they weren't too worried about the Navy. And Navy took quite a beating over there in Korea too yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:12:36] At this point they're worried about the Army.

**Perry:** [00:12:37] The Chinese hit a lot of the Navy ships over our Navy ships.

**Cohen:** [00:12:40] Yeah. Yeah, that's true.

**Perry:** [00:12:41] [US] Air Force, too, yeah. Well, they had all the modern-day stuff, we had all the old World War II stuff.

**Cohen:** [00:12:49] Yeah, I was, I was reading about that, and I was wondering what you thought about it. I was reading that after World War II, the US military cut the budget really drastically.

**Perry:** [00:12:59] We had a lot of antiques come from Europe or Japan. World War II stuff. Yeah, the planes - had to put duct tape around the wings to hold it together, had big

duct—long duct tape rolls, to hold the wings on yeah. And we didn't have nothing hardly. Well, I know the beginning of World War II they used to train up here at Camp McCredie with broomsticks. We didn't have nothing. Even World War II at the beginning.

**Cohen:** [00:13:24] And when you trained, you had ammunition, but it was really old machine guns or?

**Perry:** [00:13:29] Some of the old stuff was old. Our canned food cans came from uh... From I guess, packed in 1919 World War I stuff. [Cohen laughs] They got probably got a lot in a warehouse now.

**Cohen:** [00:13:43] Did people get sick from eating the food from 1919 or, or...?

**Perry:** [00:13:49] Uh, not too much, no. That's all you had to eat.

**Cohen:** [00:13:52] Yeah, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:13:53] Except the holidays, sometimes they would drop you some food in with the plane. They drop some hot meals in now and then.

**Cohen:** [00:14:01] So, you mentioned before that after you were at Fort Knox, after the eight weeks, you went to do your advanced individual...

**Perry:** [00:14:12] [Fort] Benning. Down at [Georgia] yeah, sixteen weeks down there.

**Cohen:** [00:14:14] Yes. So, did you want to talk about that? It's really cool that you got your wings. You want to talk about that?

**Perry:** [00:14:18] Well, it's in that book. The first week, all that jumping and running and, not at Airborne School [Basic Airborne Course]. You don't walk. Everything, you place, you go, you run.

**Cohen:** [00:14:27] So, what was the training like? Is it something completely new to you?

**Perry:** [00:14:31] Oh, like a football player. You got to run and jump and fall and all that. Like, like practice football.

**Cohen:** [00:14:39] Do you remember your first jump?

**Perry:** [00:14:43] Yeah, the light turned green, and everybody went. I think we had a few people didn't jump. We had some officers that froze, froze. They wouldn't jump.

**Cohen:** [00:14:51] Did you feel ready for a jump or were you a little concerned or—?

**Perry:** [00:14:55] Went out with the rest of them that's all.

**Cohen:** [00:14:56] Yeah, yeah. And you were—I think you made a joke earlier about the parachute not opening.

**Perry:** [00:15:03] Yeah, we had a couple of them that, they called a Mae West. They didn't open up, right to the ground. At least a thousand feet, you'd be on the ground in eight seconds. So many thousands of feet. Yeah. It would happen in the morning, and we'd go right back up in the afternoon and go jump again. Yeah, well, they don't let you think about it. You know, you see something like that. They keep you going.

**Cohen:** [00:15:23] Keep it going.

**Perry:** [00:15:24] Yeah, they don't—you don't stop and think.

**Cohen:** [00:15:26] How do they work it? Like did they first have jumps at lower elevations?

**Perry:** [00:15:30] Yeah, you start you learn on the platform, and they work up to... Then had something like they have used to have at Riverview [Park, amusement park]. They pull you up on a long chute and let you go.

**Cohen:** [00:15:44] How did your feet feel after you—like when you landed? Was it hard on your ankles?

**Perry:** [00:15:50] You supposed to land on the balls of your feet and roll, not flat foot. You don't land flat foot. You land and roll.

**Cohen:** [00:15:57] So, were you able to carry that out? Like did that work out okay?

**Perry:** [00:16:00] With that ground coming up, yeah. If you don't, you will break your legs or something. Yeah. You got to bounce and roll. You go through all them jumps. Grueling 16 weeks. They run you more until night.

**Cohen:** [00:16:13] Wow.

**Perry:** [00:16:15] Everywhere you went down at [Fort] Benning, you had to run. You couldn't be walking around. You had to run.

**Cohen:** [00:16:20] It sounds like it was nonstop.

**Perry:** [00:16:22] Yeah, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:16:23] Morning until night yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:16:26] Did you find that the, like the discipline in terms of the sergeants was a little more relaxed than at basic training?

**Perry:** [00:16:37] Over there, yeah in combat it's a lot different. Yeah. You don't see all them guys. Yeah. No, especially the officers who I see no officer at all, mostly, uh, corporal sergeants. All your officers, they stayed, they stayed in the back somewhere. They gave the order to them. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:16:55] And what was it like for you being in Georgia? Like, I'm guessing it might have been the first time you were—

**Perry:** [00:17:01] In the South. Yeah. And I wasn't too good.

**Cohen:** [00:17:06] How--like..

**Perry:** [00:17:06] Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama and all them southern states. Now it was like the Civil War. They still fighting the Civil War down there.

**Cohen:** [00:17:14] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:17:16] So, so what was—so would you go to the local towns if you had some time off or was it too risky?

**Perry:** [00:17:23] You had to go to certain places, you know. Until we get ready to go overseas, then we start running in all of them places.

**Cohen:** [00:17:31] Were you with other Blacks in your unit?

**Perry:** [00:17:36] Yeah, the whole unit was Black. Yeah, the White unit was there, and we were another. All segregated, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:17:40] The whole way through was, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:17:40] All segregated, yeah. Until we got overseas and combat, you know, there weren't no colored blood. Blood was red. So, the things change over there real quick.

**Cohen:** [00:17:52] But while training everything—

**Perry:** [00:17:54] [Interrupts] Yeah. Training back here in the States.

**Cohen:** [00:17:55] It was very, still separate.

**Perry:** [00:17:57] Yeah. States' rights. States rules they had done in the South, yeah... Over there it changed ones somebody's shooting at you. Yeah, that changed real quick. You forget about all that segregation business.

**Cohen:** [00:18:10] The perspective changed quickly.

**Perry:** [00:18:12] Other folks don't believe in that either. You know, they don't—they kill. They don't care about that. All they do is on Americans, the Chinese, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:18:19] That's right they're not making a distinction.

**Cohen:** [00:18:23] So, when you're at Airborne School, were you, like, hoping to become part of the 82nd Airborne Division?

**Perry:** [00:18:32] I was with the 11th Airborne [Division] down at [Fort] Benning, 11th. Oh yeah. Eighty-second [Airborne Division] was in Fort Bragg, Carolina, I think.

**Cohen:** [00:18:39] Oh, you're right. I'm sorry about that. I got mixed up.

**Perry:** [00:18:40] I was in the Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Yeah. No, they took it out there and put it on the ground after a while. But they needed more people on the ground over there in Korea.

**Cohen:** [00:18:48] So even though you had the training, you had the means, they needed more people on the ground.

**Perry:** [00:18:52] Yeah, we didn't have too many people left. We took quite a beating up there the first few years over there.

**Cohen:** [00:18:59] Over there. So. So before you get to Korea, did you do any more training in the United States after Fort Benning? Or like did you—

**Perry:** [00:19:10] No, they packed us up right away after Benning. Yeah, it was all getting ready because they was short of people we went out, we took troop train all the way up to Seattle, Washington. In the ship all the way around Alaska and then into Korea. [Cohen interrupts: like first north and then] Yes from Seattle, had to go all the way around. All the way around. Stop for the Russian navy, go by. And we let the Russian navy go by.

**Cohen:** [00:19:33] Oh, my goodness. What was it like being on a ship and did you have seasickness?

**Perry:** [00:19:39] Well, yeah, saltwater trying to yeah, salt water. One part was cold next time was hot. We went around Alaska—I mean Seattle and come back, back there. Wow. About fourteen days trip. Wow. By ship yeah. It was a convoy, you know, a whole lot of other ships. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:19:56] What kind of ship, what was it like?

**Perry:** [00:19:58] The Old-World War II Liberty ships.

**Cohen:** [00:20:00] Liberty ships.

**Perry:** [00:20:00] Yeah, like the one they used to make in three pieces, three or four pieces. I think they junk all that stuff; we gave a lot of stuff to Russia. All of them ships.

**Cohen:** [00:20:11] Oh, what was—what do you mean?

**Perry:** [00:20:14] All them ships they made in three pieces we put together in World War II. By then they were ready to fall apart, by the time we got to them, they were leaking and everything else, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:20:27] How did you and the others spend your time on the ship?

**Perry:** [00:20:31] Playing cards or just talking or smoking?

**Cohen:** [00:20:37] Right now here, my geography is getting a little confused, but did you pass the equator, and were there any ceremonies?

**Cohen:** [00:20:45] Yeah, I think they gave us some kind of certificate when you passed that thing twice or whatever it is.

**Cohen:** [00:20:50] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay yeah.

**Perry:** [00:20:52] The Navy has some kind of ceremony they go through, you know, when they do that.

**Cohen:** [00:20:59] So, when you're on the way to Korea, like, what had you heard at the time? Like were you being told when you were doing training that "Oh God, the situation is worsening"—

**Perry:** [00:21:09] Not too much no, they weren't too, until we got there. We'd seen all the smoke and fire. And that was it. Yeah, yeah. We knew where we were going and beginning so.

**Cohen:** [00:21:20] Did the liberty boat land in Korea itself or was it first Japan, like how did it work out?

**Perry:** [00:21:25] No, we came in and landing barges from there, out there... And Korea we went straight to Korea.

**Cohen:** [00:21:31] Straight to Korea.

**Perry:** [00:21:31] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:21:33] And you saw the smoke right away as your landing?

**Perry:** [00:21:36] Well, the Seoul was burning, The city of Seoul. You know, they'd run, chase Americans all the way back from the north to the south almost. Yeah.



**Cohen:** [00:21:44] Wow.

**Perry:** [00:21:45] So, we had to go back all the way up. And we trapped them in when they had made that when MacArthur was over there.

**Cohen:** [00:21:53] So, the first step is you guys get off the boat, you're at Seoul and you have to go north to fight.

**Perry:** [00:22:00] Yeah, we had to help back up with all the other outfits over there.

**Cohen:** [00:22:03] So, at this point in time, were the Chinese already involved or was it the—

**Perry:** [00:22:08] Oh, they were in there. Yeah, the Chinese came in, yeah, up on the reservoir. Oh yeah, they came in, yeah. Chinese, you had Mongolians and the Russians were doing the fly in.

**Cohen:** [00:22:17] Fly in. So, so, I don't know how to put it for people who were not there, could you walk us through, like, what would be a typical situation when, you know, there's battles going on and?

**Perry:** [00:22:33] Keeping your head down. That's all. I stayed on the ground, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:22:36] Were able to dig ditches or foxholes?

**Perry:** [00:22:40] In the caves, in the holes or whatever you could find. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:22:44] So, I know that the Chōsin, the Battle of the Chōsin Reservoir. It started on November 27th.

**Perry:** [00:22:51] Yeah. We had to go up there and try to save to be a Marine outfit—what's left of 'em in wintertime. We went up there during the winter, I think. Christmas time or New Year, somewhere around here.

**Cohen:** [00:23:02] Yeah, yeah. So, we're talking about it earlier that you want to talk about the cold and how it affected you and the others?

**Perry:** [00:23:09] You had to keep moving. I borrowed a sleeping bag and two or three pair of socks wherever you could find it. You had to stay dry. You couldn't get wet. Once you get wet, your hands start turning black and everything and your feet: frostbitten.

**Cohen:** [00:23:26] At this point, were you a platoon leader?

**Perry:** [00:23:31] Squad, nine-man squad? Yeah, they made a squad. The other guy got killed, so I moved up what they call battlefield commission. I take the other guy's place one guy, yeah. You move up that way and that's the way.

**Cohen:** [00:23:46] Did people in your squad get frostbite? Like did you see it firsthand?

**Perry:** [00:23:52] Some of them did, I guess yeah. The guy called to me, I guess one guy got his ear shot off. That's close as I was yeah. Guy got his ear shot off. Yeah, yeah. But frostbitten got a lot of the guys over there, especially the Marines outfit, they were there before. It was like General Custer. You seen that movie? They were overrun, yeah. Custer's in the middle. The Chinese were all around him, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:24:16] So, I'm going to try to piece it together. I was reading that, let's get this straight a little bit, that the 7th Division was sent to protect the right flank, I think of the Marines and the 3rd Infantry Division was to protect the left flank.

**Perry:** [00:24:33] Yeah, we tried to go up in the middle up there. We try to break them up out there.

**Cohen:** [00:24:37] Oh, so were you like in the, like the—

**Perry:** [00:24:38] Yeah. We went back and forth; we try to take the hills. We tried to take the hills, so they could get out on the road, try and take the hills. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:24:45] All the hills around the Chösin.

**Perry:** [00:24:46] Yeah, the Chinese were up in the hills and the Marines were down in the valley.

**Cohen:** [00:24:50] So where were you guys? You and, you and your group?

**Perry:** [00:24:53] Was up to try to take the hills.

**Cohen:** [00:24:56] Oh, okay, I see so—

**Perry:** [00:24:56] We were trying to go up there to just, you know, try and take the hills. With the Air Force Come in and drop napalm and you know...An [US] Air Force came in and helped us drop napalm so we can move.

**Cohen:** [00:25:10] So, after they would drop napalm, could you describe to us what it was like trying to take a hill?

**Perry:** [00:25:17] It was like the—like they fought the Civil War, head on almost yeah. Yeah, they were shooting down and we was, had to shoot up.

**Cohen:** [00:25:26] And what kind of ammunition did you have with you at the time?

**Perry:** [00:25:31] We carried everything we could get, hand grenades and all kind of stuff like that.

**Cohen:** [00:25:37] Were they effective, the hand grenades and the rifles or were they—were there enough supplies?

**Perry:** [00:25:45] Not at the beginning. They had to drop a lot of stuff by parachute to us you know. The Air Force came in and dropped.

**Cohen:** [00:25:53] What kind of stuff would they drop?

**Perry:** [00:25:55] The food and ammunition, the radios and all that stuff. Yeah, yeah. We had them string a wire for the radios. We had a string of wires. Wasn't like the stuff they got now.

**Cohen:** [00:26:06] So, I was reading that the cold weather sometimes affected the operating of the radios because sometimes the batteries froze.

**Perry:** [00:26:15] Everything, gasoline and oil, everything froze up, everything got like jelly.

**Cohen:** [00:26:19] Wow.

**Perry:** [00:26:21] And the colder it got, the better them folks fought. They were used to it, we weren't you know, we was all, all new people yeah. And most of the outfits were National Guard outfits, they wouldn't have trained for that.

**Cohen:** [00:26:35] Oh, so, like your point in contrast, your outfit would have had more training than like National Guard units?

**Perry:** [00:26:40] The Chinese were well trained.

**Cohen:** [00:26:41] Chinese. Yeah, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:26:43] And they don't give up. They run at you blowing the bugles and horns and all that.

**Cohen:** [00:26:49] So why did they do the bugles?

**Perry:** [00:26:53] Oh, trying to scare you, get you, get you excited, yeah. And all that, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:26:56] How would you react when you heard the—

**Perry:** [00:26:59] Kind of scared too yeah. Yeah. We were scared of that too yeah. It took a while to get used to all that, you know. Yeah. But yeah, they used to holler and scream and blow bugles and all that stuff. Yeah. Yeah, we weren't used to that. 'Cause most of the guys were all from National Guard outfit. Two weeks training, and that was it.

**Cohen:** [00:27:20] Wow, wow. So at least you had more training than that?

**Perry:** [00:27:24] Yeah, the regular, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:27:26] The regular Army, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:27:27] And the Chinese were regular. They've been fighting for... I don't know how many years around there. Chinese they're used to, they're experts.

**Cohen:** [00:27:36] Did you think they would—they were good fighters in terms of their strategy or tactics?

**Perry:** [00:27:40] Oh yeah, yeah, they're good. They believe in man. they believe in overrunning you. Life is cheap over there, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:27:51] So, would you say that you respected the Chinese as fighters?

**Perry:** [00:27:56] Oh, they don't give up they try to overrun you and they don't take no prisoners, so we didn't either after a while. No. They find somebody wounded they'd finish them off right there, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:28:10] So, they don't care for the wounded or--?

**Perry:** [00:28:12] No, no. They leave them right there. We take a bulldozer and pile them up and burn them. Yeah, that's all yeah. No, they didn't pick up nothing like that.

**Cohen:** [00:28:24] So, I was reading something a little surprising that there was one request sent for an air drop that had the code name "Tootsie Rolls", but instead it was understood that they should drop "Tootsie Rolls".

**Perry:** [00:28:40] I heard nothing like that, no. [Both laugh] No, they were nothing like that. No, no, there were no, there were no joking over there then. No. And they weren't no match.

**Cohen:** [00:28:52] I think that it's supposed to be helpful to help patch up equipment, but that wasn't the original idea.

**Perry:** [00:28:59] No, I heard nothing like that. No.

**Cohen:** [00:29:02] Well, that's good.

**Perry:** [00:29:02] No, it was not like that. The only time you heard if you heard the word "short round" then you find your hole. A lot of our ships, you know, get the wrong direction, you know?

**Cohen:** [00:29:14] So how would people, how would you find your way to, like, the next hill that had to be conquered, like how would people navigate?

**Perry:** [00:29:24] Well, the other enemy would be beyond the other hill.

**Cohen:** [00:29:27] Oh, so simply go where the shooting is?

**Perry:** [00:29:29] Yeah, the Air Force going in there and drop the bombs and napalm on it, yeah. You had a fight from hill to hill, you know. Well, the hills and valleys, there are mountains over there, not hills. They were hills, [corrects himself] mountains.

**Cohen:** [00:29:46] So how did you manage physically, like at the high altitude and the cold weather and the and the hills and like how, how did you and the others in your group manage?

**Perry:** [00:29:58] Just go. Get the orders to go, that's all. Just had to give you orders to go, you follow. Very. Yeah. You don't go back. You go forward. No, they were not going backwards.

**Cohen:** [00:30:08] You're very, very brave.

**Guidera:** [00:30:10] Leah, can you ask how effective the napalm was before they—?

**Perry:** [00:30:14] Oh, napalm.

**Cohen:** [00:30:16] Yeah. How effective was it? Did they really destroy a lot of the Chinese?

**Perry:** [00:30:20] Oh yeah. Drop it on them and burn them up. Yeah. Yeah. That's a mixture of gasoline and a different chemical. Wherever it hits it, it sticks and burns. Oh yeah. That. We've had it so close you can feel the heat, they had to drop it so close to us you can feel the heat from it.

**Cohen:** [00:30:39] Did it affect the American soldiers as well afterwards? Like were there any side effects?

**Perry:** [00:30:44] I don't know. I was always going forward. I wasn't looking back. I wouldn't worry about back. No. Whatever back, the uh—the medics and the chaplain took care of that.

**Cohen:** [00:30:56] So, what would happen if somebody was wounded or like you're saying? What, some people got a trench foot. What would the medics. Were the medics nearby, how did that work?

**Perry:** [00:31:07] Try to get them back, you know, put them on a stretcher and trying to get them back. Back where they could take care of them.

**Cohen:** [00:31:12] Yeah, yeah. Um, so, I read that eventually after... I think after seventeen days, the US forces, the UN forces were able to break out of the encirclement of the Chinese around the Chösin Reservoir.

**Perry:** [00:31:31] That's when what you call them, came in and made that and run MacArthur. And they made it in town and land. And they came in. They came in behind the Chinese. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:31:41] So, so were you still like-- where were you in particular? Did you land up joining the forces behind doing the behind the enemy lines at Inchon or were you still in the area of the Chösin Reservoir?

**Perry:** [00:31:54] Oh, we were trying to help, you know, get the rest of people out of there. You know. We brought all the wounded and dead back, and we brought all our, our dead back with them.

**Cohen:** [00:32:03] What was this at the Port of Hungnam? I don't know how to pronounce it H-U-N-G-N-A-N like part of the Christmas, the home for Christmas operation? I was reading that MacArthur and— [Phone interrupts briefly].

**Perry:** [00:32:32] MacArthur yeah, he was there, and I seen him once. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:32:35] So, when did you see him? That's pretty cool.

**Perry:** [00:32:36] Oh, he came back and ate chow with us. Sat down and ate out of a mess kit with us. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:32:40] Oh. So, which, where—

**Perry:** [00:32:40] He was up front all the time. His generals didn't want him up. He was up front all the time.

**Cohen:** [00:32:46] So were you—this is the time where you were up sent—



**Perry:** [00:32:48] Yeah. He was up there with us. Yeah. MacArthur came up there and looked around, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:32:52] Did you remember where you guys were at this point more or less?

**Perry:** [00:32:54] No, no.

**Cohen:** [00:32:56] What were your impressions of him?

**Perry:** [00:32:58] Oh, he was, he was a general—good general, but him and Truman didn't get along. Truman called him back after that.

**Cohen:** [00:33:06] Did you think Truman was right or wrong to call him back?

**Perry:** [00:33:10] Well, they didn't get along. He made Truman wait at the airport. I think they say about an hour. MacArthur said: "I'll be there".

**Cohen:** [00:33:18] Yeah, he was uh yeah, he was a good general. Yeah.

**Perry:** [00:33:22] Because they didn't want him to do what he did over there in Korea. They didn't want to—he did the same thing he did on them islands going back to the Philippines. Make that end run. Come in. They didn't want him to do that,

**Cohen:** [00:33:35] So, some people think that it was a different kind of war, that maybe in World War II there was a victory and a surrender but in Korea—

**Perry:** [00:33:42] We fought Korean War like we fought World War I. They was in our hole and they were in their hole. We'd come out and run back and forth,

**Cohen:** [00:33:51] In your opinion, Was it a different kind of war than World War II?

**Perry:** [00:33:55] Oh, yeah. Different kind. Yeah way.

**Cohen:** [00:33:57] How was it different?

**Perry:** [00:34:00] Like a trench warfare, know, we had our hole, and they had their hole, back and forth. That's the way we fought. And we had the Air Force come in after a while and they took over the skies from the MIGs. The MIGs ran so our Air Force took over. They started bombing North Korea. MacArthur wanted to go right on into Manchuria, but they afraid it might make Russia mad. Because Russia is all behind—all the weapons come from Russia.

**Cohen:** [00:34:32] Afraid of escalating the Cold War, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:34:34] They were supplying North Korea with all the weapons, new weapons. Our stuff was ready to fall apart.

**Cohen:** [00:34:43] Yeah, were you dismayed that the weapons were so old and were there promises of bringing in newer—

**Perry:** [00:34:51] Well, we didn't have anything in there for a few years before they started getting some new stuff over there. Our stuff was all patched up, you know. Our tanks were, we used to call them iron coffins. One hit and five guys are gone, you ever seen burnt marshmallows, overdone marshmallows?

**Cohen:** [00:35:10] Yeah.

**Perry:** [00:35:10] That's the way you look when in tanks. Because you are sitting on your gasoline and your, and your shells [are] underneath your—where you're sitting. And when that goes up, you go with it. Yeah, I didn't want to be around those tanks. I got out of that.

**Cohen:** [00:35:26] Oh, so you were briefly with the tanks?

**Perry:** [00:35:28] We'd would support 'em, yeah. I wasn't in them. No, I was never in them.

**Cohen:** [00:35:32] You were mostly on the ground itself.

**Perry:** [00:35:34] Ground, yeah. I didn't stay around in tanks. No, like I said: we used to call them iron coffin. Yeah. Our tanks were all, I think our tanks only had a seventy-nine-millimeter gun and their Chinese tanks had ninety-five. They had the Russians' new tanks.

**Cohen:** [00:35:53] A lot more power and force in the engine.

**Perry:** [00:35:54] Well, they had a tank almost like this building, almost two story. It had two ladders to get in the tank, the Russian tank. But the Chinese didn't know how to use them to good.

**Cohen:** [00:36:04] They were still new at it.

**Perry:** [00:36:05] Yeah, the Chinese weren't too good. So that's where we got the advantage of them.

**Cohen:** [00:36:09] So going back to your story, I think you said, "We help the, the wounded and, unfortunately, the dead to, to go on ships back to the United States".

**Perry:** [00:36:19] Yeah, we yeah. We bagged them up and brought them back. Yeah, all the dead in body bags, yeah. I come back with a whole plane load.

**Cohen:** [00:36:27] Oh, so you came back, so could you help me a little bit with the timing. Like so after the battle of the Chösin Reservoir you, you helped bring the—?

**Perry:** [00:36:37] Yeah, we helped bring up after a while and then we got short of men, and they sent me back. They sent me back to Japan. To the hospital over there, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:36:43] Oh, Okay. So, you're in the plane going back to Japan to the hospital.

**Cohen:** [00:36:47] Yeah, After that yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:36:48] And after your in Japan, do they send you back one more time to Korea?

**Perry:** [00:36:52] No, I stayed in Japan they was getting ready to send me home then, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:36:56] But you mentioned earlier—.

**Perry:** [00:36:57] We had mostly nurses to handle all that. Nurses, Army nurses. They were on a plane you know.

**Cohen:** [00:37:05] So, you were telling us earlier before the interview that there was one time you were court martialled and for good reason.

**Perry:** [00:37:13] I didn't follow orders. I didn't.

**Cohen:** [00:37:14] Do you want to tell? You want to tell... what happened?

**Perry:** [00:37:20] I was supposed to follow the outfit. I took my nine men and went around another way. The other guy[s], I think, went through a mine I don't know whatever happened to them, they was, they went through a minefield. I didn't. They threw it out after a while, yeah, summary court martial, that's all. I had to make up some days and make thirty days up I think it was.

**Cohen:** [00:37:39] Oh, so after that they threw it out because it's, yeah, yeah. Obviously, it's necessary.

**Perry:** [00:37:45] The other people didn't come back. They followed the book. I didn't follow the book. No, that rule book don't count over there. It's, it's good here.

**Cohen:** [00:37:54] Right, for during times of peace, but—.

**Perry:** [00:37:57] Also, just for—from a lot of MacArthur, from West Point. A lot of these officers were called the "Ninety-Day Wonders". They had some connections around here and then they made them also, you know, captains and stuff. The people that had money, the parents, probably the people that had money, or they knew somebody in Washington. And I—

**Cohen:** [00:38:21] So, so did you have an officer like that. Like a Ninety-Day Wonder officer?

**Perry:** [00:38:26] I was with a guy from World War II. No that that, he was a master sergeant. He was in World War II and then he got into Korea, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:38:35] He was legit: the real deal.

**Perry:** [00:38:36] What they call a career soldier. They probably had to throw him out of the Army, I think. His whole life was—he was in there when they had horses. He was in there when they had the cavalry.

**Cohen:** [00:38:46] Oh, my goodness.

**Perry:** [00:38:48] World War II, then in Korea yeah. He was a master sergeant. That was life, you know, being in the... Had lot of guys like that, stayed in all their life, all, all they know was soldiering, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:39:02] Yeah, that was their career... So, you said before that during the war you can't go by the book. Can you think of other examples, too, where you chose not to go by the book because it made more sense to do otherwise?

**Perry:** [00:39:17] Well, I held back on a lot of stuff I didn't let it go by the book. I kind of watched and see what happened, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:39:23] Oh, before acting to one.

**Perry:** [00:39:26] No, that book don't mean nothing over there when you're in another country.

**Cohen:** [00:39:31] Did your men really appreciate it? The men who were leading... Did they appreciate your approach like not...?

**Perry:** [00:39:38] No. No, I don't think so. I just saved the guy's life there. That's all. They came back and the other ones didn't so.

**Cohen:** [00:39:50] So, I think that—Ron was telling me that you saw a lot of action. Can you think of another battle or operation that we didn't talk about now that you were in? Like something that stands out in your mind.

**Perry:** [00:40:05] Quite a few of them all the way back and forth. Back and forth the country. Yeah, there were a lot of battles. A lot of them hills they used to give them hills names, you know, "Old Baldy" And "Poor Chap". They, we'd give them—we give them all of them names because they was shaped like a, you know, pork chop or...

**Cohen:** [00:40:23] I remember reading about Old Baldy. Was that when you were with the 45th Infantry [Division]?

**Perry:** [00:40:27] Yeah, there were no reason to call it that. There were no trees or grass left on it.

**Cohen:** [00:40:31] Oh wow. That's why it was called that.

**Perry:** [00:40:33] All that was gone yeah. Trees... very few trees around there. No, there were nothing but dirt, rock, that's all.

**Cohen:** [00:40:44] So that must have been really hard fighting totally in the open.

**Perry:** [00:40:49] We did most hours of the night, and we went out at night, mostly on patrols. We take our radio and put our, strung our wire out there at night.

**Cohen:** [00:40:57] So, you hear by radio where you should go?

**Perry:** [00:40:59] There were two of us one out there at night and we watch to see if anyone was coming. We'd call up every so often we had to call back to the headquarters, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:41:07] So then what would the headquarters, what would they command?

**Perry:** [00:41:11] Oh, they'd watch, you know, see if anything, they'd shoot up flares at night to see if any enemies are running. We were about two miles ahead them, go out there and set up our wires. Had to string wires like telephone wires out there for the radios Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:41:25] So, would they command your group to attack, or would they command the group right after you...?

**Perry:** [00:41:31] Right after, mostly after you. We was kind of the point men.

**Cohen:** [00:41:34] Wow.

**Cohen:** [00:41:37] So, I am sorry that we're jumping around a bit, but after you brought the wounded back to the hospital in Japan, you go back to the States. Are you at a military base at the time?

**Perry:** [00:41:52] The camp down at Camp Crowder, Missouri. I don't even think it's there anymore.

**Cohen:** [00:41:56] In Missouri?

**Perry:** [00:41:56] Yeah. Yeah, we was there for a while before we got out. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:42:00] Oh okay. Did they call you back there for a second time to...?

**Perry:** [00:42:04] No, no, no. That was enough. I had enough over there. No, they didn't call me back. Some of them went back, and the ones... I got out in '53 and lot of them had

stayed in, end up in Vietnam over there. They told me, but [unclear] the guy told me: "You get out now, don't stay in".

**Cohen:** [00:42:22] When did you hear about the end of the Korean War on July 27<sup>th</sup> [1953]?

**Perry:** [00:42:29] Well, I think I was home, back home here on my way home here in Japan, I think then.

**Cohen:** [00:42:34] Oh, you were already in Saipan, on the way back.

**Perry:** [00:42:37] Come back before the end.

**Cohen:** [00:42:39] Oh, so right before. You came back right before the end, basically. So you followed the advice of not signing up for anything after.

**Perry:** [00:42:46] I got out, no. The guy told me: "Get out now. Don't stay in" because Vietnam [War] started right after that in the sixties. I got out '53.

**Cohen:** [00:42:56] 'Fifty-three.

**Perry:** [00:42:56] December '53, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:42:58] Before we go on, I'm gonna ask you and I'm also going to ask Brad, is there something about your service in Korea itself in combat that we would like to talk about?

**Perry:** [00:43:14] Well, I don't know why it happened so fast, back and forth. It was always on the move all the time. There were no time to sit around, play cards and all that stuff.

**Cohen:** [00:43:21] So, it was like constant, constant.

**Perry:** [00:43:23] Yeah, move on back and get ammunition or clothes. Well, you change your clothes about every six months or so. They burn them. Give you some new ones.



**Cohen:** [00:43:31] Wow. Wow.

**Perry:** [00:43:32] Yeah. There was no washing. They burn all that stuff.

**Cohen:** [00:43:36] And you said something interesting too. You said, you know, when in the battle the blood is red, so I guess my question is: how did things operate between Blacks and Whites, and was there...?

**Perry:** [00:43:48] Worried about saving their uh, saving their skin yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:43:51] And did Truman's integration [Executive Order 9981, 1948] of the services start to come into play in the units you were in?

**Perry:** [00:43:58] Yeah, he said, "Now. Integrate now!"

**Cohen:** [00:44:01] So, what happened in your unit? Were people being shifted around like um...

**Perry:** [00:44:07] When I come back from Korea it was mostly all together by then. Everybody was together then, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:44:13] Oh, by the time you got back. Yeah, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:44:17] In just the southern states they were about the same, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:44:21] Yeah, like in the civil society, yeah. The Jim Crow laws, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:44:25] Yeah, I was down there when, let's see, when I met King's father down there, yeah. Martin Luther King's father.

**Cohen:** [00:44:32] You met his father?

**Perry:** [00:44:32] Yeah, my wife is from Birmingham. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:44:35] Oh, your wife is from Birmingham.

**Perry:** [00:44:36] Yeah, I was in Birmingham, Alabama. I didn't get to Selma though. Just Birmingham. I was down there when they had the bus boycott and all that one.

**Cohen:** [00:44:46] When had you met your wife, at what point had you met?

**Perry:** [00:44:50] Yeah, I met her in Chicago, but her family was from Birmingham. I went down there and around in there.

**Cohen:** [00:44:56] Oh. Had you met her — [interrupts her own train of thought] you were only sixteen when you when you enlisted...

**Perry:** [00:45:03] Twenty-four when I got married. I think twenty-four, about twenty-four yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:45:07] Oh, okay so it was like after the war you've gone down to and visited. Yeah.

**Perry:** [00:45:11] All the bus boycotts and all that down there was going on then. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:45:17] Wow, wow. So, when did you meet Martin Luther King's father? Was he—I believe he was a clergyman?

**Perry:** [00:45:25] Yeah. He was a... he had a church there in Birmingham, I think. Yeah. Yeah. He was down there then, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:45:33] So, you know, you mentioned going to the boarding schools that were run by the brothers and so on and I guess it makes me wonder, were you, you were a believing Catholic or practicing Catholic and...

**Perry:** [00:45:47] Well, that's where they sent you, you know my father was working, so he sent me there, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:45:54] I guess I'm wondering, did faith play a part, like you know, they say, "there's no atheists in foxholes"?

**Perry:** [00:46:00] Oh, that was it. Oh, you mean over there in Korea?

**Cohen:** [00:46:02] Yeah.

**Perry:** [00:46:03] Oh, you forget about that over there. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:46:05] Yeah. You just focus on the...

**Perry:** [00:46:08] You see somebody without no head and you forget about that. Yeah, that all, that all dies, yeah. It quits. Everybody's worrying about their own skin, you know, getting back. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:46:17] You wanted to survive.

**Perry:** [00:46:18] Yeah. You don't have none of that over there.

**Cohen:** [00:46:21] Well, I guess in the middle of this combat it doesn't seem likely, but I'll ask you these questions anyhow. Were you able to get the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper when you were in Korea?

**Perry:** [00:46:35] That was mostly World War II stuff. No, we didn't have none of that in Korea. They had some little ole paper come out when I, never got the chance to see it too much. Especially in Korea, it was too busy, you know. No, that was where most of that *Stars and Stripes* come on in World War II. Yeah, they had a chance to sit down and look at it. We didn't.

**Cohen:** [00:46:53] So how did it work? Like it seems like -- how would you be able to sleep at night? Or not really or how, how did...

**Perry:** [00:47:00] Uh you sleep a few hours, you sleep standing up or you know. Well, I slept on the ground most time, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:47:09] Would some people be on guard while others were sleeping?

**Perry:** [00:47:13] Off and on, yeah. A couple hours back and forth, yeah. If something started, we'd all would be awake, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:47:20] It's like you're, like you're on alert for nonstop.

**Perry:** [00:47:23] Except some time, sometime in the daytime mostly. At night...we were always watching at night.

**Cohen:** [00:47:30] Because that's when you're watching...

**Perry:** [00:47:31] That's when the Chinese, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:47:34] Did you ever like, hm how to put it... Come into face-to-face contact with a Chinese soldier?

**Perry:** [00:47:43] Uh, I see him across there, not too close. I never let him get too close.

**Cohen:** [00:47:50] And were there any Chinese soldiers that were taken prisoner that you were involved with?

**Perry:** [00:47:58] We took a few, but we turned them over to their own people to handle and take care of them. They couldn't get information out of them, so they made them go down and put our gun up to their head. Yeah. We couldn't... we couldn't do that. Yeah, but they, they know how to take care of their own people, yeah. We turn them over to them, South Koreans, yeah,

**Cohen:** [00:48:17] Sort of like—oh to the South Koreans.

**Perry:** [00:48:20] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:48:21] Which reminds me: were you working with other allied countries? The Canadians, British or other?

**Perry:** [00:48:27] Oh, no. We mostly were in different sections. The British were in one section, we were in one section. Different sections. Australians and they had the Turks and all them. They were in different areas around in Korea.

**Cohen:** [00:48:41] Were you with the South Koreans, with the Americans when...?

**Perry:** [00:48:45] At the beginning, we were supposed to back them up and we ended up—they were behind us. They didn't have nothing. They ran behind us. We were supposed to back them up. End up, they, you know, the back. Yeah, we would be in front. Well, they didn't have too many weapons or trained [training]. South Korea didn't have no army much then, no. They have a little home guard, you know, that's so. But the north was well equipped, but they had everything yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:49:15] I was just about to ask you: were you also in contact with North Korean soldiers in addition to Chinese?

**Perry:** [00:49:23] Uh, not too much. We could hear them at night. We'd go up there at night. We could hear them talking and cooking up their rice and fish and garlic. You smell that a mile away, but we didn't have no contact ordinarily except the prisoners... And we turn 'em over to their own people and they'd take them around the hill somewhere and you hear a couple of shots and that's all. They didn't talk, they get rid of them.

**Cohen:** [00:49:45] So, the North Koreans would be given—the North Korean prisoners would be given to the South Koreans?

**Perry:** [00:49:51] We turn them over to their own people and they take care of them real quick. No. Well, you do that—the North did that to the south, too. So, yeah. We wouldn't use that kind of, you know, doing, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:50:05] So, you were you shocked to...

**Perry:** [00:50:08] You finally get used to it after a while? Yeah, yeah... There's no place for you to run. You got to stay there.

**Cohen:** [00:50:18] Yeah. There's no there's no place to go.

**Perry:** [00:50:20] We had a few guys that—what they call used to call turncoats there, went to one of the turncoats over there. They finally came back. Turn—and they when they went to the, you know, North Korea, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:50:33] Oh, you mean Americans that were, that went to the North Koreans?

**Perry:** [00:50:37] Yeah, we call them turn—we call them turncoats. Yeah, they went over there. North Korea sent them to Siberia. They came back real quick. Put them up there in a mine somewhere... And all that propaganda, they promised them, you know. A big house and all that stuff.

**Cohen:** [00:50:55] So they, so they bought it. Wow. What were the, were there a lot of, like, pamphlets? Airlift of pamphlets with propaganda to— [Interrupts]

**Perry:** [00:51:06] We did that to them, but they had microphones around, you know. Set up loudspeakers.

**Cohen:** [00:51:13] Oh, so they would like sing and fight?

**Perry:** [00:51:15] Yeah, Christmas time, they used to play American songs, you know, *Wish She was Here* and all that. They played all them songs during the Christmas time, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:51:21] Okay, so some people were really lured by this?

**Perry:** [00:51:24] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. All that propaganda, yeah. They were good at that.

**Cohen:** [00:51:29] What did you think when you first heard this type of thing?

**Perry:** [00:51:34] I didn't believe that stuff. [laughter]

**Cohen:** [00:51:36] That's good. [Laughter]

**Perry:** [00:51:37] Yeah. But they were good at it though. They had some woman on there, North Korean women. They speak English real good. Sound like American, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:51:48] English.

**Perry:** [00:51:48] She used to get on their like—and talk all about Christmas time: "How come you're over here? You should be home. Nice warm house.", yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:51:56] Yeah, yeah..

**Perry:** [00:51:58] Yeah, they, they were good at the propaganda. Yeah, oh yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:52:01] Huh, that's interesting.

**Perry:** [00:52:03] Yeah, the Chinese are good at propaganda. Yea, they're experts on that... We weren't used to that kind of stuff in there, yea.

**Cohen:** [00:52:14] No, no... Did you ever receive any letters from home or not, or that was not possible?

**Perry:** [00:52:25] Uh I got some letters that took a long time. My stepmother sent me a cake over there in August and I didn't get it till January. It was a three-layer cake when I got it, it was a one-layer with the—had white icing and the icing was green... Molds. And we took that off and ate it anyway. Took them—give the mold to the rats.

**Cohen:** [00:52:47] To the rats. [Laughter]

**Perry:** [00:52:48] Yeah, had some big rats over there, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:52:50] Wow, that was so—so, you were, so here you were sleeping outside and there were rats?

**Perry:** [00:52:54] Well we had, we dug our little, you know, made our little place in the ground.

**Cohen:** [00:53:00] They were rats and other animals?

**Perry:** [00:53:02] As long as you fed the rats, they didn't bother you. And they are pretty good size, almost like a big as a cat, some of them. Yeah, rats.

**Cohen:** [00:53:09] So, would you have to share your rations with them?

**Perry:** [00:53:13] Oh, some of them did. Yeah. Yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, rats there were a lot of rats over there in Korea, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:53:22] Was the area that you were fighting in around the Chōsin Reservoir, um, were there civilians nearby other than the ones where you said you could smell the garlic and other crops?

**Perry:** [00:53:35] That was mostly in their holes, they used to have that, you know, they carry that stuff, with them, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:53:39] Oh, the food that they carried with them. I see, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:53:41] No, there were no villages around there where I was, no. If there was a house, there was no roof on it. It's flat. I didn't see no houses with roofs around there, no.

**Cohen:** [00:53:53] No, they had already been destroyed.



**Perry:** [00:53:53] That was all going on, even before we got there, I guess. Because the Koreans are already, you know, North Koreans already coming in there with the Chinese. They ran all the way back to Seoul, almost,

**Cohen:** [00:54:08] They had to retreat, yeah, retreat, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:54:09] Yeah, we had to retreat all the way back. Yeah, we burned a lot of stuff on the way.

**Cohen:** [00:54:13] Oh, oh, on the way back during the retreat, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:54:15] Yeah, retreat, yeah. We burned up trucks and everything we couldn't carry. We just brought the wounded and the bodies out. All them.

**Cohen:** [00:54:23] Oh, so even the US trucks and equipment had to be—

**Perry:** [00:54:28] Yeah, a lot of them we couldn't take. Yeah, a lot of them... And leave a lot of their stuff, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:54:32] Okay, so for that reason, it had to be destroyed, so that the enemy would not get hold of it.

**Perry:** [00:54:34] Yeah, yeah, we destroyed a lot them. Yeah, we had to keep moving back 'cause - till we get more reinforcements come in there. Once we got the, the part of the Air [i.e. support of the US Air Force] —to clear the air. Once we got our airpower over there, you know. They bombed a lot of that, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:54:55] Okay, like that was the last step.

**Perry:** [00:54:57] Yeah, yeah. We got the airpower in there, yeah. Before more airpower came from Japan, Okinawa, or somewhere else, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:55:08] So, during the retreat were you commanded to destroy villages along the way or what was the—?

**Perry:** [00:55:15] Oh, a lot of them were gone already before I got there, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:55:18] Well, what the North, North Korean didn't burn. The South Korean got—burned. We took a lot of them out. South Korean people, you know, took a lot of civilians out of there.

**Cohen:** [00:55:30] What were you afraid of snipers?

**Perry:** [00:55:33] Oh, not too much, we was too busy going there. There weren't too many snipers over there because nobody stayed in one place too long. You froze to death. [Perry laughs] Not like World War [II]—no you just sitting on there. You had to keep moving. You would have froze, especially in the winter time. Summertime, maybe yeah, but not then.

**Cohen:** [00:55:49] Right, the wintertime. Nobody wants to stay. Yeah, yeah.

**Perry:** [00:55:54] No, you kept low all the time. You didn't... You always walking around in a crunched position. You didn't stand up too much. No, you stayed close to the ground, yeah. We made too good a targets, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:56:09] So, was this the first time that you were on an airplane when you were taking the wounded to, to Japan? Was this your first time on an airplane?

**Perry:** [00:56:18] Coming back, yeah, with all the nurses and the body bags and all of them, yeah. We had about 100 bags on it, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:56:25] Wow. Um... So, when were you discharged?

**Perry:** [00:56:33] Uh, let's see, December of '53 just before Christmas I think it was, yeah. Yeah, I got out, yeah. So, they want me to stay in, I got out. 'Cause a guy, he told me: "Don't, don't stay in".

**Cohen:** [00:56:47] Who, who, told you this?

**Perry:** [00:56:50] One of the guys has been there a long time. He said: "Don't re-ap [reapply], because in a few more years, Vietnam started. "You're going to get out. Get out now", yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:56:59] This is a good this is a good time to get.

**Perry:** [00:57:01] Get out now. Yeah. Yeah. Wow.

**Perry:** [00:57:03] You end up in a training outfit and I didn't want to go back. No more training. And that's a long eight weeks training, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:57:12] No, it sounds like everything in its time, you know.

**Perry:** [00:57:15] Yeah, get out now. Yeah, don't stay in. Well, let's see. I think Vietnam started around the sixties. I got out '53, yeah. If I sign up for another three years, I'd be almost right in the middle of that again, so.

**Cohen:** [00:57:29] Yeah, it's true.

**Perry:** [00:57:29] You have to sign up for three years at a time, you know, So. I was getting out of there. I wanted to get out.

**Cohen:** [00:57:35] So, what did you decide to do after, after you were released from the Army?

**Perry:** [00:57:41] I worked for the Forest—Cook County Forest Preserve for fifty years.

**Cohen:** [00:57:44] Fifty years?

**Perry:** [00:57:44] Yeah, I put in fifty years with the, with the Forest Preserve.

**Cohen:** [00:57:48] What type of work were you, were you doing?

**Perry:** [00:57:50] Maintenance, I was a kind a maintenance uh, foreman. We helped build this botanical garden down here. On Lake Cook Road, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:57:58] Wow, that's so neat!

**Perry:** [00:57:58] A big project, Yeah, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:58:01] And you know, people sometimes call the Korean War the Forgotten War.

**Perry:** [00:58:07] It was between them right after World War Two. Yeah. That's kind of a, you know, a police action. It was like Vietnam. We was supposed to go over there and keep the peace... But the North came in, you know, with Russia and all them. We get caught in the middle of everything like that, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:58:25] What was it like for you when you came home from the war? Like how did people treat you?

**Perry:** [00:58:32] Well, everybody went their own way. Now, that's mostly Vietnam, but they didn't get along with all the stuff in Vietnam. The guys didn't get along. But Korea, you came home and, you know, went back into civilian life. Got you a job or somewhere in there, right away, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:58:49] Did people thank you for your service or buy you a beer or—?

**Perry:** [00:58:53] No, not too much. No, no.

**Cohen:** [00:58:55] Yeah.

**Perry:** [00:58:57] No, that was all during World War II. After the other wars, they didn't, they didn't even think about it. We went over there to help, help them out.

**Cohen:** [00:59:08] Was it hard, um, going back to civilian life after being in the Army for four years?

**Perry:** [00:59:17] Uh, a little while. Yeah, it took a while to get used to it. Get used to sleeping in a bed. That was a big thing. Been sleeping on the ground so long, yeah. Over there, yeah. We took some pine, bring them over there—we took pine branches and made, you know, made a bed where we could, you know, on the ground.

**Cohen:** [00:59:35] To make it a bit softer.

**Perry:** [00:59:38] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:59:38] Wow. So, when did you meet your wife and get married?

**Perry:** [00:59:44] Uh, she was a schoolteacher in Chicago. I met her down there in Chicago, yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:59:50] Yeah... Um, so, like you mentioned, many grandchildren. So how many children did you have and grandchildren?

**Perry:** [00:59:57] Two boys and five girls.

**Cohen:** [01:00:03] Have you been involved in any veteran groups?

**Perry:** [01:00:06] Oh, I'm a life member of VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]. Evanston Post, Snell Post, and everything.

**Cohen:** [01:00:12] Do you enjoy the activities, is it important to you?

**Perry:** [01:00:16] Most of those guys are gone now. Most of them are World War II veterans and they, they're all gone now. Most of them are in their nineties if they're still around now. Very few of them are still living.

**Cohen:** [01:00:26] Were there some from the Korean War like yourself?

**Perry:** [01:00:29] Not too many left. Most of those guys were in homes or sick or somewhere. We all came in a big bunch into the VFW right after Korea. Because all the World War II guys are all up in the... middle eighties and nineties now, most of them. Still living, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:00:49] What kind of activities would you, would you do?

**Perry:** [01:00:53] During the holidays, we used to come up here to Great Lakes up here, to the guys up here in the wards up here, they used to bring a piano up here and play and give them socks and stuff during Christmas time. The ladies auxiliary used to come up here and bring them cookies and stuff and stuff up here at Great Lakes, yeah. Because they had all them wars up there. You know, the guys up there from World War II. We used to bring a piano, a small portable piano up there and play them Christmas songs and they give them socks and stuff like that, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:01:24] That's nice. So, you're like helping other veterans.

**Perry:** [01:01:26] Yeah, the VFW that's what it used to be: A regular thing, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:01:30] That's nice. Have you been on any honor flights to Washington?

**Perry:** [01:01:35] Yeah, I was on the third one with the—2014 I was on the third one. Out of north Chicago down, yeah. The third flight.

**Cohen:** [01:01:46] What was it like for you?

**Perry:** [01:01:48] Uh, was it like something new like history. You would never see - went to Arlington National Cemetery—that was on the last, yeah. People all see that at places.

All you see is white stones up there for miles. Yeah... Yeah... They all see that cemetery, yeah. And we went to the Pentagon, but we couldn't go in because it was on a Saturday. They had the monument out there in the garden where the people got killed on that plane [September 11 attacks]. They got all the names on a big plaque. Yeah. We went to the memorials for the World War II and Korean, you know, more of that, yeah. That's something else to see.

**Cohen:** [01:02:29] That what sounds very meaningful very—yeah.

**Perry:** [01:02:31] Yeah. Yeah, all the history up there in different museums. Yeah, I guess they're planning on another one now. I was on the third one... That was in 20— Yeah, that was 2014 I was on the third trip. Now I think they're planning on a, either the seventeenth or eighteenth now. Because I know they skipped this past year, so I don't know what—they've got to raise funds for that.

**Cohen:** [01:02:55] Would you go back again or?

**Perry:** [01:02:59] Oh, once enough for me. They got to try to get some other guys because there were two ladies, two people died since then. One lady, she was a nurse in World War II. She was about ninety-five. Another guy, they let him go on air with his oxygen tank. He was in the hospice thing here in Waukegan at the time. That was the last wish for him to go on that trip. They let him carry a small oxygen tank with him. Most of those people are gone now, yeah... And you got to have an escort there. I think there was twenty-five people when they had to push us around in wheelchairs. She [referring to Mary Roberson who is present] can tell you about that, yeah. Pushing the wheelchairs. In a wheelchair. [Laughter] She can tell you about that. Yeah, that's a job. Yeah, that was a job.

**Cohen:** [01:03:49] Yeah, we were hearing earlier about that from Bob [Robert Gorman].

**Perry:** [01:03:50] Yeah, that's the job, though. Where we went, they had to push them around, yeah, that's—

**Cohen:** [01:03:54] That is a job. That is.

**Perry:** [01:03:55] Oh yeah, that's—I think you got to pay their own way to do—didn't they—had to pay your own way. Yeah. Had to pay their own way.

**Cohen:** [01:04:03] The President Bob also accompanied the veteran, yeah. Hm.

**Perry:** [01:04:11] Yeah, it's quite an experience going there. Lifetime experience there, a lot of people never, never go there.

**Cohen:** [01:04:20] Are you in touch with any veterans who you served with?

**Perry:** [01:04:25] No, I doubt if any of them are even living now. Because they're all up in their eighties now if their home or moved away—a lot of them probably moved. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:04:35] You mentioned earlier that your grandchildren want to know your story. Like do you have any special messages for your grandchildren and for young people of today?

**Perry:** [01:04:47] The young people today don't want no uniform. All my grandkids, they don't want to go in those services now, no. In my day, everybody wanted to, you know, wear the uniform and all that. Yeah. Army, Navy and all that. They wanted a uniform and medals and stuff. But now these kids don't want, they don't want that. But now all they do is sit home, push a button, and—now.

**Cohen:** [01:05:18] In general, do you think it would be a good idea if people served in the forces?

**Perry:** [01:05:25] Well, the other countries, have your—I know people from Israel I met. They have compulsory training over there. Yeah, the girls and boys have military training.

**Cohen:** [01:05:36] Yeah, and quite long. I think three years for the boys and two years for the girls.



**Perry:** [01:05:39] Yeah, I met quite a few of them over there, yeah. Yeah, they got a good army and air force over there.

**Cohen:** [01:05:45] Did you say over there? Have you, have you visited Israel?

**Perry:** [01:05:48] No I haven't. No, I got a lot of friends around here. That have been there, yeah... No, it's compulsory over there. I think when you're either sixteen or seventeen, you got military training.

**Cohen:** [01:05:59] That's, I think after high school like [snaps fingers] your there.

**Perry:** [01:06:01] Yeah. Oh yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:06:04] Um, is there a moment that you're most proud of, like looking back at those four years that you were in the service.

**Perry:** [01:06:13] Getting out [laughter]. Getting out of there, that was it. Yeah, getting out. Yeah, that was it.

**Cohen:** [01:06:18] [laughter] I think that was something that was a victory you know.

**Perry:** [01:06:22] Yeah, getting out in one piece. That was it.

**Cohen:** [01:06:27] No, that, that's true. I mean, I take it you did not have any injuries, thankfully?

**Perry:** [01:06:31] Uh, no, just... I had a nose full of dirt. I had to get all that sinus cleaned out. I had a lot of dirt up there and they had to clean out the sinuses, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:06:41] From all the years of living in the—

**Perry:** [01:06:42] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:06:44] And, you know, nowadays we hear a lot about, like PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]. Were there any—

**Speaker1:** [01:06:49] Oh, that was all—come along during the Vietnam and that stuff. We didn't have none of that stuff.

**Cohen:** [01:06:54] All The people who you fought with were, managed okay?

**Perry:** [01:06:57] Well, except frostbitten and direct hits and stuff like that, that's all.

**Cohen:** [01:07:02] Yeah. That was good.

**Perry:** [01:07:03] Yeah. No, we didn't have time for all that stuff over there in Korea. You were alive or dead over there. That's the way it was.

**Cohen:** [01:07:09] That was it.

**Perry:** [01:07:10] Yeah. They put you in that bag and zip you up, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:07:12] So, you, the museum that Brad and I work for, the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, is dedicated to what we call the citizen soldier. In other words, some museums are just for World War II or just the Air Force, but here we're looking at every citizen who was a soldier. So, I guess my question is: when you hear the word "citizen soldier", what does it mean to you?

**Perry:** [01:07:40] Well, that was back then, back in my days, that was kind of like the National Guard. They'd go train two weeks a month. That was it.

**Cohen:** [01:07:48] Like you're saying, you're the citizen and you're also the fighter?

**Perry:** [01:07:49] Yeah, for two weeks they send you up there for camp and that was it. But when you got to these other countries, they got—like England, they got what they call

lifetime soldiers over there, and sailors, airmen. They still got a lot of guys from World War II. They're career people.

**Cohen:** [01:08:06] Career people, as well.

**Perry:** [01:08:08] Yeah, we're not, we're not used to that, you know.

**Cohen:** [01:08:11] Okay, so I guess you see it more like a volunteer thing, yeah.

**Perry:** [01:08:17] Well, over there, their career. They stay in their lifetime. They go in there when their young, when they come out, they're old people when they come out. But over here is a lot different though nobody—I think you have a few graduates out here at the high school with ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps], but very few. Nobody wants to be in the military now, except maybe [US] Air Force and stuff like that. That's more technical, the Air Force and Navy.

**Cohen:** [01:08:44] So, do you agree with that, like do you think, um, do you think there should be a larger armed forces or it's okay as it is?

**Perry:** [01:08:55] Well, it's hard to say unless we get into another war and then we have to—you won't have to go over there then. They just push the button and that's it. The stuff they got now. It's all technical, like in the Navy, they got a lot of—I know people down, based down there. They got all the technical stuff on the aircraft carriers that go out for three or four months and come back in the school down there. They got all that electrical stuff, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:09:22] So, Mr. Perry, very often I listen to my interviews again and I'm sorry that I didn't ask certain things, so I'll start off with you. Is there something that you would like to talk about in relation to your military service that we did not talk about?

**Perry:** [01:09:39] Well, for the kids nowadays just discipline. Strict discipline. That's right. We got up in the morning at 4:30 AM For reveille and you went to bed when they felt like it. About eight o'clock. And he was glad to go to bed. That's right.

**Cohen:** [01:09:54] Do you think having this discipline instilled in you helped you in your civilian job or your family life?

**Perry:** [01:10:01] Oh, yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah.

**Perry:** [01:10:04] I started out as a truck driver with the county. I end up as assistant superintendent and the division superintendent.

**Cohen:** [01:10:10] That helps you rise up in your career.

**Perry:** [01:10:13] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:10:15] That's cool. That's. Um, um, Brad, can you think of something?

**Guidera:** [01:10:21] Yeah, I have two questions, actually. Um, were there any benefits to your military service when you got home, like nowadays, did you get schooling paid for, or maybe you made some connections there that helped you get—

**Perry:** [01:10:33] No, you couldn't hardly go to schools when I got out of service. No, they wouldn't take you in a lot of the trade schools.

**Guidera:** [01:10:41] And then back to your time in Korea when you said, you know, "All blood was red", were you leading both White soldiers and Black soldiers?

**Perry:** [01:10:49] Yeah, it was all mixed. Yeah.

**Guidera:** [01:10:51] How was that received by the White soldiers?

**Perry:** [01:10:54] They just want to stay alive, that's all. All that race business dropped. You didn't hear no more of that. No, everybody shared, you know, shared alike. No, they wouldn't let—that dropped over there when somebodies shooting at you.

**Cohen:** [01:11:10] Had the race issue also dropped when everybody was back in the base in the States?

**Perry:** [01:11:16] No, right back to their same old thing, yeah. In the fifties and sixties, yeah. No, that was the same going on. My father had people who had a store out in Tulsa, Oklahoma, out there. I've seen that. My father had the paper. He lost it somewhere. But all that in Tulsa, Oklahoma. You know about all that, yeah. I heard all about that. And that was in the twenties. Yeah. They had a store or their business somewhere out there then, yeah. I heard about that because he had newspapers and all that.

**Cohen:** [01:11:52] Did you feel that things were, relatively speaking, better in Waukegan, in Chicago, or not so much?

**Perry:** [01:12:00] About the same? No, just Chicago. No, not in a big city like New York. The marks twice. Twice the headache in New York.

**Cohen:** [01:12:16] Is there anybody here who has a question that we should ask?

**Perry:** [01:12:22] They run out of questions. [laughter]

**Gorman:** [01:12:25] I have a question. It's an obvious question, but it was the coldest winter in a hundred years. How did you cope day and night in the cold? How did you deal with it?

**Perry:** [01:12:33] Trying to keep warm. We build a little fire; we had a little fire down on the ground. You slept with all you everything on. Yeah, you didn't change no clothes. You put a little water on your hands and face, that was it. Very little water, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:12:57] Did your guns work or did the springs malfunction?

**Perry:** [01:13:02] Sometimes it didn't, no. It would get too cold. We always had to try to keep warm. The other guys were all ready to fight the Chinese, they were used to that. We was always trying to keep warm, you know, trying to stay warm.

**Cohen:** [01:13:17] So, how would you get the guns to work again?

**Perry:** [01:13:21] Would finally get them going. Either we use some of their weapons, oh yeah. We used that AK-47 [Avtomat Kalashnikov], yeah. That's accurate. They got that all over the world. And that's better than what we got.

**Guidera:** [01:13:34] What was issued to you from our army?

**Perry:** [01:13:38] The old M1 [M1 Garand Rifle]. World War II stuff. It had too many springs. That AK-47's got less. That was made in the garage in Russia.

**Cohen:** [01:13:49] So, there were less springs in the AK-47 than the—

**Perry:** [01:13:54] Yeah, ours had too many springs in it. All the world's got them now, AK 47, they all using that. And they use the M31 caliber, and we had all 30s. The Russians were smart, we had M30 and 8-M31, and .32 calibers. They could use our stuff, but we couldn't use theirs, so.

**Cohen:** [01:14:18] Oh, I see, because Russia's more advanced.

**Perry:** [01:14:19] Smart, yeah. Oh yeah, Russia is smart. There are no dummies over there.

**Guidera:** [01:14:28] I was just going to ask, John, did you write home to your family a lot and did you get letters and packages from home?

**Perry:** [01:14:35] Oh, just a few letters often from my father. Yeah, that's how, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:14:41] And the famous cake from—

**Perry:** [01:14:43] Yeah, that was, yeah, that was the cake, yeah. Because we were moving all the time, so, we didn't get you know, you didn't get the mail too much.

**Guidera:** [01:14:52] I'm sorry, I don't know what this was asked. I don't remember, but how long were you there in Korea for?

**Perry:** [01:14:57] Oh, about over a year or two. Yeah, I was there, yeah, quite a while. Yeah.

**Guidera:** [01:15:02] And how far did you move while you were there?

**Perry:** [01:15:04] Pretty much the whole country back and forth, yeah.

**Guidera:** [01:15:09] Walking a lot of times or riding with vehicles?

**Perry:** [01:15:11] Walking quite a bit, yeah. No, you stay away from the vehicles, too good a target. Tanks and trucks, they are too good a target, and they were good gunners over—the North Koreans.

**Cohen:** [01:15:26] So was terrain mostly hilly with valleys?

**Perry:** [01:15:29] Hills and valleys, yeah, and mountains, yeah. And when it rained, it rained for a week over there straight. Everything turns into a river over there. The roads and everything, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:15:42] So how would you manage with the—

**Perry:** [01:15:47] You walk... Yeah, you walk... No, because they had all the new stuff. The Russians and Chinese, they had all the new stuff over there. But a lot of the stuff they didn't know how to use. The tanks, they went too good on the tanks. That's why we took advantage of them. We took care of the—we dug our tanks in like pillboxes. [Cohen interrupts] Yeah, buried them in the ground. Yeah, yeah, we couldn't find them in the open, no, no. But the Chinese didn't know how to use them new Russian tanks. They weren't used to them. But the Russians were doing all the flying.

**Cohen:** [01:16:26] Oh, so there's a question over here,

**Gorman:** [01:16:29] John, can you describe a time When you thought there was no way in hell, I'm getting out alive?

**Perry:** [01:16:40] During the wintertime up there, around the reservoir. Yeah, you could see the Chinese running out there and there are many of them folks. Yeah.

**Gorman:** [01:16:51] What was out there?

**Perry:** [01:16:52] It was like, General Custard [i.e., Custer]. You ever seen General Custard?

**Gorman:** [01:16:55] Yup.

**Perry:** [01:16:55] That's what happened to him. [laughter] He got surrounded, yeah... And they don't give up. Them folks don't give up. The Chinese, no. If you fall down and you just down, that's all. They didn't, you know, they didn't fool around. They made sure you stayed down. We was all scared around them, yeah.

**Gorman:** [01:17:23] How did you get out?

**Perry:** [01:17:23] We fought our way out at night. We fought our way back out there. We ran back half the way. Ran, retreat in a hurry.

**Roberson:** [01:17:35] I have a question. John, thank you so much for this wonderful story. You remember a lot. Were you—how many other African American or Black men were in your unit?

**Perry:** [01:17:49] Quite a few. Had a lot of them, yeah. Yeah, all of them, most of them were twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth. They were almost all Black outfits, yeah. The first couple of outfits were there. They were along with the 1st Marine Division up there at the Reservoir.

**Cohen:** [01:18:06] Wow. Right at the front.



**Perry:** [01:18:08] Yeah, they were some of the first ones over there. And we start taking their place over there, yeah. Yeah, we had to come over there, and... With all young guys, all sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:18:23] Well, uh, this is.

**Perry:** [01:18:28] That's all huh? [laughter]

**Cohen:** [01:18:30] I just wanted to check, but I would like to really sincerely, sincerely thank you for your service under conditions that most of us can barely imagine. And for coming in today for the interview. And please accept the Pritzker [Military Museum and Library] challenge coin as a token of our thanks.

**Perry:** [01:18:48] I got another somebody else gave me one of these to me, yeah. Yeah, I got a couple of these at home already, yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:18:54] So you have a collection.

**Perry:** [01:18:55] Ah hah.

**Cohen:** [01:18:56] That's great.

**Perry:** [01:18:57] Well, there ain't too many left. That's why I tell them they better get these interviews now before they try to get these people for this Honor Flight. There won't be many of them. They have a hard time trying to get people for that flight.

**Cohen:** [01:19:08] I mean, it's a little bit sad to bring this up, but I've only been working at the Pritzker for three and a half years, and unfortunately, many of the World War II veterans, you know, whom I interviewed have passed away.

**Perry:** [01:19:20] He gave us this big dinner out here at the—out here at the, uh, on Milwaukee Avenue a couple of years ago. They had that big restaurant out there. They had a big Christmas dinner out there. The Pritzker family.

**Cohen:** [01:19:30] Oh, they had. They had like a celebration here?

**Perry:** [01:19:33] Yeah. Pritzker and the people down in Lake Forest and the Sherwin Williams people. They put on that big dinner out here, that big restaurant out here on Milwaukee Avenue. I can't think the name of it anymore now.

**Cohen:** [01:19:45] It's okay. I'm not—.

**Perry:** [01:19:46] Is a coffee—pancake house. A big, big building on the corner.

**Gorman:** [01:19:50] Could I ask you two to shake hands and do...

**Perry:** [01:19:57] Shaking hands like politicians huh. [laughter]

**Cohen:** [01:20:00] That's right. Let me put this out of the way.

**Perry:** [01:20:02] Like politicians, huh.

**Cohen:** [01:20:04] Oh, that's right. Thank you, Sir, for your service, and for your story.

**Perry:** [01:20:07] Okay, thank you very much. Well, they better get the rest of them guys before they're dead.