

**John K. Homan
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
NYS Military Museum
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on January 8, 2003
Newburgh, NY**

I: Alright, this is an interview with John Homan at the Hampton Inn, Newburgh, New York, January 8, 2003, approximately 9AM. The interviewers are Michael Russert and Wayne Clarke. Could you tell me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

JKH: John K. Homan. July 11, 1930. Newburgh, NY.

I: Ok, what was your education before you entered the service?

JKH: My education was only up to the tenth grade. Then my dad had a bad fall and things were hard back then, so I didn't go back to school, I went to work. And it was nice, make a little money. And then I joined the Marine Corps in 1949.

I: So, you enlisted in the...

JKH: I enlisted in the Marine Corps in August of 1949 and went to Parris Island.

I: Ok, could you tell me first, why did you select the Marine Corps?

JKH: Because the Navy wouldn't take me, they said my teeth didn't come together, and it may sound silly, but the guy said my teeth didn't come together and if I was aboard ship, I would sink with the hose in my mouth. So, I don't think they had needed a quota. So, I went down the hall, and the Marines signed me up, and that was the rest of history.

I: Ok, where did you go for your training?

JKH: From there, we went to Albany, NY and got sworn in up there. And I went in with a buddy that I went to school with. I didn't even know he was listing, Frank Crystal was his name, and we went up together, and as I walked in before him, the Captain said, "Private Homan, you're going to be in charge of Private Crystal." And I held that over him for the last three and a half years that we were in the service together. But he just passed away about two years ago; he was really banged up bad. He was a lineman in Korea, up at the Chosin. He got lost from his outfit and he had some bad problems. I finally got him signed up for compensation disability. He received a couple of checks, it was 70% disability, which I'm receiving right now, going toward 100% disability for my face. All these years, everybody thought I had high blood pressure, but it's frostbite from Korea. Also, the loss of the hair on my legs, that's from frostbite, and I get 40% post-traumatic stress. I still have nightmares after 52 years. So, I'm in the Marine Corps, we were on a med cruise. We left in May of 1950 out of Norfolk, VA, aboard the USS Worcester, light cruiser 144. Then, near the end of September – I'm sorry, October

– we were sseoulhaied over into Kobe, Japan, where we met up with the first Marine division and made the Inchon landing in September, and then from there was through...

I: Why don't we go back a little bit to – could you describe the Inchon landing?

JKH: It was rough. We were, I think we were the second group to go in, and of course, once we landed at Inchon, my buddy that was alongside of me all through bootcamp, he was going to be a doctor when he got out – he got hit. You couldn't stop to pick him up, you had to keep on going. Then they had a big wall there, which we had to try to climb over with some ladders, homemade ladders, got in there in Inchon, secured that, and from there, we fought our way up to Seoul. And the rest is all in my book. I have – I kept a little address book, and I wrote things down as we went along. Probably if I got caught, they probably would have terrorized me more or whatever you want to call it. But I finally took it out of the book and wrote it on three or four pages, the very place I was, and the time, and so forth.

I: Were you allowed to keep diaries?

JKH: They didn't know it. I don't think they – it was just a little address book and I just kept writing on the pages, and then finally I transferred it onto paper and it's in my scrapbook. I have, I started three scrapbooks. My mother used to be very thankful for me for – I thank her, rather, for saving all the papers that I sent home. Anything I could pick up, I sent home, she saved them. The other scrapbook that I originally started is falling apart, so I've taken things out of it and made new ones.

I: Did you write often?

JKH: I wrote all the time.

I: And she kept your letters?

JKH: She kept my letters, but they got lost someplace and what do I want to say? My mother's birthday was on Christmas and I was always sending a cake, no matter where I was, so I sent a five-dollar scrip home to the bakeshop in Newburgh, and they couldn't accept it because it was worthless back here. So, they took and made the cake and delivered it, and I got that picture in the paper where the bakeshop was delivering the cake – it says, "Marine Remembers Mother's Birthday from Foxhole in Korea." So, it made the front page in the local paper. And I've been having a couple of other interviews. I've done a couple of stories a few years ago, and made the Record, made the Sentinel in New Windsor on articles about me over in Korea.

I: Could you tell me your unit?

JKH: I was in Howe company, third battalion, seventh Marines, first Marine division. When we left Parris Island, or I mean Camp Lejeune rather, from Camp Lejeune, I was in the second Marines and then of course we joined up in Kobe, Japan with the first Marines and then made the landing. But that was my outfit, H37.

I: How would you rate your training?

JKH: This is back in 1949. It was little bit easier than today, when I look at some of the Parris Island boot camp stories and videos – I've got a couple of them. The training looks a little harder, but we still went through a good training, too, with the gas chamber

and out in the fields, in the marshes. Back then, we lost a few men that got caught in the swamp and never made it out. But they still do it today, too. I had good training. I had very good training and we graduated, the class graduated from Parris Island. I came home and then I went to Camp Lejeune and stayed there until I saw a notice on the board about a vet cruise. And everybody said you ought to take one. You get all this – see the world and everything on the government. So, I signed up. And then another guy says, “Why don’t you take mess duty? Because once you’re on mess duty, you get free liberty wherever you want to go, in the ports.” But they put me in a bad position. They had me down cleaning the garbage. I had to go through it with a rubber glove and a big stick to pick out the silverware, so I never did make much liberty in some of the ports, but I did get to France and Italy and Portugal. And as I say, then Truman got us out and shipped us over to Kobe, Japan. Then when I came home, I was stationed up in Scotia, NY, the Navy Supply Base nearby Schenectady. I don’t know if you know?

I: Yes.

JKH: It’s all out of there now and I became Staff Sergeant there. I was Corporal when I left Korea. And my buddy, Frank Crystal, came in about two months after I was there. We had gone in together and we got discharged together. So that was something I’ll always cherish. (8:09)

I: So, let’s go back to Korea. You said you were involved from Inchon up to Seoul.

JKH: Right up to Inchon, Seoul. I was at Pusan, Hoengsong, that evacuation of the 100,000 people, I was with that one. Then when we got up to the Chosin Reservoir, up near the Chinese border – that’s when we got trapped. It was only a single road going up. It was 30 below zero, windchill was like a hundred, you couldn’t make fires because if you did, then they would spot you. The Chinese would always attack late at night. We sent flares up and we looked out there in the field and here they come, hundreds and hundreds of them. Once the flares died down you can’t see them then. One night I heard my buddy screaming. I didn’t dare yell. They told you don’t yell because that’ll give your position away, and then the next morning I saw him, he got stabbed right in his sleeping bag. So, I feel lucky, very lucky.

I: How well were you equipped? How would you rate your winter equipment?

JKH: At first, it was a little hard. It took a while for us to get full equipment. The main part we were always worried about was our feet. They always told us to try to keep our feet as dry as possible. We had the parkas, finally they sent the heavy parkas in. The trouble with the sleeping bags was that the zippers would freeze up and they couldn’t get them down at night time. That’s why a lot of guys lost their lives because they couldn’t get out of their sleeping bags. We had good, heavy gloves, our underwear was good, but the socks were the worst of the whole thing. At night, if you could, we’d put our little ponchos up and try to get in where it was a little warm, try to take them off and wring them out and then we’d put them in between our shirt and our body to try to dry them as best we could. That’s, I think, what saved a lot of them.

I: You didn’t have extra socks with you?

JKH: We only had about two pair, that’s all. And the underwear we hadn’t changed in three or four months, five months; we hadn’t changed our underwear because there was

no place to go. We were always on the go and there were no tents or buildings, no showers. So it made it kind of hard at that point and I ended up with frostbite on my toes, and I just found out in November at the VA up in Albany that that is frostbite on my face, and the loss of the hair on my legs and my fingers are starting to crack and bleed from the cold weather. I can't take the cold weather. I'm just thankful that after 72 years, I am, that I can be around to talk about some of it. I never talked to my children about it and my second wife here, Dora, she's a nurse, retired nurse, and when she went with me one year up to Albany, she told the doctor, she said, "This gentlemen twitches and he turns and he's talking in his sleep all the time." Still, I get visions of what I have seen over there. One of the articles in one of the papers shows where I went out to try to save my Staff Sergeant and pulled him back in and then I got the Bronze Star from Colonel Litzenberg on the 38th parallel. That's all documented there too when I did it, so I kept a record.

I: What did you receive the Bronze Star for?

JKH: For saving his life. He was pinned down under fire and I went out and drove him back in and then the next day we went out on patrol...

I: Now is this in the Chosin?

JKH: This is up near the Chosin. When I got back, he wasn't with us, so they sent another patrol out and I found him standing up by a tree with a bullet between his head there, the eyes. They had turned his pockets inside out and took his boots off him, and that's a memory I always have. And there's other incidents, too, that I've seen along the road where all the bodies are in the ditch, our people — we couldn't get them out because we had to keep moving. These things just keep striking me back all the time. I get very emotional, but as I say, it was something I had to do and look out for yourself, that was the main thing, and also your buddy. That's why you always kept the buddy system, the two of you would be together. One looked after the other; while one's resting, the other's keeping watch. So, that's what I say, I think helped saved a lot of our lives over there. But we did lose an awful lot, and there's still more missing. General Davis just went back over to Korea. He's a Medal of Honor winner and he just went back over and went up by the Chosin Reservoir and took a plaque up there, I guess, and placed it up there by the Chosin for our group. It's called, "The Chosin Few." They organized, I think, in 1984. I don't know if I'm going off the subject.

I: No, that's okay.

JKH: They organized, I think it was back in 1984 or '85, but I didn't know about it until 1991 when my daughter took me down to see a friend of hers, and her father came out with a hat on that said, "The Chosin Few." I said, "That says Korea." He said, "Yeah." I said, "I was there." So, he gave me an application and I filled it out in 1991, went to New Orleans for my first reunion, and I met, I would say, about eight or nine fellas from my outfit down there plus the Colonel. I was his runner at that time. He was a Lieutenant. We had a nice reunion at the dinner that night and after that, '95, I went down to the big parade in Washington for the dedication of the monument. Have you ever been down there to see that?

I (1): No, I've never seen it.

I (2): I've seen it.

JKH: You have seen the Korean monument? Isn't that something? Well, we live in Newburgh and they had all the monuments made in Beacon, NY. So, my wife and I went over, and I took pictures of it all. I got them in here, of the ones being made, and then when they took them down and transferred them to Washington, DC. We were there that morning when they were taking them away in a truck, so I had a set made and I sent them to General Davis because I thought he would like that because he was on that committee. He sent me his book of his life story, General Davis. I don't know if you've ever seen it or not, but it's quite a history of a Medal of Honor winner. And I also now belong to two Chapters of the Chosin Few, one Northeast Chapter of Albany, NY, and the New England Chapter – that covers Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, all over there. I am also a member of the Marine Corps Leagues. At this time, I'm the Commandant. I'm the Chaplain of the Albany group up there. In the New England Chapter, I'm just a member. So, it keeps me busy. I'm also a member of the Korean War Veterans up in Albany. I joined that group up there. I was with the American Legion. It's a wonderful outfit. But I had to give up something and that was one of the things. I shouldn't say that, but I had to give it up...

I: You can't do everything. Could I ask you a couple of questions? How do you feel about your overall military experience? How do you think it affected your life?

JKH: I think it's something every young man, when he goes into the service, doesn't know what he's expecting. But when you come out of boot camp, you're a man and you do whatever the government's going to tell you to do. There's nothing else you can do about it. You have to do what they tell you and when I got home, I was only 21 and I felt pretty good. I felt pretty good. I didn't have any injuries. I was thankful for that. It was a close call which I still have the bullet home that landed on my parka – it ricocheted off a rock. I'm thankful for that – that it wasn't meant for me. I met a lot of good guys, who I still correspond with after all these years. The worst part was when I got back, I tried to get a job. Because I didn't finish school, they wouldn't accept me at the telephone company in Newburgh. They said I had to have a high school diploma. Well, I said, "I've been away for three and a half years." I just got my high school diploma last month at the high school after Operation Recognition. I was just presented my diploma from the NFA, Newburgh.

I: Congratulations.

JKH: Thank you. So, that part there. I got married, I had three children and when I went to the first physical, the doctor said, "Why are you waiting all these years to come to us now?" I said because I didn't realize there was an organization from the Chosin Reservoir so, when I heard about this, I went to the VA and applied for disability and compensation, which at that time, they didn't give me hardly anything. I think it was like, 20%, so finally, after another visit, they increased my disability for post-traumatic stress and my feet, for the frostbite, but now I'm going into...

I: Did your feet ever bother you when you came back?

JKH: Yes, they were bothering me, but I didn't know what it was, you know, I'm only a young guy, I'm only twenty-one years old. I got married, raised a family, but as I got older all these things started setting in and this is what happened to most of our

veterans. Nothing happened while we were young, but as we got older, it was affecting our body, and I have another fella I just met a couple of days ago, and he and I were down in Parris Island and he was in Korea, but he wasn't up at the Chosin, but he was up in that area where it was cold. He's having a lot of problems with his legs. I said, "Did you ever apply?" He said, "No, I go to the VA for treatment." I said, "That's not what you've got to do. You have to go in and see the girl for disability compensation. You're a Korean veteran." This is an organization, what I belong to now, the Chosin, we are all members that were up at the Chosin Reservoir and fought our way back down, 14 days we were up there and then came down 76 miles to the sea. But I said to him, "Yuggie," that's what I called him. "Yuggie," I said, "You're entitled to something. You ought to tell the girl over there you want to go to Albany and be examined." I've got to give him the phone number and have him call the girl.

I: What were your relationships with the Korean population and the Korean soldiers? Did you get much contact with...?

JKH: Not too much because the language barrier, that would be number 1 and, of course, we didn't know whether they were South Koreans or North Koreans, that was a hard thing to distinguish. So, when we were going through villages, we had to watch all ways. Because when we were aboard ship before we left to go there, they were showing pictures of the first part of the action when it started. How, in the summertime, they had hayfields out in the field and the soldiers would go by, Marines or Army, whatever they were, and then they'd open up fire on them. They had a machine gun inside the stack. And then we went through the villages and went into houses, the women would be sitting over in the corner all curled up or huddled up there with their.... they looked big and they had their children underneath their dresses. They were afraid we were going to shoot them. We didn't know what we were getting into, I mean we just had to search the homes as we were going along. So that was very scary, very scary.

I: Did you ever have any contact with, since this was the first time in the Army and the Marines were integrated with blacks?

JKH: No, we had five or six blacks in our group. In fact, I've got a picture that shows them standing there, a few of them. We got along fine. No problems with integration or anything like that. We all fought together for one thing – to get our job done and go home. Like MacArthur said, "We'll all be home by Christmas." Well, Christmas, I was behind a big hill, we were having our Christmas dinner in cardboard boxes and whatever else we could find to eat it. It was hot, it was a hot meal, but we were under fire. That was supposed to be home by Christmas, so...

I: How about the Chinese army? What did you think of them as an opponent?

JKH: I think most of the Chinese army, I think they're all young, very young these kids were, and they were hardly dressed, I don't know how they could take the weather. I guess maybe because they were used to the cold weather where they lived, but they didn't have the equipment like we did and that's why as soon as they killed one of our men, or whatever they did, they would strip them down, take their coats, take their boots, because they didn't have boots, they had their feet wrapped with burlap and most of what I saw were younger men. I would say, I was only twenty, but I'd say these fellas looked like seventeen-eighteen years old. They were very young-looking, and they'd just

come in droves and droves. Well, like the papers said and I got it from the thing – it was 120,000 Chinese against one division of Marines. We only had, you know, the odds were so bad. The equipment was freezing over, you know our rifles and...

I: Were you continuously provided with food and ammunition?

JKH: We had rations and then if we had a break, they had, they called them the gooks, they'd carry up the hot food up on the mountain. I showed pictures of that; I've got some pictures of that where they carried them up. How they ever did it, I don't know. They must have backs made out of steel, and those things are heavy and they would bring them up and set them down and we would get a hot meal out of that. But then again, I always wondered, how do you trust them, do you know what I mean? We didn't know if they were North Koreans. They were supposed to be South Koreans. They could have poisoned the whole outfit. No, we did get a few hot meals. The only part was our rations were frozen, so most of the time, we always carried one can inside our parka by our chest to get it heated up so you could eat it. Of course, the old beans and hot dogs were the most favorite. The chicken soup and stuff like that was just frozen so bad that you couldn't even enjoy it. But once in a while, we'd get a chance when they were stopped along the road, you'd take your can out and go over and put it by the jeep or whatever, the tank, and try to warm it up a little bit. It was all right, it was okay.

I: How did you feel about the... What was your reaction to the relief of MacArthur?

JKH: Well, everybody thought he had done a good job, but when he pulled that statement about, we'll all be home for Christmas, we knew it wasn't going to happen so then I guess a lot of us turned against him. But we had very good superior officers that led us through; very good, yes.

I: You don't have to answer this one if you don't want to. How about the election of Eisenhower, did you vote for Eisenhower, support Eisenhower, or did you not vote in that election?

JKH: No, I don't think we voted in that one because... We didn't get any ballots or anything. But he did well, he did very well, I thought, from all I read about him.

I: Who was your division commander at that point? Do you remember?

JKH: I hope I'm saying it right. Omar Smith, I think it was Omar Smith. I might have it in one of my papers here, but like I say at the time, Colonel Litzenberg, he had one part of the Marine Division up there, Colonel Litzenberg, and then there was General Davis. He was a Colonel. He's a Medal of Honor winner, he had a group. In fact, he had our group H37, Item 37, that area like that. but I can't recall off hand who was the division. I just think at that time it wasn't important to us.

I: It was more your unit?

JKH: It was more of our unit that we were concerned about, you know. We lost a lot of men. I lost one Lieutenant and then when this other Lieutenant came in, it was Lieutenant Newton, and I became his runner, and when I got out in '52 and found out when we had this parade in '95 in Washington, he retired as a full Colonel, so...

I: How did you and your fellow Marines get along with replacements? Were they welcomed with open arms?

JKH: Oh yes, they were welcomed because when they came in, I mean it was getting closer for us to get out. In fact, I was the next to the last one in my outfit to leave, under fire we were, when the Lieutenant got over the radio. He said, "Homan, you're going home." I said, "Oh boy." I said, "I'm not putting my head up over this hill for nothing, Lieutenant." I said, "I'm staying right down here low." Then he said to me, "You're going back to the command post with four other men." Now we had to go back through the village that we had come up through, and it was getting dark, and we didn't know what was going to happen going down, just the four of us, and all's we carried was our weapon, we left everything back up there. We got back to the CP group, and the guy wasn't going to let us in because we didn't know the password. They had changed it. I said, "Wait a minute, after nine months over here, I don't want to get shot now." I said, "We've just come back off of patrol," I said, "And we're supposed to come back here." And he finally let us in and when I got over into the CP group, who was there, was Lieutenant Newton and he welcomed me. He came back down to the group. He had left our outfit, and he gave us some hot food and everything, and then we stayed there overnight in the tent, and then the next day we went down and got on the airplane and I went back down over to Kobe, Japan. So...

I: While you were over there, did you get any kind of rest breaks or R & R, USO shows?

JKH: Oh, yes. We had USO shows, we had some boxing when it was good weather. They did have a USO show. I forget who was there, but I think it's written down who was there. I didn't get to see them because there were so many around the area. They brought in a truck and made a stage and things like that. I did get to the USO to have coffee and doughnuts. They have them there. They play music and you sit and chat. And I'm walking down the road in, I think it was Maison, going to the USO, and this tank comes up the road and stops and opens up the turret and out jumps this little guy, comes over, picks me up off the road and spins me around. I thought the guy was crazy, you know? He took off his goggles and helmet – it was Joe Galindo from Newburgh who I had worked with in the jewelry store before I left. He spotted me walking in the road. He said, "Jump in, John." He said, "I have to take it out." He was in ordnance; he'd put the tanks together and everything, and they'd take them out and test them. He brings me back to their area to go into his tent. He said, "Want a piece of fruit?" He had a bowl of fruit on the table. He said, "Would you like some clean underwear?" I said, "Yes, that would be nice after five-six months." Took a shower. I said, "You guys are really living." But it was so funny – and he's still around today, I see him every once in a while, – to have this guy pick me out of the road. I couldn't get over it. I had a picture taken, but I lost it. I'm getting Joe; he's got his. I've been trying to get him to make me one so I can have it, but that was one of the funny incidents.

I: You answered most of the ones I was going to ask about, being involved with friends or any contacts with the war. I'd just like to thank you for the interview. Now, if you could show us some of your things and then we could...

JKH: Well, first of all, I have a collection of hats. This is the New England Chapter that I belong to, I mean the Northeast Chapter up in there. [Holds up blue cap, with various pins and insignia:

Northeast New York State
THE CHOSIN FEW
KOREA
Nov – 1950 – Dec]

I have a few pins on there. [Points to pins on cap.] It says Seoul, Inchon, Pusan, frozen, and I'm chaplain of this organization. [Points to chaplain pin.] The Bronze Star is over here, and this is the First Marine Division insignia here. I have about eight or nine different things on it, pins and all.

This is the New England Chapter, the Chosin Few, the New England Chapter. [Holds up black cap with white lettering:

The Chosin Few
New England Chapter]

This is their hat we wear when we go, and [points to various pins on the cap] it has the Marine Corps emblem and a pin, and Korea, and this is the Chosin Few. This is the star that led us back, over here. [Points to star pin on his lapel.] There is a Christmas card we had one year about the star that led us out.

I: Why don't you tell us the story behind that? What do you mean the star that led you out?

JKH: I can't remember it all; I'd have to get it out of the album.

I: Ok.

JKH: It's hard to remember all the little words. [Points to pin on lapel] This is the fiftieth anniversary pin that the Korean government sent to all veterans if you – you know, you had to sign a paper and put in your discharge. They sent everybody one. This is my first album that I started after I got out and came back, 1950-53. [Opens album, points to photographs.] My boot camp picture, I'm over here. [Points to right middle of photograph.]

I: Where is your friend from Newburgh?

JKH: Frank Crystal?

I: Yes. Was he in?

JKH: Yes, he's in there. I didn't circle him. He's over in this section someplace. [Points to left side of photograph.] This is the story that I was telling you about [points to newspaper clipping in album], "Combat Veteran Remembers Mother on His Birthday." And she's holding all my mail; there's all the mail. And my favorite bible verse that I always had and my stepdaughter just gave me a Marine Corps chain, and on the back of it, for some reason, it had Philippians 4:13. "For I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." And I wrote that on all my letters to my mother. This is when I first came home from Korea. And these are some of the pictures of over there in Korea. These are over 52 years old. That's me standing in front of our tent. [Points to photograph.] We had a tent there in the area. And, as I was saying, this is the

Lieutenant here. The book's falling apart. I just wanted to show there are two or three black fellas in here and we got along fine together. This is one of the – we were watching a fight. They had fights over there to give people something to do. Let's see if I can find... That was my first wife when I got back home and got married. [Holds up photograph of bride and groom. Groom is in military attire.] We were forty-one years, and I've been married to Dora now for ten years. This is a reunion in New Orleans when I went down.

I: How many reunions have you attended?

JKH: Four, we attended four, haven't we? Let's see if I can find that in the other album. This is another one I started. [Holds up album and reads title.] "And on the 8th day, God created the Marines." This is when we went and I was a singing cowboy aboard the – we went on a cruise out of Miami.

I: Do you want to sing for us while you're turning the pages?

JKH: [Starts singing "from the Halls of Montezuma".] These are all things that I've collected over the years. And here's what I'm talking about [holds up photographs] – the monuments that were made over in Beacon, New York that are down now in Washington, D.C. We went over and I took pictures of every figure at the Tallix Foundry in Beacon, New York.

I: Is that your insignia collection right there? [Points to photograph.]

JKH: No, no. This belongs to this fella here [points to photograph] that we met when I was in New Orleans, Bob Volkmann. We went to his house in Pennsylvania and this is his collection of pins. And this is a group [points to photograph] that was there from the New England Chapter. I'm over here in the back and here's Dora right here. We had a good turnout.

I: I think it is kind of interesting to see the figures before they...

JKH: [Holds up photograph of Korean War Memorial figures.] If you'll notice, they're all on steel, steel on the bottom, so when they got ready to ship them, we were over there that morning and the guy had a torch, and he was taking and cutting them apart and they would hoist them up on... This is the service they had that day, the dedication. I went and had – Dora took a picture of me standing by one of them. And I also made the Chosin magazine, somebody sent it in. These are just all things about Korea. Now, here they are taking them apart – see the guy cutting the bottom. [Holds up photograph.] He's cutting the leg off and then they would put a wire around the neck, over here you can see, and then they'd lift them up on to the flatbed truck and they took them down to Washington, D.C. Here they are loading them on the truck. They had a convoy that took them down. And I saved all the clippings about everything. And I'm trying to find that... This is all about Bill Clinton. I'm trying to find that card. I think it's in the other one.

I: Is it a Christmas card? I remember seeing a Christmas card.

JKH: I'm trying to find the one about the star. This is a very good article – "Native of Korea Honors those Who Save Freedom". [Holds up newspaper article.] This is Dr. Herbert Lee over here. [Points to photograph.] He is a Marine, he'd come from Korea.

He had a dinner for more than fifty Marines, I think it was. and we went out to the party. It didn't cost me anything. He paid for it all. They did an article on me, which I have, I'll show you. But, he's such a guy. Now he's trying to raise money for the little Korean veterans over there that don't have anything. This is the park in Washington, D.C. [Points to a series of photographs and articles.] All articles about Korea, this is one coming down out of the road, going back down into the safe area. This is what this pin stands for, the Star. [Reads from article.]

There's a history of a place called Valley Forge repeated on December at the Chosin Reservoir, and it has a story over Kotori, the star over Kotori and it is on the night of December 7, 1950 in the snow-clad frozen mountains of Central North Korea in an area known as the Chosin Reservoir Region. About 16,000 United Nation Troops were in this remote, barren wilderness – the First Marine Division, a reinforced U.S. Army Battalion, a Royal Marine Commando and elements of the Republic of Korea Army and some small supporting elements of the U.S. Army. These troops had been assured by the U.N. high command that the Chinese Army forces were not expected to attack across the Manchurian border, and that the troops could be expected to be on their way home by Christmas. Ten days earlier, an estimated 125,000 Chinese Communist troops had poured across the Yalu River to attack the smaller U.N. force. Although not completely surprised, the U.N. force was almost overwhelmed by the tidal wave of the enemy troops who cut the mostly American force into four segments, intending to digest the segments at their leisure. So critical was the situation that the U.N. high command had written these units off as lost. However, these fighting men, and not knowing that all was lost, proceeded to fight their way doggedly through enemy lines and roadblocks until, determined and battered, they all joined together at the small village of Kotori, which guarded the entrance to the only road leading down the mountain. Our air support had been a major factor in the battle so far. Navy, Marine and Air Force planes had helped battle the enemy during the daylight hours, but on December 7th – does that date ring a bell – a snow storm began to blow widely around Kotori, and now air support was not available. The vastly superior Chinese forces were now in position to stop any further movement of the smaller U.N. force. Throughout that evening, many brave men who had been fighting for ten days in sub-zero weather, prayed that they might see a star appear to herald the end of the storm. Then, before dawn, a star did appear to shine weakly at first and then more brightly. A shout went up from the throats of desperate men, "There is a star, there is a star." Then there were more stars and more stars as if God had pulled a celestial switch to brighten the skies over Kotori. Soon the snowstorm ceased and the skies cleared and in the morning light our aircraft arrived on station to help these beleaguered forces fight their way down the mountain road to safety.

That's what this represents. [Points to pin on lapel.] I also received a few things I thought maybe you'd like to see. Our government has been very good. I just brought these to give to you. They're my cards I had printed up – I'm the Commandant of the Marine Corps Newburgh, our Chapter, and I received two diplomas from the State of

New York from Governor Pataki. This one [holds up diploma] says, “Conspicuous Service, State of New York, His Excellency the Governor, to John Kenneth Homan, Staff Sergeant, United States Marine Corps.” That was awarded to me. And then there was another one – it’s also, “State of New York Conspicuous Service, His Excellency, the Governor, United States of America” and this is also from Governor Pataki. This came from the Orange County, Joseph A. Rampe, Orange County Executive, and this is also Orange County Certificate of Recognition presented to John K. Homan, August 2000, in recognition of your brave service to the country during the Korean War on the occasion of the 50th anniversary”. I thought it was very nice. And then of course, the last thing was, this is one of the articles that ...

I: Yes, you sent us that one.

JKH: And then this is the latest one that I got from the school. When I went to see Tom Kerwin, who was the 96th District Representative for Operation Recognition, he thought it was a good idea to do something, so he asked me for some information and I got him what I just showed you and some other things out of my album and out of that, twenty-one more guys were there that day to get their diploma, and five of them I grew up with around where I was born and I was so surprised, especially this guy – he was so emotional. [Points to photograph.] But, I’m in the back row and can’t be seen too much. You can have that copy if you like. And that’s about it, I think. These are the two medals that came from Pataki. Conspicuous service. [Displays medals.] I thought it was very nice. I’m going to put them in one of the plaques that they have. That’s what I want to do with them. I’ve got the plaque but don’t have the ambition to get them in. [Holds medals up.] They’re very nice. From New York State. That’s about it.

I: Thank you very much for your interview. You transcribed that? Could we copy that and put it in your folder?

JKH: See – it’s all taped in. Here, you want to keep that? I’ve got another one home. Where’d I write it? Let’s see, that’s the second or third book. I can’t remember. I think this is the last book if it has a lot of pages in the back. Now, it should be in here, I think. I went in the Marine Corps with... Yes, here he is, here. This is the one. I, over here in this corner, Frank Crystal. [Holds up photograph book]. This was taken down in Parris Island, and it’s Frank Crystal and I, in boot camp in 1949. And that’s me with the “undress” blues on the next picture over, right here. And this is what I was talking about, how the gooks would come up with the food, and that’s me getting ready to eat, [points to photograph] and Richie and Nick, called chow line, chow call. These guys would carry these up on their backs and then there would be hot food in there and we’d get at least about three things and then hot coffee also. This is me here getting ready to go out. I’ve got my pack on my back and we’re getting ready to go out on a patrol. This time there was no snow. This was probably first part, before the snow came. I know it’s in here. These are all my outfits. [Continues pointing to photograph album.] I saved everything you know, all the guys’ names. I played softball on the team up in Scotia, New York. That’s me here and this is the Captain over here. [Holds up photograph.]

I: Whereabouts are you?

JKH: I’m right over here where it says, “Me”. I was in shape then. Then I went to a wedding, one of our buddies got married and we held the rifles and that’s me over here,

while he marched underneath it. That's me aboard ship, the USS Worcester. This is General Hart's last visit and he came aboard ship and for some reason I was on the end and we were just out of boot camp and everything. This is the fella I told you about, got killed right alongside of me, Bob Taylor, his name was. Nice guy, he wanted to be a doctor. As soon as we landed in China, he got it. I got a whole book of these home. These were the papers we got aboard the ship, USS Worcester. It was a light cruiser and we got these papers and I took them home to my mother and she saved them for me. Then I got the other album home with them all on. You can see how they're starting to... So, I just picked out a certain few. This is up in Scotia, New York. This fella here right now – he's a retired Colonel. And a family in Schenectady gave us a bulldog as our mascot. He's a retired Colonel now, and he's running all these trips to Korea and all over. His name is Weehow. I met him about five years ago down in Quantico, Virginia. Let me see if I can, I'm still looking for that. Have you got time yet?

I: Yes.

JKH: Where's that second book that I had; that might be the one. I'm sorry. My wife's saying, "Get out, you've said enough." [Flips through pages.] Oh, this is terrible. This is the diary of my Marine Corps life whereabouts from day 1 August of 1949, telling me when I joined the Marine Corps, went to Albany and then down to Parris Island and then down to Camp LeJeune. And we left in May of 1950 aboard the USS Worcester, ports of call I was at – Italy, Genoa, France, Golfe-Juan, port of call Cannes, Crete.

I: You still have the original diary?

JKH: Yes.

I: And what did you keep it in?

JKH: A little address book. This is after [reads from diary] "Three days at sea and on the 21st of September, 1950, made the Inchon landing. Now the rest is history." Now the only thing I can do, if you want, I can take these out, I'll cut them out, take them over to church, make you a copy and mail them to you. Is that all right?

I: Yes, just at your convenience.

JKH: What I got to do is take a knife and I'll run them over to church and I'll mail you a copy. Is that all right or is that going to be too...

I: If that would be fine with you. We really appreciate that, so we could keep that in your folder.

JKH: See, this tells me where I was November 27, December [reads from diary], "At which time we got surrounded with 120,000 Chinese troops, temperature 30 below, wind chill 100 degrees. We were 16,000 Marines," and I went on, "Then we left there and we went to Maison on the 16th and stayed until the 13th of January. From there we went aboard a Japanese LST for Pohang," and so forth and so on. "We set up at night at the bridge and in the morning moved out to the Kansas line, set up on the 8th and dug in good position. On the 10th of April 1951, I went to battalion with four others awarded the Bronze Star by Colonel Litzenberg." I have his picture; I know I do. We were out in San Diego, two years ago. They had the 50th anniversary of the Korean War, out in San Diego. My wife flew out, and we went out there and it just happened to be that day I

didn't go to the meeting they had about the cold war injury. We went shopping but when I got back, the meeting was over and I walked over and I saw all these guys signing books and everything. You know what book that's in, the other one I made up. Colonel Litzenberg. There was a girl standing there and she had a whole stack of pictures in front of her. I said, "That's Colonel Litzenberg." She said, "Yes, that's my grandfather." I said, "Well, he pinned the Bronze Star on me on the 38th parallel." She said, "Oh, yes," so she said, "Give me one of the pictures," and I gave it to her and she signed her name on the back. She said, "Why don't you just wait in line after the other fellas get done? That's his son sitting there. He's a retired Colonel." So, I went over to him after I had my turn, and I said, "Sir, I want to thank you for continuing on in the Marine Corps. Your Dad pinned the Bronze Star on me." He got up; we both got emotional and it was so funny, you know and he said, "Thank you for what you did over there and everything," and I said, "Well, we just did our job." One year I was at a gas station in Newburgh getting gas and a guy pulled up behind me and I've got license plates out there you know, and he said to me, "What are you, a cult?" I said, "No, I belong to a group called the Chosin Few. We're survivors of the reservoir over in Korea 1950." Made me mad. Then another guy got up one time and he came over to me and said, "Thank you for serving our country." Makes me feel good. I've got a license plate out there now that says, "I am a survivor of the Chosin Reservoir, Korea, 1950-1953." A fella had them made when we were in Washington, D.C. and I bought one off of him. I tried to send it in to the Leatherneck magazine, figuring they'd put it in, but they never did it yet, so I'm going to try it again. I've got American flags on the car, Marine Corps stickers, and stuff like that. Very proud. I get emotional, very emotional at times.

I: Once a Marine, always a Marine.

JKH: Well, that's what they say. But the only thing is, when the Sentinel did my article, they did an article on me, they put, "ex-Marine". I called them up and I told them, I said, "Sir, your girl made a mistake. We're not ex-Marines, we're former Marines," so I crossed it off and put former on to it. But I get emotional. The day of the graduation, the girl came over to me and said, "You're Mr. Homan?" and I said, "Yes." She said, "Can you do an interview with Tom Kerwin?" I'm waiting for that interview. It was on local channel 6 Time Warner, and I didn't have cable channel 6 so I called them and they're supposed to make me a video. She said, "I chose you because my name is Homan." She was a photographer, interviewer, so they did a nice article there. People got to see it and we saw it over at my sister's on her television. It was very emotional and near the end, I said, "I'm sorry, I just can't talk anymore." I never talked to my children when I got back and after letting them, when they got a little older, I never said anything much to them. Lately they've been reading some articles and then the books they have. In fact, Dora, a couple of books, Pusan, The Chosin, she read. She didn't realize what we had gone through. I'm glad that there's still a few of us around that we can talk about it. I want to go up to the school and talk to the kids in the 10th grade history class. They were at the ceremony in November and every one of the kids in the class signed the card, and they sent it to me. I thought it was very nice. So, I took it to church the following Sunday and I showed it to one of the girls. She's a teacher at North Junior High. She said, "Oh, I had this one here and this..." She had four or five of the students that were in the 10th grade history class now at the high school, so I thought that maybe I'd go up one day and I'd just talk to them a little bit about finishing school

and getting your education means a lot to them and give them a book about Korea. I have a couple of articles they can put in their classroom or whatever, you know. Well, is that it?

I: Thank you very much.