

Leo Mahar
Narrator

Interviewer: Phil Leonard
Hoosick Falls Historical Society
Interviewer

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Hoosick Falls Historical Society
Hoosick Falls, New York

Leo Mahar: LM
Interviewer: Int.

Int.: What is your name please?

LM: Leo Mahar.

Int.: Where do you live Leo?

LM: I live in 7 Griffith Ave, Hoosick Falls.

Int.: I see. Did you live in Hoosick Falls all your life, or did you move in?

LM: Nah, I lived here...was born here. 1928.

Int.: In 1928 you were born. Alright, tell us a little bit about before you went into the service Leo, what did you do?

LM: I graduated from high school here.

Int.: Did you go to the public school, or to St. Mary's?

LM: Public. I went to 8th grade at St. Mary's and then went to public school until I graduated.

Int.: When did you graduate?

LM: 1948.

Int.: What did you do when you got out of high school?

LM: I worked in the woods some...logging and did a little bulldozing and so forth. I got called into the service in October '49, within the year.

Int.: You were drafted?

LM: Drafted for a year.

Int.: What did you do that year you were in?

LM: I was sent to Japan, I was in the 25th Infantry Division, the 27th Regiment. I got discharged from there into the active reserve and when the Korean War started I was called back in and got shipped back over.

Int.: You got called back in October 1950?

LM: October '50.

Int.: The war had started in August...or July, I can't remember.

LM: That's right, August I think. I was shipped over to Korea and landed in Incheon.

Int.: Wait, you were already trained in the infantry?

LM: Yes.

Int.: They didn't give you any more training?

LM: Yes, we were called back and they sent us to Ft. Hood, Texas for an infantry refresher course and then was sent to Camp Stone, California before we were shipped to Korea. I was assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division.

Int.: When did you get to Korea?

LM: November, 1950. Assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division, 9th Infantry Regiment, Company I and we were in Incheon, Seoul and we had fought all through the mountains in Korea trying to get to Wonju. I was wounded north of Wonju about March 1st and went into a Marine aid station.

Int.: You were in battle and you got wounded, is that what happened? Was it a machine gun, shrapnel?

LM: No, they were shooting...we were trying to get up to this machine gun emplacement on the mountain and a squad of us got up fairly close. We could see the Chinese every once in a while and we crept, crawled up to where we thought we could throw some grenades into the machine gun nest. One guy got a little too anxious and we were too far away. He threw the grenade and of course that alerted the Chinese and they started throwing grenades back – they had the old type German “potato masher” type that you pulled the string on it to activate the fuse (Leo makes a throwing motion). Then when they threw the grenades it alerted the Chinese on another ridge (Leo motions to left), kind of guarding their flank and we could see the dirt flying up around us. We got up to jump back off the edge where they couldn't get a good shot at us I jumped up and felt something hit me; it felt like a hammer and got an electrical shot like you'd hit your funny bone on something. He hit me on the knuckles here (Leo points to his left hand) and of course you had gloves on. We got down to the foot of the mountain to a medic and he just wrapped it up. We couldn't get out because the Chinese had the roads secured. The ones that got hit real bad had helicopters take them out, but we didn't have helicopters like they did in Viet Nam, we had the little small helicopters. They'd take two men in a basket on each side. They'd fly them out to an aid station, but they couldn't open the road to the other, you know, the walking wounded...we had to wait until they secured the road. Then our driver got lost until we got into a marine aid station and they cleaned it up and put a cast on hit, didn't set any bones. Then, from there shipped to Tegu to an army hospital or field hospital and from there they flew us back into the 141st

General Hospital in Japan, which they set the hand and put a cast on. But then they had to cut that cast off because it was still swelling and it had tightened up so they cut that one off and put another cast on. Then I stayed there until it healed up pretty good then they assigned me to a 2nd (inaudible) company where we were in charge of unloading ships there in Tirafor, Japan had Japanese laborers unloading the ships and so forth. I lost my company commander in one battle, he was a 2nd World War man, and Captain Howe he was shot in the mouth and killed. Then my platoon leader, Jerome McGovern, was killed in another battle. Lost my squad leader, Robison, he was hit...a mortar landed between me and Robison. I heard the stuff go by me, never touched me, but hit him bad in the back and I don't know if he ever survived or not; they took him out. So, it was quite an experience I'll tell ya.

Int.: Yes, it must have been a terrible experience. I've done some other veterans; they said it was cold as heck in Korea?

LM: Oh, it was cold I've hated winters ever since. I used to sit the hole at night – we usually had two men in a hole and when they attacked it was usually early morning and we'd take turns dozing during the night, but then at 2 or 3 o'clock they'd wake everybody up because you'd be on full alert because that's usually when they hit you. And boy, you'd wake up and look at the guy in the hole next to you and he'd look like a porcupine with his whiskers all frost and your rifle all covered, white with frost.

Int.: They said it was terribly cold...

LM: Ahh, we lost a lot of men with frozen feet, frozen hands. I always kept an extra pair of socks and I'd take my boots off at night, wring my wet socks out, then put them down inside my belt and let the body heat dry them off and take the ones I had in my belt and put them back on. So I kept my feet from freezing that way, but they were plenty cold I'll tell you. I don't know how these guys from the south ever stood it because we were kind of, you know, use to it being in the north we're kind of use to cold weather. It got down to 20 below zero and you were sitting in a hole at night looking at the stars and I used to look up and see the moon shining and think that's shining over Hoosick Falls!

Int.: Another thing they told me was the trees, they'd cut all the trees down and it was hard when you went up hills, there were no trees, there were only little stumps.

LM: Yeah, there was a lot of small scrub pine and a lot of scrub oak on a lot of the mountains of course the artillery blew a lot of them off. They had a great trick of rolling grenades down at you. The old potato mashers didn't roll too good, but they had concussion grenades and fragmentation grenades of ours. The pineapples that they'd throw out and let them roll then they'd roll right on down beside you. You wouldn't see it coming then it's right up next to you and then it was too late. But, they were tough; I'll tell you...the Chinese. And they lived on hardly anything, they'd eat nuts and you know they didn't have the equipment we had; they had an awful lot of casualties from frozen feet. All they had were these little tennis shoes...I don't know how they did it; I don't know how they did it.

Int.: OK, so you're in Japan getting shipped home, right?

LM: Yes.

Int.: When you came back your hand healed pretty well?

LM: Yeah, well it was crippled up for quite a while, but they straightened it out pretty good. And then of course using my hand I think with the work I was doing helped loosen things up a lot.

Int.: OK, so they shipped you back to the states and you came back to the states and you got out in November 1951.

LM: November, '51, yes.

Int.: And they discharged you?

LM: They discharged me and we came back in the state of Washington when we came back. I went out of the state of California, twice; no, I went out from California the first time – came back into California and the next time shipped out from California and the last time came back into the state of Washington.

Int.: When you came back did you get discharged outta Dix?

LM: No, I was discharged from Kilmer.

Int.: OK, then here you are you're out of the service finally, you got rid of that.

LM: Yes.

Int.: And you came back to Hoosick Falls?

LM: Yes, I came back to Hoosick Falls.

Int.: And then what did you do Leo?

LM: I went into the excavating business then and I stayed in that until I had to retire with a heart problem.

Int.: You got married about when?

LM: I got married in about...must have been '54, '53 or '54.

Int.: And how many children do you have?

LM: I had six! Five girls and one boy.

Int.: Some of your children live around here, I see some of them; your son helps you run that business now right?

LM: Right. And let's see I got one daughter in Philadelphia, another one in Maine, one in East Greenbush, one here in Hoosick Falls, one in Bennington, and Mike is in Bennington.

Int.: Well, is there anything else you'd like to say about Hoosick Falls or about the service?

LM: I went to see my platoon leader and his family in Washington and ahh...I saw in the paper where he had two sons killed in action. He had one in the 1st Cavalry that was awarded the Medal of Honor. And Jerome, my platoon leader, was awarded the Silver Star and his father was so upset about the Korean War that he refused to let Truman award either one of his sons a medal. I wrote to him when I was in Albany at the VA and he wrote back and said that he couldn't get any information about Jerome and where he was killed. He knew about his other son and where he was killed, but he didn't know too much about Jerome. So he asked me if I could give him more information about Jerome. So, I went to Florida one year with a friend of mine and on the way back we stopped and looked his father up and explained to him what happened, about where he was killed. And I remember that night when he was shot he...we were trying to take this hill all in one day and couldn't make it. We had to pull back and try it again and fought all day and that night we were pretty near to the top and I heard Jerome holler "Come on you guys, what'ya waiting for?" And evidently he stood up and sky lighted himself and I didn't see his body, I didn't want to see it.

Int.: Well, that's the time. We really appreciate it Leo, really appreciate it.